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Title: The process of primary desistance from intimate partner violence

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the interaction between structure and agency for individuals in the first or early phase of primary desistance (one year offending free) from intimate partner violence (IPV). Narrative accounts of perpetrators, survivors and IPV programme facilitators were analysed using Thematic Analysis. Changes in the self and the contexts, structures and conditions were necessary to promote desistance. Perpetrators made behavioural *and* cognitive changes taking on different identities (agentic role) by removing external stressors and instability within the confines of a supportive environment (structural role). Findings provide a theoretical framework of desistance from IPV that integrates social processes and subjective change.

Keywords: Primary desistance; Intimate partner violence; Process of change;

Intervention and longitudinal cohort studies have shown that between 23-69% of men who engage in intimate partner violence (IPV) desist from (i.e., stop) using physical violence against their partners (Quigley & Leonard, 1996). However, the process of desistance is poorly understood as no single theory or model has been developed to explain it (see Authors, 2013). Furthermore, there is inconsistent evidence that interventions (e.g., IPV perpetrator programmes) are effective in encouraging desistance by men. Some researchers suggest such programmes have a minimal impact (if any) on recidivism (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2005), whereas others suggest there may be at best small effect sizes, with effect size being inversely proportionate to the rigour of the design of the evaluation study (Bowen, 2011; Eckhardt, Murphy, Black, & Suhr, 2006). A recent large scale qualitative evaluation project (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015) showed that interventions appeared to play a part in the process of change by facilitating men to develop different ways of being ‘men’ in relationships with women and children. However, this study did not provide a clear description of what the process of change involved. The present study therefore provides the first detailed account of this process, in male perpetrators, developed through the qualitative enquiry of multiple informants’ perspectives on desistance from IPV.

Defining Desistance

There exists significant variation in opinion concerning how to operationalise and define desistance. A key difficulty is the ‘absence’ and sustained absence of particular behaviours (Maruna, 2001). This requires the measurement of something that no longer exists and which is ‘absent’ over a period of time that has no definite end point. Early definitions of desistance construed it as ‘the termination of offending’ (Shover, 1996). However, it is now more commonly considered that desistance is not simply ‘termination’, or the point at which criminal activity has ceased, but the causal process that supports the termination of offending. Hence, desistance is regarded as an evolving multifaceted process (e.g., Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Roy, 2007), rather than a simple one-off ‘event’. A distinction should also be drawn between primary and secondary desistance. ‘Primary desistance’ comprises crime free gaps or apparent interludes in the course of a criminal career, whereas ‘secondary desistance’ (or real desistance) signifies a long-term shift in behaviour and attitudes. This represents the movement of behaviour to non-offending, where existing roles become disrupted and a measurable change in personal identity is seen (Gadd, 2006; Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004). Although there may be more theoretical and

practical/policy interest in long-term or secondary desistance (Maruna, Immarigeon, & LeBel, 2004), King (2013) argued that primary desistance should be seen as a 'transitional phase' between offending and crime cessation (as opposed to simply a lull in offending), which is a necessary condition for secondary desistance. Studying primary desistance therefore is important, as it can provide insight as to how long-term or secondary desistance develops, and helps identify the specific areas that require intervention (King, 2013).

This study will examine the process of primary desistance, in a sample of male IPV perpetrators. It is acknowledged that both men and women use physical violence against their intimate partners (Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011), but it has been argued that this violence may be qualitatively and quantitatively different between the genders (Bowen, 2011). This suggests that process of desistance and gendered nuances of change are also likely to be fundamentally different. According to the World Health Organisation (2010) the overwhelming global burden of IPV is borne by women. Consequently, the current study focuses solely on an examination of men who have stopped using physical IPV; the time frame chosen is for a minimum period of one year, as this will capture primary desistance. Currently there is no agreement in the literature as to what time period an offender needs to be offence free denote a period of primary desistance (Authors, 2012). However, Scott and Wolfe (2000), considered 6 months was suitable as a minimum time period and Feld and Straus (1989) argue that the absence of a behaviour for 12 months is of clinical relevance and significance; hence the period of a year was chosen for this current research.

Desistance from IPV

Stability and incidence of IPV is related to desistance from IPV (Aldarondo, 1996; Quigley & Leonard, 1996; Whitaker, Le, & Nolon, 2010; Woffordt, Mihalic, & Menard, 1994; Wooldredge & Thistlethwaite, 2006), with desistance being associated with less severe and frequent assaults. Similarly, IPV perpetrator typology studies and examination of psychopathologies, suggest that differences in individual characteristics can distinguish desisters from persisters (e.g., Authors, 2013; Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2003). However, such studies provide little insight into how the process of desistance unfolds. Early explanatory models of desistance from offending broadly fall in to three categories: criminal propensity (internal and maturational factors; e.g., Piquero, Moffitt, & Wright, 2007); informal social control (social processes such as employment and marriage; e.g., Laub & Sampson, 2001) and subjective change (the role of agency; e.g., Maruna, 2001). Generally it is agreed that desistance arises from an interaction between these factors. Bottoms et al. (2004) have proposed that the role of background factors, structure and agency all need considering when examining desistance and will be considered in the current research.

There are currently no desistance models that specifically explain the process of change in partner-violent men. However, researchers have applied the transtheoretical model of behavioural change (TTM; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984) to IPV. According to the TTM perpetrators proceed through a set of stages that prepare and assist them in maintaining behaviour change (Alexander & Morris, 2008; Eckhardt et al., 2004). It has been proposed that men go through different stages characterised by variations in their motivation, desire and ability to change. IPV perpetrators classified in the early stages of change (precontemplative) have been found to be less motivated and more resistant to change than those identified in the later stages of change (contemplation or action), who have been found to report improvements in levels of anxiety, depression and anger control (Alexander & Morris, 2008). However, generally when the TTM has been applied to IPV, researchers have adopted a quantitative approach to infer from scores where on the stages of change IPV perpetrators might lie, rather than focusing on understanding the mechanisms that underlie the actual process of change itself. Sheehan, Thakor, and Stewart (2012) have suggested that qualitative methodologies may be better suited to understanding the complex process of change for perpetrators of IPV, as this will give a clearer understanding of how this process unfolds and enable the development of programmes that are specifically customised to perpetrators' needs.

A small number of qualitative studies have examined specific aspects of the processes of change for individuals prior to or during IPV interventions (Catlett, Toews, & Walilko, 2010; Chovanec, 2009; Curwood, DeGeer, Hymmen, & Lehmann, 2011; Flinck & Paavilainen, 2008; Pandya & Gingerich, 2002; Pandya, 2009; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Curwood et al. (2011) examined the processes of 42 men's behaviour change following first time arrest and subsequent conviction for domestic violence, via interviews prior to attendance at group treatment. They found that change was a complex process that started well before treatment commenced and that agentic and structural change needed to be addressed across several levels including: individual (e.g., stress and anger management), interpersonal and relational (e.g., improved communication and patience) and external (e.g., employment status or career aspirations). Silvergleid and Mankowski (2006) also found that change was facilitated and experienced by men who had completed IPV programmes at different levels: individual (e.g., learning new skills, self-awareness and decision to change), community (e.g., fear of losing partner, involvement in criminal justice system), organisational (e.g., treatment group facilitators' influence) and group level (e.g., impact of other men attending treatment). This suggests all these factors need careful consideration when researching desistance from IPV.

A sample of 64 men (in treatment) and 48 women (ex) partners were interviewed within six weeks of the men starting treatment and again within six weeks of the end of treatment, in a UK multi-site intervention evaluation study (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). Six measures of success were operationalised (improved relationships; space for action [restoring women's voices]; safety and freedom from violence for women; safe positive and shared parenting; enhanced awareness of self and others for men [including awareness of impact of DV]; and safer, healthier childhoods). Based on the six measures of success, the qualitative data suggested that the 'vast majority' of men made steps towards change, that physical and sexual violence ended for the majority of women and women reclaimed space for action (i.e., freedom restored that abuse restricts). The process of change was enabled particularly through teaching the men to self-reflect, by the men taking responsibility for their own emotional states and through them questioning their gendered assumptions about masculinity in relationships and parenting (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). Although these studies discussed offer some insights into change processes, it is not known if all of the men in the samples were or were not still using violence as this was not assessed in the majority of the studies (e.g., Catlett et al., 2010; Curwood et al., 2011; Flinck & Paavilainen, 2008). This means that it is not clear whether and how relevant the findings are to the desistance process.

Three studies have clearly examined men's experience of how they stopped using violence against an intimate and these included a measure of IPV cessation. Gondolf and Hanneken (1987) interviewed 12 men attending a treatment programme who reported that they had not been violent for 10 months. The men described the process of change as including the acceptance of responsibility, becoming empathetic and the redefinition of their 'manhoods.'. Scott and Wolf (2000) purposefully sampled nine men deemed by themselves, facilitators and partners to be successfully changing (i.e., violence free for six months). All had just finished treatment and were interviewed to elicit personal stories of how they changed their abusive behaviours. A priori coding based on theories applicable to understanding change (e.g., feminist, socio-cognitive and attachment) were applied to the data. Taking responsibility, developing empathy, reducing dependency, and improving communication skills were consistently reported in behaviour change. Recently Giordano, Johnson, Manning, Longmore, and Minter (2015) analysed data from in-depth interviews with 89 young adult men and women. The desisters had on average stopped using IPV for 3.2 years and represents secondary desistance. These narratives suggested that the possibility of arrest, an individual's role as a parent, and relationship-based motivations (e.g., change of perspective about violence, change in relationship behaviours including infidelity and negative communication) acted as potential hooks for

change. They proposed, however, that the relationship-based motivations were central features in the narratives of desisters and that context-specific learning experiences within each individual's romantic relationship served as a 'important basis for making concrete, forward looking changes' (Giordano et al., 2015, p. 33). Therefore, the authors concluded that social experiences can create redefinitions or attitude shifts and these facilitate behaviour changes related to desistance from IPV. This previous research indicates the need to examine the role of agency, attitudinal and behavioural changes, as well as specific contextual factors associated with secondary desistance. However, this does not establish whether these factors are important in the initial or primary stages of desistance and therefore whether they are important in promoting this initial process of change.

Present Study

The aim of the current research is to address this gap in the literature in relation to primary desistance in order to establish what needs to happen first so that men can then achieve secondary long-term desistance (as examined by Giordano et al., 2015). This study will also examine a broader range of perspectives (i.e., also including survivors and intervention facilitators) than has previously been used in examining desistance from IPV (e.g., Giordano et al., 2015; Scott & Wolfe, 2000), which is important given that multiple perspectives provide more reliable sources of information (Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). This is particularly important in researching IPV, as those who use violence against their intimates are open to denial and minimisation of their behaviours (e.g., Catlett et al., 2010; Flinck & Paavilainen, 2008). This current study will examine the process of change by analysing data taken from the multiple perspectives of persisters, desisters, IPV survivors, and intervention facilitators to provide a novel insight of how individuals make sense of their involvement (or lack thereof) in IPV to develop an understanding of how and why the process of primary desistance from IPV evolves for certain individuals and not for others.

The current study, focuses on individuals' accounts or narratives about primary desistance, or 'early desistance narratives' (King, 2013, p.160), in order to investigate human change processes. Examining narratives means understanding life experienced as a construed story; as such these stories give meaning and coherence to events and provide a sense of what has happened in the past and more importantly provide a sense of the future (Rappaport, 1993). Individuals therefore create identity through life-stories and so assemble events in their lives in a narrative or an account that explains how 'the self of yesterday, becomes the self of today and will become the anticipated self of the future' (McAdams, 1995, p. 382). Our analytic goal is to understand the process of primary desistance as reflected in the early desistance narrative accounts

or ‘stories’ of male perpetrators of IPV as violence stops being a feature in their relationship and how this is supported by survivors and facilitators. Desisters’ narratives are naturally of particular interest and importance, as their accounts are embedded within a ‘story’ of successful IPV cessation for a year. However, persisters’ narratives may reveal different stories and potential views of the world that may act as barriers to desistance, and so will offer a different viewpoint. How this process is understood by other parties involved with these men, namely survivors and facilitators, is particularly important in establishing the extent that these varied perspectives converge to identify common attributes of the desistance process. Therefore the current study adopts a multi-informant approach in order to understand: (i) how internal and external factors dynamically interrelate to promote or hinder primary desistance from IPV; and (ii) the process involved to successfully achieve primary desistance and develop a violence free relationship.

Method

Design

A qualitative approach was taken to develop a three stage conceptual model (Authors, 2014) and within this model three stages were specified: (i) What the individuals’ lifestyles were like when they were using violence; (ii) What initiated or triggered the process of change; and (iii) What the individuals’ lifestyles were like as they desisted from IPV. For an overview of the full conceptual model please see Authors (2014). For the purpose of the current paper the focus is solely on the findings relating to the third stage i.e., what the individuals’ lifestyles were like as they desisted from IPV.

Participants

In total, 13 male desisters ($M_{age} = 38.0$ years, $SD = 10.3$), nine male persisters¹ ($M_{age} = 36.0$ years, $SD = 10.3$), nine (5 female and 4 male) Offender Managers/Programme Tutors (to be referred to collectively as facilitators; $M_{age} = 43.7$ years, $SD = 9.1$), and seven female survivors ($M_{age} = 49.14$ years, $SD = 7.19$) were interviewed. Participants were recruited from IPV rehabilitation programmes in England and were either court-mandated through probation to attend ($n = 10$) or had self-referred ($n = 12$). Persisters had just started attending ($n = 7$) or were waiting to attend ($n = 2$) these programmes. Desisters were either at the end of their treatment ($n = 9$) or had completed treatment ($n = 4$). The facilitators were also recruited through these organisations by the researcher, as were survivors who were identified and approached through women support workers.

¹ This is the chosen term for the paper to identify those still using physical violence. It is acknowledged that this might be an ambiguous term as some might associate ‘persister’ with those who have completed treatment but continue to use violence; this is not the case in the current study.

Classification of the male perpetrators as desisters and persisters was based on their use of physical violence in their lifetime and the past year as measured on The Revised Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS2; Straus et al., 1996). If males reported that they had used physical violence in a lifetime but not in the past year they were classified as (primary) desisters. However, those who reported they had used physical violence in the last year were classified as persisters. The questionnaires were cross-checked with the offenders' narratives for consistency in reporting of physical violence use. To promote external validity of desistance file notes held by the treatment providers were also cross-checked for any police and/or victim reports of violence in the previous year. The survivors were all females who had experienced physical violence from their male partners (three partners were persisters, four partners were desisters).

When presenting the results, in order to maintain confidentiality, no names are used. In order to identify which group each individual comes from, when presenting quotes the following coding is used: S (1-7) for survivor, D (1-13) for desister, P (1-9) for persister, and F (1-9) for facilitator. All excerpts have been reported verbatim.

Data Collection

Ethical approval was obtained from the University's Research Ethics Committee and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). All participants were interviewed on a one-to-one basis in a private room. Desisters and persisters were interviewed at the location where they were attending for treatment. Likewise, the facilitators were interviewed at the location where they delivered the interventions. Survivors were interviewed in their own homes.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format. As desistance is seen as a process the questions were developed around a timeline asking the participants (perpetrators and survivors) what their life was like when violence was a part of it and during periods when violence was not being used. The facilitators were also asked questions about what the perpetrators were like when they first came into contact with them through to the current time or when contact with them had ceased. Desistance is a complex process that is likely to involve an interplay between individual characteristics and social factors (Healy, 2010) where both structure and agency have a role (Farrall, Sharpe, Hunter, & Calverley, 2011), so questions focused on asking about individual characteristics and subjective factors as well as contextual factors (and how they interrelate) associated with persistence and desistance.

The basic structure of the interviews for the IPV men included background information, most recent use of physical violence and details of the use of violence and any changes in the use of violence within

relationships. These were tailored depending on if the man was a desister or persister in that the desisters were questioned about how they have actually stopped using violence, whereas for the persisters the line of questioning focused on how they think they could stop using violence. The survivors and facilitators were asked about their backgrounds regarding either working with offenders, or their experiences as victims of IPV. This led to questions about their opinions on how they thought men stopped using violence. A copy of the interview schedule used for each group is available on request from the authors.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data as this lends itself well to exploratory and preliminary work on a new topic. TA enabled the researcher to examine generic features of the participants' accounts and look for distinctive elements within and across their accounts. Using TA the researcher identified *themes* within individuals' narratives, and can analyse them through organisation and description as well as by interpretation of the various aspects of the research topic under investigation (Boyatzis, 1998). TA is a flexible approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that allows the researcher to develop independent themes and associated sub-themes.

The key benefit of TA and rationale for choosing this methodology is the flexibility associated with it, as it can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. The TA was conducted within a critical realist paradigm in this study. Critical realists assume that there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, but that our understanding of the world is a construction from our own perspectives (Maxwell, 2012, p. 5). Critical realism focuses on ontology (what entities exist and how can they be grouped) and mechanisms not events, i.e., what produces the events not just the events themselves (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2001). In the current study a critical realism approach was taken as it can be used to explore themes around how structural factors are received by perpetrators of IPV who are in similar positions, how such individuals mediate these structures and how this will then result in very different courses of action for individuals, i.e., desistance and persistence. The framework of TA enables the researcher to consider both the language used and the cognitive process associated with desistance from IPV. Consequently, TA, conducted within a critical realist paradigm has the ability to provide rich, detailed and complex accounts of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and enabled the researcher to understand the process of desistance from IPV through analysing how others make sense of this process.

The TA of the verbatim text involved following well-known techniques in qualitative analysis and developing thematic networks that summarise the main themes found in the data set. TA enabled the

researcher to uncover salient themes within the text at numerous levels and the thematic networks facilitated how to structure and depict these themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Networks are built from three classes of themes: (i) basic themes that are the lowest order of theme derived for the textual data; (ii) organising themes that are middle-order themes and are represented by basic themes; and, (iii) global themes which are super-ordinate themes that encapsulate the principle concept in the data as a whole (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

The steps followed for the TA and thematic networks, were informed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001). An examination was made of how the desisters, persisters, survivors and facilitators incorporated the themes into their narratives/accounts. To ensure trustworthiness of the data a balanced presentation of the experiences of the interviewees was provided to support the themes that were generated (Silverman, 2000) and direct quotes are provided to promote verifiability (Murphy & Meyer, 1994). For credibility and confirmability of the research a number of practices, as informed by Shenton (2004) were employed. These included: (i) Following methodologies and procedures from those previously utilised in prior successful projects; (ii) A colleague unfamiliar with this area of research was asked to verify that questions used were objective and aligned with the research objective; (iii) Detailed memos, notes and extensive records were kept throughout the whole analytical process to provide evidence that findings are data-orientated and offer transparency regarding the themes and resultant model that was developed; (iv) Systematic checks were completed to ensure that the findings were always supported by the data and therefore offered an accurate representation of the participants' experiences; and (v) Two independent researchers examined and verified the analysis undertaken and the conclusions drawn.

Results and Discussion

In this exploratory qualitative study, IPV males offered a series of accounts that described what led to their decisions to desist or persist in their use of IPV. Survivors' and facilitators' accounts were included in addition to this. Due to the nature of the research and the sample size involved the findings cannot reveal a cause-effect relationship with desistance; however, the themes that follow and are discussed offer an insight into factors associated with persistence and desistance based on subjective accounts from multiple perspectives

Global Theme: Lifestyle Behaviours (Non-Violent): 'New Way Of Being.'

The part of the process that is the focus of the current paper is the global theme that is found in the accounts that is Lifestyle behaviours (non-violent): 'New way of being'. This encapsulates what the men understand to be happening in their lives and so explains why violence is not a feature of their relationships. This global theme and its associated organising themes and basic-themes are presented in Figure 1. Lifestyle behaviours (non-violent):

‘New way of being’ is made up of three organising themes: *Manage antecedents and triggers*, *Permission to be non-violent* and *External support and input*.

[Figure 1 about here]

The themes developed formed a model to explain the process of desistance that was cyclical and bi-directional. The men did not follow a linear consistent progression as they desisted and did not share identical experiences of the individual themes, as each men’s progression was idiosyncratic. However, an integral feature that runs through the narratives of primary desistance is this *New way of being* which is the paradigm shift that the men experienced. According to Kuhn (1970), a paradigm shift is a radical change in underlying beliefs or theory, i.e. when one conceptual view of the world, that is their *old way of being* (violent), is replaced by another, that is their *New way of being* (non-violent). Awareness is a pre-requisite to a paradigm shift, as without this the individual has little concept of what needs to be changed. In the case of IPV this prerequisite is self-awareness. Self-awareness facilitates a consideration of antecedents and consequences of behaviours (Gibbons, 1983), as well as increasing the self-attribution of responsibility (Duval & Wicklund, 1973). As would be expected themes representing this paradigm shift are more evident in the desisters’ accounts than in those of the persisters. The persisters may experience some of the elements that are required in order to follow this new pathway (although none of them have experienced all of the elements), but as the persisters have all used physical violence in the last year, this has not yet become a ‘new way of being’ for them. As the model concerns primary desistance the themes developed from the ‘early desistance narratives’ (King, 2013, p. 160) will be presented next and demonstrate how individuals start amending existing identities and begin to consider the possibility of adopting a different identity in the future.

Organising Theme: Manage Antecedents And Triggers To Violence.

This theme incorporated in the early desistance narratives, identifies both the behavioural and cognitive changes that the men need to make (persisters) or have already made (desisters) in order to prevent violence being their choice of response. This is evidence of how individuals make sense of all the different interrelated factors that need to be in place for primary desistance. The behavioural and cognitive changes observed relate to how the men appraise and react to the latent and acute factors that previously instigated violence. In the accounts it is seen how the men *manage* the risk factors that previously were associated with their uses of violence. The desisters have an understanding of how particular triggers in their lives lead to violence and so develop alternative viewpoints so violence is not triggered in the future. This organising theme is made up of three basic themes that are shown in Figure 1. These basic themes are three different but interrelated factors, linked by the fact that they

all have the same role. They represent how the men are able to respond non-violently to certain factors and in situations where previously violence would have been used.

Perceive situation differently. This theme was dominant in eight of the desisters' accounts, yet only one of the persisters talked about the need to change how he perceived and interpreted certain situations. The essence of this theme is how the men explain that they changed their appraisals of situation, or reframed their interpretations of events. Part of the process was achieving a better understanding of certain situations and realising how the interpretation of them is likely to affect their reactions to them. In the following example **D9** compares how he previously would react to situations with how he would now react. Reactions are therefore narrated as changed thinking, as this offender comes to realise taking a different perspective will result in a more positive outcome. In the following account this desister emphasises the move away from a default position of reacting aggressively in a given situation.

D9: Before I'd flare up but now I just sort of think you know, why shall I shout at this person...why should I grab this person. Or what they're saying to me is something which I need to be told and it could just be some constructive criticism. I was getting a better understanding of situations and of things I would do or how things would affect me or how I would react...I was always on the defensive. And it was trying to change that behaviour that I didn't have to feel like I was always fighting somebody.

Another way that the men perceived the situations differently was by actually attempting to look at things from other people's perspectives and to not assume that their own perspectives were the only valid/right ones. The ability to perspective take is a skill that is associated with conflict resolution (Galinsky, Gilin, & Maddux, 2011; Gehlbach, 2004). Johnson (1975, p. 241) defines perspective taking as understanding 'how a situation appears to another person and how that person is reacting cognitively and emotionally to the situation...put oneself in the place of others and recognise that other individuals may have points of view different from one's own'. This summarises how within this desisters' early desistance narratives they described a cognitive change in seeing others' points of view which they explained was required in order to manage potential triggers of violence [**D4:** I'm getting better at not thinking that I know the only way because it's not the way, it's just my way and there are other ways]. Several of the facilitators and men spoke about a need to see things from other people's 'points of view'. An example from a facilitator about how they understand what helps people change and the reason they see success for some people compared to those who they know have reoffended:

F1: I think the ones that can develop some form of perspective takings, and start seeing things from kind of other people's points of view are different to those who reoffend. That really helps people to change and you do, I think you do with some of them see some slight changes in their behaviour, they become a little bit more respectful. They start to appreciate how their behaviour is impacting on the facilitators and the group and on other people, particularly their partners.

Interestingly, when the persisters talked about a need to perceive things differently, it was at the conceptual stage and so their accounts did not include stories in which they could identify explain or understand how or why they needed to look at things differently i.e., they can't explain their use of violence or identify actions they had actively embraced to change this. It was perceived as something that 'just happens' over time:

P7: I saw actually the use of violence as quite a standard thing. Like in life just in, even in sometimes in day to day. In general things and yeah now I just see it as well I don't know what I see it. A bad thing Obviously but yeah a very last resort....I think sometimes maybe it's just people get older and look at things through a different point of view. Eventually. But it takes different times for different people.

Create more stability day to day. Desistance from crime often requires a reorganisation and change of one's lifestyle and this seems to be reflected in relation to IPV. This theme refers to the men attempting to deal with the day-to-day stressors they had in their lives and attempting to remove or manage them more effectively. Again, this was not something evident in the facilitators' and survivors' accounts but came from the men themselves. This was seen in both the desisters' and the persisters' accounts. However, there was a subtle difference in their accounts in that the desisters seemed to be proactive in their creation of stability, whereas the persisters were more reactive, i.e. changing because circumstances forced them to (e.g., separation from partner, permanently end relationship [**P1:** The violence stopped because we separated and she was not there])). Nevertheless both groups explained that either the latent stressors that could lead to violence were removed from their lifestyles, or the stressors were managed with effective non-violent solutions.

One of the desisters described that removing and dealing with the day-to-day stressors was a way of managing triggers to violence. He addressed each stressor one at a time and then removed it, suggesting that removing the stressors removed the violence. In his account this desister explains how the practical steps he took created a less stressful situation. When this desister was asked what stops him from being violent he identified several areas that needed changing in order to remove stress and to create an environment less

likely to foster violence within it. This is perhaps best described as a narrative of proactive change and represents the events, stages and contexts described as being required so change can emerge.

D9: One of the first things I did to change the situation was to get rid of everything that was a factor causing the problem. So I started off with the smallest the first, the housing situation. We were going to lose our house, so I sorted that out and I went to the Council got ourselves on the Council list. Got ourselves into a hostel which eventually got us into a house. And then I thought right, the debt. Sort out the debt situation and I went for debt advice and eventually went bankrupt. That took a massive equation out of it. My job, my job was another factor, working long hours and I was not spending enough time with my family. If I get rid of the job, there's plenty of other jobs about. I started a new job. So I went through all the factors and knocked them off one by one.

Having background latent stress has a significant impact on daily stress and pushes a person to his/her threshold, which results in violence; hence if the background stress is removed, the day to day to day stress has less potency. As seen in the account from the male above he worked through stresses by identifying each problem and tackling it head on. This demonstrates what has been theorised as problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This is an approach that is task-orientated and individuals channel resources in order to reduce stress, which demonstrates direct efforts to resolve problems. Endler and Parker (1990) suggested that this is predictive of positive consequences, as was described by the desisters in the current study.

Reduce or eliminate alcohol. There is frequent reference within the narratives by the men that alcohol is a trigger for violence and a factor for them that commonly plays a role when their ways of being are violent. By removing or eliminating this element the men described how they felt this encouraged a non-violent way of being. This was typified by one of the desisters, **D10**, who reflected that previously alcohol "brought out the problems in my relationship which resulted in arguments and violence" thereby demonstrating his understanding is that his violence was a result of his drinking. However now in his accounts he explains that he understands by not drinking he is not so opinionated but more level headed and so he feels he is changed as a person. This in turn is reflected by him not using violence.

D10: Well the thing is last year I stopped drinking as well, I didn't drink at lot anyway but I stopped drinking what I did drink and in that time I have changed. Yeah I used to go out you know and have a few drinks and be really opinionated....and now I am much more level minded I say I think I've changed quite a lot, which is seen by me not using violence.

It should be noted however, that based on the narratives, although alcohol was identified as relevant within the process of persistence and desistance, a cause and effect relationship or a theoretical insight to explain the relationship how IPV persistence and desistance and alcohol could not be established. The actual role that alcohol plays in IPV perpetration, persistence and desistance remains a topic of considerable debate. Heavy alcohol use has been proximally related to aggression through its pharmacological effects on cognitive function (Klostermann & Fals-Stewart, 2006). It has been suggested that heavy drinking can lead a person to overreact to perceived provocation, misjudge social cues and reduce the saliency of cues that aggressive behavior will have negative consequences; these factors increase the risk of confrontation and violence (Reyes, Foshee, Bauer, & Ennett, 2011). This theme of reducing or eliminating alcohol was found in the accounts from all four groups, although more prominently for the desisters. The persisters who did identify that this change was required had either just stopped drinking or were in the process of battling with giving it up. In the following example the persister in his account had identified that up until recently he was ‘drinking for king and country’ and when this happened it ended up in violence. However, ‘alcohol problems’ is a theme seen in his narrative; he now acknowledges alcohol as a problem and something that although not fully addressed needs addressing.

P8: You see the thought processes about going to buy a bottle of wine. Most of the time, if I’m not drinking I don’t need a drink. And then you know, I come down the hill into [Town] and Sainsbury is on the right side and I just thing oh I’ll just go in and before I know what’s happened I’ve done that [bought wine] without a second thought. The biggest battle I have is with alcohol still.

Within their early desistance narratives, to manage antecedents and triggers to violence the males identify that this involves them using several different strategies. This is something that the desisters are aware of as their narratives included explanation of how they have proactively put these strategies in to action. The survivors and facilitators also suggested that this was an integral part of the process of desistance. This also seemed to be something that the persisters were aware of; however, they appeared to be at a stage where they have not committed to a new lifestyle behaviours which is reflected in their accounts which do not include reference to actual action taken. At this stage their stories suggest they may have just, or are still contemplating whether to, proactively embrace the factors identified in this organising theme, as part of their lifestyles of behaviours.

Organising Theme: Permission to be Non-Violent

The *Permission to be non-violent* identified in the narratives comprises examples of how the men now justify why they are non-violent in their relationships i.e., they narrate a story where they recognise previous behaviours as abusive and assign themselves characteristics associated with non-violent individuals. This theme represents how the individuals describe how they have had to make radical cognitive shifts. A prerequisite of this shift is *awareness* that there is a problem or issue that needs to be changed. In this part of the process one conceptual view of the world needs to be replaced with another. At this stage the men are starting to reconstruct their identities and beginning to consider the possibility of adopting a new future identity, which in time would enable them to distance their present and future self from their past self (King, 2013). In order to desist, changes to personal and social contexts is a necessity. This organising theme has three basic themes that include different elements identified as being required in order to activate and maintain a non-violent way of being. These three themes were: *See the way to change by seeing behaviour as abusive*, *Internalise responsibility* and *Identify self as agent for change*.

See the way to change by seeing behaviour as abusive. This theme represents how individuals suggested that they needed to make a cognitive shift.. The shift that is described in this theme is an awareness that their behaviours were and are abusive and this then initiates a decision that this can be changed and will be changed. Such awareness increases the self-attribution of responsibility (Duval & Wicklund, 1973). This was identified by two of the survivors [e.g., **S3(P)**: He realised how he was behaving, ...and knew what he had to change] and the majority of the facilitators who gave examples of how they saw this happening. In the following instance, this facilitator when speaking about how they see the process of change developing discusses the importance of the offender recognising their behaviour as abusive so that they then can actually do something about it.

F2: To refrain from reoffending or being abusive again, so being able to recognise that the behaviour that they would go on to commit would be abusive, but being able to put a stop in place and restricting themselves or resisting themselves from going on and taking that action. There is a guy that's recently completed... And seeing things on the videos that we show for him was quite insightful because he realised actually, I'm doing that and didn't realise he was being abusive, or didn't realise the impact that would have. He became more talkative with his partner, he became less blaming of his partner.

This theme is also one that the majority of the desisters drew attention to in their narratives, but only one of the persisters discussed it. The desisters speak extensively about this and how they feel that part of the process is 'awareness,' 'acknowledging,' 'recognising,' and / or 'admitting' that their behaviours were abusive and violent.

An important element within the desisters' accounts is that they need to not only recognise that their behaviours are abusive, but realise that they can also do something to avoid such behaviours in future. The narrative below was common from the desisters; in this case **D8(C)** makes sense of how he stopped using IPV by recognising and admitting publically that IPV was wrong and then exploring ways to then change the behaviour.

D8: I absolutely, well admit and recognise, well no, recognise then admitted. So coming to a group is admission right, it's acknowledgement ... I think the moment of recognition is crucial. I didn't even see it [violence] as wrong I guess. So it's a recognition that it's wrong. Massively. There's this recognition of, not only is it wrong, but I've now found a way of being able to control it.

The findings in the current study reflect those of Chamberland et al. (2007) who suggested that men who were violent free for a year, all of whom had completed treatment, were able to recognise abusive behaviours better than the men yet to start treatment. It therefore seems that recognition of the violent and abusive nature of their behaviours is an important stimulus for change.

Internalise responsibility. This theme was clear across all the accounts except those of the persisters, who did not evidence internalising of responsibility for their behaviours. This theme captures how the men described how they not only acknowledged that their behaviours were abusive, but took this one step further by also taking responsibility, accountability, and ownership for their violence. This is different from the previous theme, by the movement from simply recognising their behaviours as abusive to actually taking responsibility for them. This may be a crucial part of process of change, particularly as this theme was not evident in the persisters' narratives, which suggests that this process is on a continuum from recognition to responsibility. It suggests that offenders may not truly desist unless they internalise responsibility, as this transforms recognition and foresight in to action, i.e. taking behavioural steps towards desistance. In the accounts a cognitive change is seen, as a realisation is required that the focus needs to be completely on the self. In the following excerpt this desister clearly articulates that he needs to be accountable to his wife and disclose to others that he is attending a group. Accountability has to be to everyone [*the outside world*] but importantly he understands his ability to desist is reliant on him being completely accountable to himself meaning he takes full responsibility for his own behaviour, who he is and then do something about it.

D4: The big issue, for most of the people here, is closure to contacts in the outside world about attendance at this group. I don't know what the guys do, as far as I'm concerned, this group is, unless I disclose that I'm attending an abusers group to the right people at the right time I in no way lift the shadow of my treatment from [*wife*] if it remains in some way secret between me and [*wife*] that I've been coming to an abusers

group. I need to be accountable to the world not just to [wife] for my behaviour. I believe in accountability. I need to be accountable to everyone and take responsibility myself. I am absolutely accountable and wholly responsible for my behaviour, I'm still a complete bastard but I want to learn to behave nicely.

In taking responsibility the men also suggested that they needed to make sure that responsibility was taken away from others, usually their partners. The following desister offers more of a change narrative around who is responsible for his behaviour i.e., a move away from suggesting that his violence was his wife's fault to retraining his thinking in to the realisation the fault lies firmly with him.

D9: Then when the order got lifted, after the court case we started sort of talking to each other and seeing each other again. Spending more time with my little one but there was still, it wasn't anger, I was still determined I wanted to change but I still had this little bit of resentment in the back of my head and you know there was always that niggling thought why, this is your (*his partner*) fault I'm doing this [*using violence*] and then it was just trying to retrain my brain into thinking you know, it's not her fault, you are the person that's done it.

The findings in this theme have been previously reported in other studies (e.g., Catlett et al., 2010; Scott & Wolfe, 2000; Semiatin, Murphy, & Elliott, 2013) where it is suggested that taking responsibility for past violence and abuse is important for behaviour change. It has been proposed that those who display honesty about and responsibility for their abuse tend to be the most successful in changing their abusive behaviours (Scott & Wolfe, 2000). This was certainly echoed in the narratives in the current study.

Identify Self as Agent for Change. This basic theme is represented by two sub-themes that illustrate how within the men's narratives they talked about assigning certain characteristics and behaviours to themselves that they felt meant they took on identities of individuals who have stopped using violence against their partners. The men look to the self (i.e. internally) and attribute themselves with characteristics, behaviours, and beliefs that are aligned with individuals who are non-violent. The narration of the self therefore produces agentic movement for the men. The concept of agency in the general offending literature is often deemed to have a pivotal role for those 'going straight,' and this is starting to emerge for these IPV offenders. This theme links to active management of propensity and gives an insight into individual propensity to be violent. There was, however, no evidence that the men had taken on completely new identities as non-offenders (as found by others, e.g., Maruna, 2001), although this finding is associated with long-term desistance. However, the men did discuss how *aspects* of their identities were different, as they attempted to maintain violence free relationships. This may well relate to the fact that the individuals are experiencing primary desistance. There is evidence that self-identity is important in the desistance process and that individuals make changes to their personal identities and self-narratives, and this results in new,

improved selves that no longer cognitively or emotionally align with offending (Farrall, 2002; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Vaughan, 2007).

The two sub-themes that are all associated with this basic theme are *Manage characteristics and emotions to create different identity*, and *Motivation to change*. The men assigned themselves with characteristics and mindsets incompatible with individuals who engage in IPV. This was observed in the men's explanatory style (Peterson, Buchanan, & Seligman, 1995), which has been linked to desistance, in the general offending literature (Maruna, 2004). In the new ways of being the men attribute *not* being violent to internal attributes (e.g., *Identify self as agent for change*), and they execute processes of positive-internal attributions. Maruna (2004) has suggested that processing biases that encompass positive-internal attributions seem to be most supportive of desistance from offending.

Manage characteristics and emotions to create different identity. This theme was found in the majority of desisters' and facilitators' accounts, but only two of the persisters and one survivor referred to this. The key element of this theme is that it refers to *managing* pre-existing characteristics and emotions (or propensity). In their early desistance narratives the men explained that in order to stop using violence they need to manage their propensities, which are dynamic, so that they do not go over the threshold that then leads to violence. Although this leads to different identities, the men discussed how they still acknowledge that these characteristics remain underlying features of who they are, and therefore there is always the possibility this could lead to violence again. This desister is not saying his violence is an illness *per se* but sees it as comparable in that both need to be managed. Again the theme represents an active involvement by the offenders as this management requires cognitive effort.

D8: I think it's (*violent characteristic*) always going to be in me...it's how you decide to live with it. I see it as not necessarily an illness, but you know, when you've got an illness that you've got to learn to manage it. I think if I don't manage myself and my situation, like if I let things get on top of me, or if I get down or depressed there is the potential to be violent. Because you stop thinking about you need to be doing and that's when the things you shouldn't be doing happen all the things.

The men's narratives underscore that they suggest they become agents for change, as opposed to individuals who previously had seen their characteristics as being part of the ways they were and as something they could not control. In the persistence narratives violence was explained through negative internal attributions [e.g., **P7:** Yeah kind of, just thought I done it (*punched partner*) because I'm a bad person]. Across all the groups there was talk about the need to manage certain traits and characteristics (e.g., aggressive, angry, defensive, and opinionated).

This links to managing propensities, particularly self-control which is one of the characteristics that the men identified they needed to manage. Some researchers have proposed that self-control is not *absolutely stable* within a person (Hay & Forrest, 2006; Mitchell & MacKenzie, 2006; Winfree, Taylor, He, & Esbensen, 2006) and fluctuates over time in response to individual experiences (Muraven, Baumeister, & Tice, 1999; vanDellen & Hoyle, 2010). It could therefore be argued that self-control is potentially renewed as individuals' personal circumstances change (new way of being). One of the survivors in their accounts talks about their partner who had stopped using violence and saw this as a result of his behaviour change in him being calmer and therefore easier to reason with [S3: He's a lot calmer now than he used to be. He is a lot calmer. You can reason with him now]. Numerous interviewees discussed how their desistance related to managing their characteristics and highlight that these were choices they made meaning they have become 'calmer', 'more relaxed', 'laid back', 'mellowed' and level 'minded'. The narrative below shows how previously this desister described himself as a 'growler' and as argumentative (with not only his partner but also other members of his family); yet as a non-violent individual he sees himself as calm and placid, which he identified, as being 'normal.'

D5: It's about your own choices and your own behaviour. I'm calm, placid, normal... They would describe me as a growler, I would get angry and grrr and growl at them... now I don't growl no more I'm very calm. My sister said to me the other day, you've changed but it's all for the better, you know and I said at least we don't argue no more... So I take myself out of the situation now. Whereas before I'd be like grrr grrrr with me own sisters and me own brothers my other half you know and that's not a good thing you know.

Motivation to Change. This sub-theme represents how the men are required to be motivated as individuals in order to achieve a non-violent ways of being. This is a dynamic state, and consists of the desires and willingness of the men to change. In order to maintain non-violent lifestyle behaviours, each man has to genuinely want to put the effort in and have an incentive to do this, e.g., a better relationship or access to children. The following desister talked about initially not being motivated to change but that this altered once treatment started and when he saw the potential benefits (seeing daughter) which all brought about the realisation that this would have benefitted him years ago.

D6: I said to them at first I'm not being funny but you want to put me on a course that I don't want to do, but you know as I started it, I was I will complete the course I will participate in everything. I'm doing it (*treatment*) I have had to fight to see my daughter you know and that is why I am doing it. I would have done it years ago but like I said, probation wouldn't put me on it. That's what I needed years ago.

Similarly, Stanley, Graham-Kevan and Borthwick (2012) found that desire to regain access to children was an extrinsic form of motivation to change for perpetrators of IPV, and desire to become ‘better fathers’ functioned as a form of intrinsic motivation to change. All of the facilitators talk extensively about how they believed motivation was an essential requirement but this concept is less widespread in the other accounts and not found at all from the persisters. In fact the persisters in contrast seemed to be more passive about the desire to change than active, as common in their accounts about their ability to change was that this was a ‘hope’ opposed to a ‘want’ [P1: I hope that I can do this. But I’ve seen other guys that can’t, do you know what I mean? So I’m just, I know that I can see at the time you could easily let it slip again if you wanted; P2: I hope to (*stay violence free*) I would like to but, because I really believe it but I’m not 100% sure or convinced myself yet]. However, the survivors in their accounts acknowledge that it is down to their individual partners to *want* to make the change again seeing this as an active process [S5: He’s got to want to change..he’s got to want to do it]. Likewise in this desister’s narrative, he clearly understands that his ability to change and be different comes from his active determination, desire and want to change.

D12: That’s it, you have to have the determination. It’s no good just saying you know I’m going to change for 5 minutes You’ve got to want it (*to be violence free*). Mine has just been sheer determination. I am changing but I want to. I want to actually be different. Because I’d tried before I tried before, I tried before and it hasn’t, I haven’t done no, made no difference. This time I want help I want to change.

The importance of motivation is very apparent in all of the facilitators’ accounts (e.g., **F8:** There has to be a motivation...If it’s not there, no I don’t think things will change). Here there is a general consensus that each man needs to be ‘motivated’ to change and have a ‘willingness’ ‘desire’ and ‘openness’ to change. This is consistent with the findings that treatment is more beneficial for those who are motivated as opposed to those who are not (Bowen & Gilchrist, 2006; Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2009), and that motivation improves during and after treatment (Connors, Mills, & Gray, 2012).

The organising theme *Permission to be non-violent* (and its associated basic themes and sub-themes) encapsulates how the men appear to create different personas and embrace behaviours that are associated with being non-violent. Desistance is connected to a change in self-storying and cognitively divorcing ‘the person I was from the person I am now’ (Stevens, 2012: 541); although in the current study the men do not at this stage provide evidence that they completely change their identity, they offer a redefinition of who they are. It is clear in this theme how important agency is in the desistance process. Through self- awareness the men take responsibility and ownership for their abuse and see themselves as, and become agents for change. When the men are agents of

violence they look externally to blame their partners *and* internally to justify their violence. However, in their new ways of being, the men recognise that their behaviours are wrong, take responsibility and are accountable for them, and crucially do some things about it; the men therefore become agents for change and non-violent.

Organising Theme: External Support and Input

The narratives that make up this final organising theme all capture how there is a need and requirement for external support networks to be an integral part of the desistance process. While the men have to look internally to acknowledge and change their behaviours, this needs to be supported by partners, families and treatment providers. External support seems to offer both guidance on what needs to change and how this can be achieved. External support also appears to be crucial in helping the men to sustain their new ways of being, which enables the men to continue a lifestyle of behaviours that are non-violent and not return to violence. This organising theme is made up of two basic themes, *Group pressure, influence and support*, and *Support and encouragement from others*.

Group pressure, influence and support. This theme was found mostly in the facilitators' accounts, although it was acknowledged by a small proportion of the desisters (four), and by one persister and one survivor. The influence of the group was found to be a particularly strong support system. This finding has also been reported by other researchers (Daniels & Murphy, 1997; Sheehan et al., 2012; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006) who have found that relationships with other men in treatment groups facilitated behavioural change particularly through positive feedback that reinforced and shaped behaviour change, and through manifesting the feelings in the men that they were not alone in this. Within these early desistance narrative it was seen that being challenged by your peers appeared to have enormous impact on the men, more so than if challenge came from other people (e.g., facilitators and partners). Kelly and Westmarland (2015) suggested that change in IPV men was associated with being challenged by peers. One of the facilitators talked extensively about group pressure and how power comes from within the group, by group members sharing their accounts of success:

F6: One or two people that attend the group that have had their arms twisted behind their backs by Social Services.....the volunteers will drag the other men up to their level. No you've got to change your behaviour, that's why you're here. So the power comes from within the group. And its peer pressure as opposed to facilitator pressure. You've got to open up. And then you get the experienced group members saying I was like that when I first got here, this is what I done and it worked for me, it might work for you. So there is a lot of peer pressure within the group and the ethos is for the men to challenge each other respectfully and then utilise the respectful behaviour within their relationship as well.

The influence of the group serves unique purposes for the men at different points in their pathways to non-violence. The group initially is influential as it challenges men, so that they can see their behaviours are wrong and they then start to understand what they need to change as they start the process of desistance. However as time goes on this changes as the men then become the ones who are challenging others. This is perhaps a reflection that they have grasped what was needed to change and why. What was particularly seen in the desisters' and facilitators' accounts was that the men saw 'new' offenders coming in the group, which made them realise how they used to be and how they were different now – they see their 'old-self' in others which is a contrast to how they describe themselves now. This external factor acted as reinforcement for the men to remain violence free. This was summarised very well in the narrative of one of the desisters who identified his change in behaviours by recognising his old self in others, which emphasised how much he has changed. As well as this recognition, part of his narrative is also about challenging others (and in effect his old self) about this problematic attitude.

D10: We had new people starting. They were sort of in denial, and it's like yeah I was like that 8 months go or whatever. And then you could tell them you're thinking exactly what I was thinking months ago and it's not the right way to think....it was that that reinforced that I've changed and I knew what, how I should be behaving and that also I could see me in them. And that's so and it was that the real force that I've changed and I knew what, how I should be behaving and that also I could see me in them. Instead I say you're wrong, that's not right.

Group influence was therefore important in facilitating a paradigm change to their *New way of being*, and this was seen in how the men accounts reflect a change in their identities within the group. Kelly and Westmarland (2015) found group work to be part of what enables men to change particularly through them seeing themselves through others. In the current study, to start with the men saw the group members as the 'others' (Hudson & Bramhall, 2005; Murray, 2010); this is the suggestion that they were not like the offenders on the programme and so would try and distance themselves from them. However as they were challenged by the men and heard the accounts from these 'others' this initiated recognition of their own abuse and acknowledgement they are in fact the same as the others on the group. Their roles and identities then changed again as they became the challengers and not the ones being challenged. This change in role and the self was not seen in the persisters' narratives who were still at the early stages of treatment and therefore had not made the transitional change at that point in time. *Support and encouragement from others*. This theme relates to another external influence that was discussed and described as a factor that enabled the men to maintain violence free ways of being. Again it is the re-narration of

the self (Vaughan, 2007), in light of these external factors, that produces agentic movement. This theme was identified from the desisters' and facilitators' accounts but was not seen in the persisters' and survivors' accounts. This external influence identified comes in the form of positive encouragement/feedback from others, namely their partners. Positive feedback increases motivation to pursue goals, and encourages goal persistence and may prevent disengagement (Fishbach & Finkelstein, 2012). Positive feedback was a support mechanism that encouraged the men to maintain being violence free, once the decision to stop had been made and they had started using new behaviours in their relationships. This encouragement acts to reinforce the new behaviours and different self as positive changes by rewarding the men for their modified behaviours and their new ways of being. In one of the facilitators accounts their experience in group work, he reflects that part of the process is reminding the offenders that fundamentally they have aspects of them that are good such as a loving father and then to reinforce the positive steps that the men are taking which will result in desistance.

F3: When they are getting that positive feedback, and when you know... we do tell them, if you start behaving respectfully and loving to your partner, she will do the same to you..., if they get that reward so to speak... that reinforces the behaviour and then you are on a road to you know, desistance. They need the support of their partner. So is it a constant process of doing behaviour and reflecting and reinforcing the positives. You know, we do encourage that. That's something I do believe in.

Several of the desisters explained about the importance of external support and this included extended family and friends. However it was their partners' support that was described as being the most important, particularly their encouragement. This seemed to confirm to the men that they were doing the right things, were on the right pathways, and importantly motivated the men to continue these ways. In the following account from one of the desisters, he clearly explains his motivation to continue along the path of desistance as being driven not only by being praised during the intervention he was attending but also specifically from his partner.

D9: Because I mean I wanted to prove to myself and everyone that you know, I could do it [*stop using violence*] And the more and more I got praised in [*intervention*] and more and more hearing good things from [*partner*] you know, when [*partner*] would write me a note in the morning saying, I'm happy with the way things are going, little things like that but it meant enough to me to sort give me that motivation to keep going.

This final organising theme gives an insight in to the narratives about the external support networks that were identified as being important mechanisms during the process of primary desistance. It refers to the external structures that the individuals suggested needed to be in place to promote the process of change and initiate the men to re-evaluate their life, and make sense of who they are. This factor seemed to run

alongside the two other organising themes presented, in order to make up lifestyle behaviours (non-violent). Once at this stage of the process within the narratives there are frequent references to the fact the IPV desisters recognised their behaviours were abusive and had taken responsibility for their violence. They look to identify themselves as agents of change and put strategies in place, and adopt mindsets to stop using physical violence against intimates. External support is also required to assist this process and help with the maintenance of violence-free lives. Based on the current data, this has been achieved for at least a year and so still remains a '*new way of being*'. What still needs to be examined is the narratives offered when long-term desistance is achieved and non-violence is simply a '*way of being*.'

Limitations of Research

This work was exploratory and coupled with the sensitive nature of the topic under investigation and the methodology employed comes with inherent limitations. The identification of desisters was made based on self-report on the CTS2, which can be problematic (Cook, 2002). There is no guarantee that the desisters had stopped using violence. Interview narratives were compared with the CTS2 to check for consistency in reporting (although this also was reliant on self-reporting). To promote external validity of desistance file notes held by the treatment providers were also cross-checked for any police and/or victim reports of violence, and disclosure in group or to intervention provider in the previous year. No evidence of physical violence by the desisters in the previous year was found using this approach. However, this does not account for potential unreported use of IPV. It is also possible that response bias influenced men's reporting during the interviews. The men may have been influenced to respond more positively particularly in light of the fact that the majority of the interviews took place where the men were also attending treatment.

It is expected that the findings will generalise to other clinical and forensic settings given that the sample was made up of both self-referred and court-mandated men. However, all participants were volunteers. Therefore it is not known whether they differed from other IPV men, facilitators and survivors who did not volunteer. In addition, in relation to the IPV perpetrators it is the case that the findings are not generalisable to those who have not been referred at all to treatment, i.e., those who live in the community but have never been arrested or never voluntarily sought help/treatment. It has been suggested that those who have not been referred constitute a large proportion of IPV men (Dutton, 1988), but it is exceptionally difficult to access this type of sample, which is why they were not included in the current study. However, this unreferral sample would also need to be studied in order to draw firm conclusions as to whether the findings are

aligned to the process of ‘spontaneous’ desistance found in ‘untreated samples’. There are likely to be some key differences between ‘untreated samples’ and the current sample, by the very fact that the community men have not attended treatment, particularly as the influence of treatment (and certain elements associated with it) was evident in some of the accounts given.

The sample also comprised predominantly white British participants and so the generalisability to other ethnicities is also questionable. This was in part attributable to the inclusion criteria for group treatment (had to be able to read and write in English). Although the examination of ethnicity within desistance research has been neglected in IPV research, in the general offending literature it has been suggested that structural (family, friends, employment) and cultural (religion, values) ethnic differences affect how the process of desistance is experienced (Calverley, 2012). This has not been examined specifically in relation to IPV; however, Caetano et al. (2005) examined stability and prevalence of IPV over time across different ethnicities and reported that incidents of and reoccurrence of IPV was higher for Black and Hispanic Americans than Whites. They also found that Whites reported higher rates of desistance. All of this would suggest the ethnicity must be considered in relation to IPV in future research studies. It is likely, however, that the current findings reported are generalisable to other white British treatment samples of domestically violent men.

Finally, the current research examined desistance from physical violence. It is known that IPV comprises a range of different behaviours, not all of which are physical violence. All the desisters and persisters who participated reported extensive (both in severity and frequency) physical and psychological violence but there was little evidence of sexual violence (based on CTS2). Research suggests that men who batter are not a homogeneous group as evidenced by typology research (e.g., Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994); batterers are classified according to the severity and frequency of their violence and whether the violence is only marital or extra-marital as well. It is not known how the findings can be applied across different types of IPV men and so this needs to be addressed in future research.

Implications

Implications for theory. In conducting this study, there are some conceptual issues raised that have implications for theorising about desistance from IPV. Theories in relation to general desistance have not been applied to IPV, yet it is seen from the current research that desistance from IPV can be better understood under a theoretical framework that integrates social processes and subjective change. It was not clear how relevant criminal propensity was in relation to desistance from IPV as this was not specifically identified in the narratives, although

arguably understanding if this is relevant might be better suited to a quantitative approach. Primary desistance from IPV involved redefinition of the self and agency. Within the narratives a paradigm shift that involved fundamental changes in individuals' values, beliefs and behaviours was evident i.e., the *New way of being* for the individuals. It is both structure and agency that are involved in this process. Environments and external structures that are conducive to personal change also needed to be in place. It is not the external factors and structures *per se* that make individuals change but the re-narration of the self in light of external and structural influences that facilitates agentic moves that produces positive change (Vaughan, 2007). Through their early desistance narratives the IPV offenders built a coherent version of the self (i.e., *Permission to be non-violent*), actively influenced and managed social environments (i.e., *Manage antecedents and triggers to violence*) and this was all achieved within supportive and conducive environments for change (i.e., *External support and input*).

Desistance from IPV must be theorised as a process made up of different stages of change, although this should not be conceptualised as a linear process that follows a set pattern of progress, direction or order of stages. This perhaps aligns with the TTM which it is argued is best represented as a spiral progression through stages as individuals rarely go through stages of change in a linear fashion but rather relapse and revisit one or more stages (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Desistance from IPV needs to be theorised as a complex process that involves a dynamic pathway on which there may be key identifiable phases that promote or inhibit the likelihood of desistance. The precise nature of how the process of change progresses and evolves is likely to be idiosyncratic.

When theorising about desistance from IPV, it is clear that this does not 'just happen' and is not a spontaneous event. It has been previously suggested in the general offending literature that external structures influence criminal behaviour by what might be described as desistance 'by default' (Laub & Sampson, 2003, p. 278) and that commitment to desist is not made by great forethought but rather 'by default' as individuals commit to go straight without realising it. However, this was not the case in the current study, suggesting that primary desistance does need upfront work (Maruna, 2001), a commitment to change and that the redefinition of the self and identity is a conscious choice that is facilitated by an awareness of the need to change and a desire to change. Desistance from IPV can therefore be theorised as an active process that takes hard work commitment and a conscious choice as desistance from IPV by default is unlikely to happen.

Implications for practice. As desistance from IPV is a complex process and not a static one-off event, interventions must understand this and identify ways to manage and setbacks and difficulties (e.g., relapse and

revisits to different stages of the process of change) and reduce the risk of them occurring in the future. From a practice point of view the relevance of these findings is that early facilitation to enable IPV men to amend existing and then construct new identities (e.g., found in *Permission to be non-violent*) could increase the likelihood of desistance. As desistance is about discovering agency, interventions are more likely to be effective if they encourage self-determination and therefore work *with* offenders. In addition to this, interventions also need to assist offenders in recognising, creating or utilising structural influences (e.g., *Managing antecedents and triggers to violence* and *External support and input*) that when in place are also likely to promote and encourage agentic movement and re-narration of the self. Interventions need to provide opportunities to practice and reinforce through feedback newly forming identities that were starting to emerge in the current research. It was seen that the process of change required hard work, commitment and support from others and these needs to be acknowledged and facilitated in treatment. In addition, rather than making the emphasis of intervention holding an individual responsible for what they have done in the past, i.e., “passive responsibility” (Maruna & Mann, 2006, p. 167), the focus needs to be placed on encouraging individuals to take control over their own lives and take “active responsibility” (seen as individuals *Managed antecedents and triggers to violence*) for making things right in the future. It is argued that control over the future might be a valuable therapeutic tool (Ward & Brown, 2004). Intervention would benefit from taking a strengths-based approach, which has been identified as an effective approach for intervening with IPV men (Curwood et al., 2011; Langlands, Ward, & Gilchrist, 2009; Lehmann & Simmons, 2009) and thereby not asking what that person’s deficits are but what positive contribution can the person make and to promote ‘good lives’ as defined by the person themselves (Maruna & Roy, 2007). Focus needs to be placed on personal strengths and resources in individuals’ social networks that can help them overcome obstacles to desistance. Intervention should seek to empower individuals to achieve the new positive identity and roles and life situations that have been empirically associated with successful desistance from IPV. In addition to this there is a need to expand the availability of interventions so that *all* individuals have the opportunity to be helped and supported to achieve primary and then ultimately secondary desistance from IPV.

Implications for future research. The new model developed in this research needs to be tested across other groups of men who have used violence against their intimates to assess its reliability, validity and generalisability. This could be done either using a deductive qualitative methodology where an *a priori* template of coding is used (Ryan & Bernard, 2003), or by the development of a questionnaire. Research needs to examine this in different groups of men i.e., different cultures and ethnicities, types of IPV men, different treatment settings (e.g., one-to-one) as well as for those who have not experienced formal intervention. In addition to this, research needs to also

include different types of IPV and abusive behaviours (e.g., psychological, sexual, controlling behaviours). Desisting from physical IPV does not necessarily mean that all abusive behaviours have stopped, and these other non-physical behaviours can be as if not more traumatic in some cases for victims (Mechanic, Weaver, & Resnick, 2008). Desisting from different types of IPV behaviours has not been fully studied so changes in these behaviours overtime and the mechanisms associated with these changes warrant further examination. In order to get a clearer and more nuanced understanding of the changes over time it necessary to undertake some qualitative longitudinal research (QLR). It has been argued that this type of research is necessary to encompass the complexity of the interaction between the personal and social contexts (Farrall, 2006). Untangling this complex relationship will then provide an evidence-base for intervention focus and practice. QLR enables researchers to understand the intricacies of change and continuity, the processes and structures within which these changes occur and the agency of individuals in shaping these processes (Neale, Henwood, & Holland, 2012). It is suggested that through time using QLR it is possible to discern how personal and social, agency and structure and the macro and micro are interconnected (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003). QLR offers the opportunity to explore complex flows of time through which people organise and make sense of their lives (Neale et al., 2012), and an opportunity to examine change and constancy over time.

Researchers also need to extend their work on desistance from IPV to cover longer time periods and so examine secondary or long-term desistance. It is vital that we understand the process of primary desistance, as this is a necessary condition for secondary desistance. However, research then needs to be extended to include the long-term (i.e., over several years and perhaps decades) to understand whether and how this phase differs from the findings identified in the current research. In the current study desistance was seen as *‘Lifestyle behaviours (non-violent): New Way of being’* and an understanding of the mechanisms and framework that promoted and support this were identified. Research needs to be extended to understand the mechanisms and frameworks that need to be in place so that these lifestyle behaviours (non-violent) are simply a *‘Way of being’* for the men, as desistance has been sustained long-term. Through an examination of narratives of those who have desisted for years an understanding how external and structural factors interact with agency and if and how this process differs in comparison to primary desistance can be achieved. This is critical information in order to treat IPV offenders and enable them to maintain the changes that they achieve.

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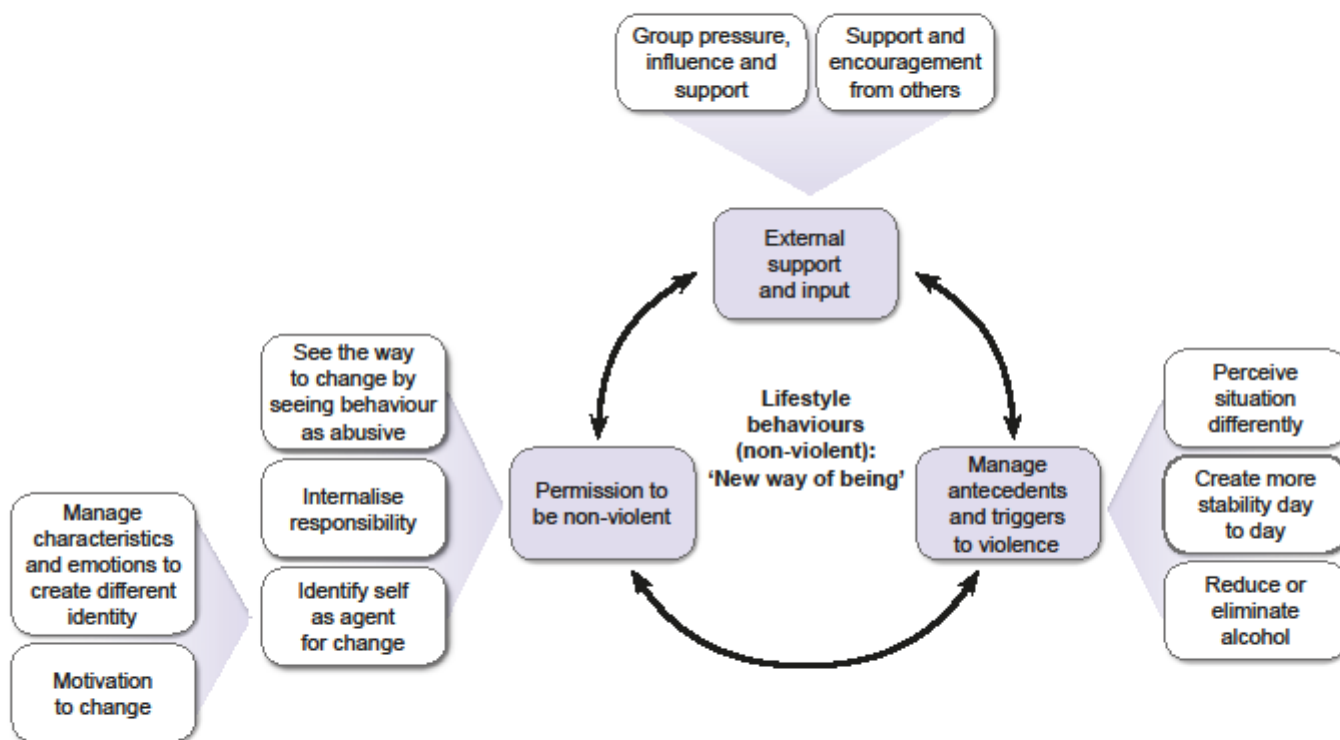


Figure 1

