DESISTANCE FROM INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF MEN WITH HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR FEMALE PARTNER

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the men's process of desistance from intimate partner violence (IPV). Using thematic narrative analysis, the life stories of men who desist from IPV, who attended specialized intervention programs, were examined and compared with the life stories of men who do not desist from IPV, and who were attending similar programs. The analysis shows how men who desist from IPV construct a personal identity of men who have changed in terms of their relational purposes in life, responsibility for their behaviour and its impact on their affective relationships, gender positioning, communication skills, and ability to self-monitor and self-regulate their own emotional states. Desisting men stressed both their agency and the significance of receiving respectful expert assistance in achieving this change, and the need for ongoing effort in maintaining change in communication skills and emotional self-regulation after program completion. In contrast, men who do not desist from IPV construct an identity of men who have not changed in the terms indicated by men who desist, and remain centred on their own individual needs, as they were before getting involved in the intervention program. Analysis also shows that desistance from IPV is a process unfolded over time, requiring external expert assistance to boost men's motivation to change. The change process involves the provision and discussion of novel frameworks for enabling men's self-reflective processes of biographic reinterpretation and repositioning, in order to facilitate the implementation of changes in their relational lives and strengthen their commitment to preserving and expanding these changes after program completion. This study highlights the centrality of the sense of self to understanding desistance from IPV, and the extent to which men's emotional lives have been overlooked in the intervention with men who use IPV and in the study of change in IPV. Findings are discussed in terms their implications for intervention and further research.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Carlos René Clavijo López

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INTRODUCTION

1.1   Interventions with perpetrators of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence against women (IPV) is a global problem affecting the health and human rights of 35% of the population of women worldwide (WHO, 2013). In Australia, one in six women have experienced physical or sexual violence, and one in four have experienced emotional abuse from a current or former male partner (ANROWS, 2014). The feminist social movement provoked the development of a range of responses to IPV that have been implemented in many countries from the late 1970s onwards. These have included: advocacy, shelters and counselling for victimized women; the criminal prosecution of offenders; and the provision of gender-based intervention programs (GBIPs) aimed at holding perpetrators accountable, re-educating them in order to prevent further IPV, and promoting social change towards gender equality (Day, Chung, O'Leary, & Carson, 2009; Gondolf, 2007; Paymar, 2000; Pence & Paymar, 1993).

GBIPs originated in the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project program in Minnesota (Pence & Paymar, 1993), and are commonly known as the Duluth model (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). These programs are described as either mandatory or voluntary psycho-educational group interventions, developed from a feminist socio-educational approach to address the attitudinal and psychological factors associated with the use and perpetuation of violence against women. GBIPs seek to develop men's understanding of the causes and consequences of their violence through consciousness-raising activities based on the use of the 'power and control wheel', the confronting of their denial and minimization of their use of violence and controlling behaviours, and the promoting of gender-egalitarian relationships using the 'equality wheel' (Barner & Carney, 2011; Pence & Paymar, 1993). Although further developments in USA have integrated cognitive behavioural techniques into GBIPs, to enhance conflict resolution skills in an effort to target behaviour management and anger control, these developments have not displaced gender power issues from the core of the intervention with men who use IPV (Babcock, Canady,

Graham, & Schart, 2007; Babcock et al., 2004; Murphy & Baxter, 1997; Van Wormer & Bednar, 2002; Whitaker & Niolon, 2009).

1.2   Intervention with perpetrators of IPV in Australia

GBIPs have become a key form of intervention in IPV, sponsored by governments and formally integrated into coordinated community responses (FaHCSIA, 2009; Geldschläger et al., 2010; NCRVWC, 2009). In Australia, GBIPs are known as Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs). These were first developed in South Australia during the mid-1980s (Lazarus & McCarthy, 1990), modeled on ideas brought from the field of systemic family therapy (Jenkins, 1990). In other states, such as in Victoria, programs were developed on the basis of the Duluth model (Pence & Paymar, 1993), which has continued to be the most influential model, as shown in the standards implemented in Victoria in the mid-1990s and revised in the mid-2000s (NTV, 2006). Programs in Victoria are mostly voluntary and utilise the group-work approach. Although they emerged as an alternative to the criminal system, MBCPs are becoming increasingly connected with the justice system (Mackay, Gibson, Lam, & Beecham, 2015). More recently, the Council of Australian Governments[1] (COAG) has developed a number of initiatives regarding MBCPs; as for example the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, which has as one of its goals that "perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account" (COAG, 2010, p. 29). COAG have also initiated the setting of national outcome standards for perpetrator interventions, with a focus on 'what works' (Mackay et al., 2015). Political support for perpetrator intervention programs is currently strong in Australia. The National Plan recognises that MBCPs are "an essential part of an effective plan to reduce violence against women and their children" (COAG, 2010, p. 29). Furthermore, the upper house of the Federal Parliament recommended increasing the availability of MBCPs and ensuring programs are evidence based (Parliament of Australia, 2015). A recent report delivered by The Royal Commission into Family Violence, in Victoria (State of Victoria, 2016), points out that "bringing perpetrators into view and assisting them to change behaviours is essential to reducing family violence"; although they acknowledge that the "current response to perpetrators

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[1] State Governments in Australia have their own separate authorities from Federal Government in the Constitution.

remains under-developed", they recommend exploring options for expanding interventions for perpetrators by taking into account the "important work that has already been done" (p. 10).

1.3   State of the knowledge on MBCPs

Despite the growing importance given to MBCPs among responses to IPV, since the mid-1980s a number of empirical and meta-analytic studies have shown mixed and contradictory findings, raising doubts about the effectiveness of these programs in stopping IPV (Babcock et al., 2004; Eckhardt, Murphy, Black, & Suhr, 2006; Feder & Dugan, 2002; Feder & Wilson, 2005; Gondolf, 2000; Gondolf, 2002). This has led to an increasing dispute between gender-based and gender-neutral, psychology-based scholars, regarding the aetiology of IPV and the best ways to assist perpetrators to stop IPV (Dutton & Corvo, 2007a; Gondolf, 2007). Attempts to improve program effectiveness by developing typologies of perpetrators, and matching their motivational states through the assessment of men's positions within the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Brodeur, Rondeau, Brochu, Lindsay, & Phelps, 2008; Levesque, Driskell, Prochaska, & Prochaska, 2008; Scott & Wolfe, 2003), have reported limited results (Alexander, Morris, Tracy, & Frye, 2010; Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2008; Murphy & Meis, 2008). In addition, in the literature the vast majority of the quantitative studies focused on evaluating program outcomes have been conducted in the USA (Mackay et al., 2015), although some significant work has been carried out in the UK (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 1999; Kelly & Westmarland, 2015), thus, these studies should be read carefully as they reflect structural, legal and cultural conditions that are not necessarily generalizable. Furthermore, it has also been shown that most of these quantitative studies exhibit a number of methodological flaws affecting their credibility (Eckhardt et al., 2013). However, quantitative research focused on program evaluation, particularly research with an experimental design, are still considered to be the best source for the knowledge needed to determine whether MBCPs work (Gondolf, 2012).

Contrasting with the great interest in evaluating program outcomes, little attention has been paid to understanding how change occurs, and to how perpetrators make sense of this change and participate in the change process (Walker, Bowen, & Brown,

2012). Moreover, the few qualitative studies on change processes carried out to date have privileged a focus on 'what works' in programs, showing a number of 'treatment' factors that promote violence cessation (Pandya & Gingerich, 2002; Scott & Wolfe, 2000; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006); with the only exception to this being the study conducted by Morran (2013a), which has a focus on 'how' programs work. Although all these studies suggest the appropriateness of qualitative methods in understanding the change process in IPV perpetration and their potential for improving existing programs, qualitative research on MBCPs has not yet articulated a conceptual model of change in IPV perpetration.

Given the privileged focus on 'what works' and the dominant medicalized approach to interventions, change processes have been studied with a predominant focus on in-treatment processes, which has limited the research scope (Sheehan, Thakor, & Stewart, 2012). From this perspective, programs have been conceived of as 'treatments' and perpetrators as passive recipients of treatment components. For example, in the study by Silvergleid and Mankowsky (2006), participants were interviewed using questions such as "what influence does your group leader have on your process of change?" (p. 143). The literature also reflects a preference for binary, objectively-measurable behaviour outcomes (Eckhardt et al., 2006; Scott, 2004) such as physical violence and severe psychological abuse (Scott & Wolfe, 2000). Consequently, change in IPV has been qualitatively studied as if MBCPs were medical treatments having no relation to perpetrators' subjective experience and agency; leading to a systematic neglect of subjective issues such as the men's understandings of themselves and their situation, and the relation of these understandings with the sociocultural context

1.4 The place of subjectivity in understanding personal change: A theoretical framework

Contrasting with the scarce interest in men's subjectivity observed in the field of research in IPV intervention, individual's views of themselves have been portrayed as critical for the underlying process of termination and abstention from offending in contemporary criminological research; where this process has been conceptualized as desistance (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001). Although

criminology has been noticeably absent in theorizing about IPV etiology and intervention (Fisher & Lab, 2010), and criminological understandings of desistance have been commonly overlooked in the study of change in IPV (Walker et al., 2012), desistance theory has the potential to contribute to understanding and conceptualizing change in IPV from men's perspectives, as the research conducted by Morran in the UK (2013b) suggests.

However, criminological desistance theory is not a unitary body of knowledge. It has been only the most recent theoretical advances in this field that have stressed the significance of individuals' views of themselves for understanding the desisting process (Maruna, 2001). Furthermore, a great deal of these theoretical advances have been developed on the basis of contemporary psychological theories, emphasizing the narratively constructed nature of the personal identity (Maruna, 1997). Therefore, the theory of desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001) and the theory of narrative identity (McAdams, 2011b) play guiding roles in the present research. However, these theories do not pay particular attention to gender issues in the construction of the personal identity, in circumstances where gender issues are strongly supported by the literature as relevant to understanding IPV (Gondolf, 2012). Thus, the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' was also incorporated into the present study in order to broaden the scope of theoretical understanding of how men construct personal identity. The three conceptual lenses configuring the theoretical framework of this research, desistance, narrative identity, and hegemonic masculinity, are described below.

1.4.1 Desistance

Desistance is defined in criminology as the causal process underlying the termination of offending, and is conceived as a dynamic and complex process unfolded over time (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Laub & Sampson, 1993; Maruna, 2001; Murray, 2012a, 2012b). Three different theoretical approaches to desistance can be distinguished in criminology, according to their emphasis on different factors involved in the process.

The maturational approach emphasizes internal developmental factors related to age as the source of change (Glueck & Glueck, 1974; Matza, 1964); while the informal

social control perspective holds the view that social structural turning points, such as employment and marriage, are the main causal factors (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Laub & Sampson, 2003). Subjective change perspectives state that desistance occurs due to shifts in offenders' identities that take place through self-reflective processes and actions regarding relevant social circumstances, rather than as the product of external control. These perspectives give pre-eminence to the role played by personal agency and identity change in 'going straight' and staying that way (Maruna, 2001; Vaughan, 2007).

Empirical criminological studies have supported subjective change perspectives, suggesting that people who desist from crime make identifiable changes to their personal identity, producing a new self which no longer coheres with offending (Gadd & Farrall, 2004; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004; Maruna, Wilson, & Curran, 2006; Vaughan, 2007). These studies have also argued for the suitability of qualitative narrative methods for exploring this subjective process of personal identity transformation (Gadd & Farrall, 2004; Laub & Sampson, 1993; Maruna, 1997).

1.4.2   Narrative identity

Recent subjective change perspectives of desistance were developed on the basis of psychological theories of narrative identity (Maruna, 1997). In a narrative approach, personal identity can be understood as the way people create a sense of unity and purpose in of their lives (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008; McAdams, 2011b). This constructed sense of self consequently shapes people's future choices and behaviour (White, 2007), according to what Giddens (1991) has termed "the reflexive project of the self" (p. 224). From this perspective, in order to achieve a temporally-structured and contextualized understanding of human behaviour, it is necessary to look at self-narratives (Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1985b; Sarbin, 1986).

Narrative identity as a concept offers an advantageous approach to self-narratives, given its empirical support and growing use in psychological and criminological studies of personal change (Adler & McAdams, 2007; Angus & McLeod, 2004;

Bamberg, 1997; Maruna, 1997). According to McAdams (2011b), narrative identity "is the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to give sense and meaning to his or her life" (p. 99). Identity takes the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, character, plot, and theme, through which an individual is able to integrate the self synchronically and diachronically (McAdams, 1993; McAdams, 2011b). The story serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his or her life is going, by drawing on prevailing cultural norms, images and metaphors (McAdams, 2011b). A person's evolving life story is a key component of what constitutes the individuality of that particular person, situated in a particular social context (Thorne, 2000), at a particular moment, within a particular society (Gregg, 1991); reflecting the co-constitutive dynamic interplay between the person and the culture (Hammack, 2008).

Self-narratives can be compared and contrasted to the salience of thematic lines, and analysed in terms of the construed selves and in relation with local cultural norms and metaphors that shape narrative identity (Maruna, 2001; McAdams, 2001). For example, in a study of adult life transitions and well-being in USA, Bauer and McAdams (2004) report that agentic-growth themes take the form of redemptive stories, and that these correlate with transition satisfaction and well-being; while communal-growth themes correlate only with global well-being, reflecting the preference of American society for resilient protagonists involved in stories of individual upward social mobility, liberation, atonement, and self-actualization (Bauer et al., 2008).

Narrative approaches have provided a systematic framework for studying the contextualized processes of human change from the perspective of the individual, in a comprehensive, multi-level portrait of the psychosocial correlates of the experience of change (McAdams, 2011b; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001, 2006). Examining people's personal identity constructions has proven relevant not only in desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001) but also in researching psychotherapy processes and outcomes (Adler, 2012; Adler, Skalina, & McAdams, 2008; Angus & McLeod, 2004; Dunlop & Tracy, 2013), and live transitions in general (McAdams et al., 2001). Therefore, such examination could be also relevant for understanding change and abstinence from IPV.

1.4.3 Masculinity

Theoretically and empirically, there is a strong association between masculinity norms of aggression and dominance, and IPV (Babcock et al., 2004; Paymar, 2000; Stark, 2007). Feminist scholars hold that abuse is caused and promoted by a society that reinforces patriarchal beliefs of masculine entitlement. In this context, men are allowed to use violence to impose and maintain power and control in gender relationships, mirroring male domination beyond the domestic sphere (Dobash & Dobash, 1983; Paymar, 2000; Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Masculinity is considered as a process rather than a product (Schongut, 2012). It is a historically-created configuration of practices organized in relation to the structure of gender relations, which is culturally specific, for the regulation of power relationships, social roles, and the bodies of the individuals (Connell, 1995). Such practices have been socio-historically construed as the natural order (Bordieu & Jord, 2000). Although masculinity is not unitary, hegemonic masculinity represents "the currently most honored way of being a man", requiring that all other men position themselves in relation to it as an ideologically-legitimated parameter (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Hegemonic masculinity implies the existence of multiple masculinities conceived as discursive positions that "express ideals, fantasies and desires" and "provide models of relations with women and solutions of gender relations" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838). Therefore, the analysis of gender-discursive positions of men's self-narratives must be considered in the study of abstention from IPV, given: their importance for understanding how men who desist from IPV negotiate a masculine position; what sort of non-hegemonic masculinities are available in the local context (Demetriou, 2001); the ways in which men are able to resist the dominance of the hegemonic masculinity (Ramirez, 2005); and ultimately, how systems of gender inequality can be potentially challenged (Dellinger, 2004).

1.5 The relationship between the researcher and the phenomena under scrutiny

As a clinical psychologist, psychotherapy trainer, and as a researcher, my interest in the present research is both theoretical and practical. My attraction to the field of intervention with men who use IPV is linked to my trajectory as a practitioner-

researcher. I started working as a practitioner in this field by chance during the mid-1990s as the result of the requirement to gain experience in working in community settings. At that time, in Chile, working with men was an emerging field due to the recent enactment of the family violence law. There was no clear guidance on how to conduct this work, and the justice system simply expected that psychologist and social workers should know how to respond. However, as a therapist-in-training, I soon realized that the clinical models that I had learnt were not appropriate for responding to a complex problem involving justice, ethical, safety, and political concerns. After finishing my placement, I was hired by the program, and I continued looking for more appropriate theoretical maps for conducting my work with men. The providential visit of Luis Aravena - one of the founders of the Duluth Model (Miller, 2010) - to my program contributed to giving to my approach to my work a more sound foundation, and provided me with a set of new tools. I came to understand that this work was both political, educative, and therapeutic.

While working in the program, I was offered a position in the Department of Clinical Psychology at a local university. I commenced to build bridges between the apparently separated worlds of interventions in IPV and clinical psychology, advocating for the incorporation of IPV into the curriculum and training of new therapists. I also started a modest undergraduate research program exploring literature and the experiences of women and men involved in IPV. However, both my practice and my academic explorations led me to a point where I found myself with no satisfactory answers to my questions. I was intrigued by the fact that, while some men exhibited good outcomes from their participation in the program, others returned reporting relapses with the same or different partners, and others remained for years attending the program occasionally to have a chat. I needed the time and funding to answer these questions properly, so I looked for alternatives, and was offered a scholarship to conduct the present research.

Although the above account could explain the impetus for this research, it offers only a partial description of the various axes configuring my personal and professional approach to the study, which are important for clarifying this study as being an interpretative endeavour (Davies & Harre, 1990; Khawaja & Mørck, 2009). From this perspective, it is important to underline that the research that follows was developed

by: a heterosexual man, married to a female psychotherapist and father of two children; a man with South American background, who comes from a working class family, which made great efforts to open up the doors of knowledge and social mobility for him.

1.6   Research aim

As discussed earlier, to date, qualitative research on change processes in IPV has focused on examining the factors that men report as relevant for their change within the interventions (Sheehan et al., 2012). Although recently-published studies have incorporated the concept of desistance into the exploration of men's change process (Giordano, Johnson, Manning, Longmore, & Minter, 2015; Walker, Bowen, Brown, & Sleath, 2015), the role of personal identity constructed by these men, and the process through which they build a sense of self, remain unexplored. Herein lies the aims of the present research: to contribute to knowledge concerning how men who desist from IPV construct a sense of self; how this sense of self relates to discourses of masculinity; and how these understandings compare to those of men who do not desist from IPV. In order to accomplish these aims, a qualitative narrative study was implemented, given its advantages for producing and analysing data regarding how people construct their personal identity. Furthermore, this research, being explorative and discovery oriented, is also intended to stimulate discussion and further research directed at assisting men who use IPV in their journey out from violence, to better contribute to the safety of women and children.

1.7   Thesis outline

This thesis contains eight chapters. This introductory chapter has situated the current study in the context of empirical efforts to understand change in IPV, and has specified its aims, of contributing to knowledge on the desisting process from IPV, from a narrative approach to personal identity and a constructionist approach to masculinity. Chapter II offers a broader portrait of the empirical endeavours carried out in the field of intervention with men who use IPV. Controversies regarding the role of gender in understanding IPV and the effectiveness of MBCPs are examined and discussed, and the uncertainty around the effectiveness of these programs is

established. Studies on the change process in IPV are also discussed, and the need for developing a conceptual understanding of the change process in IPV through the exploration of men's subjective construction of personal identity by means of narrative research is argued, on the basis of criminological research. Chapter III explains in detail the methodological decisions taken in conducting this research, including discussion of the role of epistemological and theoretical underpinnings, and the rationale for selecting a particular approach to conducting narrative research, as well as a description of the process of data production and data analysis.

The findings of the research are presented in three consecutive chapters. Chapter IV presents the findings resulting from the analysis of the life narratives of men who do not desist from IPV; Chapter V presents the findings produced through the analysis of the life narratives of men who desist from IPV; and Chapter VI presents the analysis of the comparison between the life narratives of men who desist and men who do not desist from IPV. The discussion bringing together the issues and themes reported in Chapters IV to VI are presented in Chapter VII. The meanings of the findings, pertaining to the gradualness of the change process, motivational issues, external assistance, biographical reinterpretation, and the centrality of self-monitoring for desistance from IPV, are interrogated in light of existing literature; and the limitations of the study are also discussed. Finally, Chapter VIII summarizes the research main findings, and discusses the implications, of the need for social collaboration, the centrality of self-reflexiveness, and the significance of emotional life, for desistance from IPV; and potential developments in intervention for men who use IPV, and in further research.

Interventions for men who use IPV have increasingly been examined and problematized by empirical research. Studies looking at the change process of men who use IPV have been scarce, and most have also been limited to medicalized approaches. Contemporary criminological theories of desistance from crime, psychological narrative theories of personal identity, and sociological understandings of the discursive constitution of masculinity, together offer an alternative and advantageous route for exploring the relatively uncharted territory of the subjectivity of men who desist from IPV that is needed to shed light on the process of change and change maintenance in IPV.

CHAPTER II:
RESEARCH ON INTERVENTION PROGRAMS FOR MEN WHO USE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1   Introduction

A review of the literature pertaining research on intervention with men who use IPV is presented in this chapter. The chapter begins with an introduction to the controversies between feminist and family violence scholars regarding the effectiveness of gender-based interventions for perpetrators of IPV. Subsequently, these controversies are explored in depth, by examining empirical studies where the role of gender variables in IPV etiology and intervention with perpetrators is both contested and supported, and the effectiveness of gender-based interventions for perpetrators is constructed as uncertain. The chapter follows with a review of the studies carried out with the aim of improving intervention programs, the results of which have led to considering the study of the change process in IPV as a promising route for fulfilling this goal and expanding the knowledge of IPV. Finally, the examination of studies of the change process in IPV leads to the consideration of criminological studies of change, suggesting the appropriateness of using methods and theories developed in this field for the study of desistance from IPV.

2.2   Controversies on gender-based interventions for men who use IPV

The Duluth model, developed by Pence and Paymar (1985), spread across the USA and Canada during the 1980s to became the most influential model of gender-based intervention programs for perpetrators of intimate partner violence against women (Eckhardt et al., 2013). During the 1990s the model also influenced the development of programs for men in the southern hemisphere in countries such as Australia and Chile (Clavijo & Demicheli, 2002; Mackay et al., 2015). However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s a wave of empirical studies began to cast doubt on the effectiveness of Duluth-based intervention programs (from here onwards MBCPs to reflect the local terminology) in stopping violence against women, and begun to question its privileged position as a politically-supported and judicially-mandated treatment

(Arias, Dankwort, Douglas, Dutton, & Stein, 2002; Babcock et al., 2004; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Eckhardt et al., 2006; Feder & Dugan, 2002; Feder & Wilson, 2005; Gondolf, 2004; Gondolf, 1999a; Holtzworth-Munroe, 2001). This situation ignited a growing controversy among researchers and theorists (Dutton, 2003; Gondolf, 2003), which promoted further theorization and empirical research into the etiology of IPV against women, reciprocal violence, and associated frameworks for designing programs for perpetrators; leading to two groups of authors attempting to influence policy making on IPV (Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011). On the one hand, a group of researchers, often dubbed 'Feminist Scholars' in the literature, developed empirical efforts to support their claims about the nature of the gender asymmetry in IPV, and the central role of gender in its etiology, suggesting a 'one size fits most' approach for intervening with IPV perpetrators (White & Gondolf, 2000). On the other hand, a group named in the literature as 'Family Violence Scholars' emphasized the symmetrical nature of IPV, arguing for the role of psychopathology as the main etiological factor and as a better framework for risk assessment and change promotion in IPV treatment (Winstok, 2011).

The tension between the socio-historical and psychological paradigms changed the field of IPV from the early 2000s, stimulating the evolution of its understanding from a single-manifestation phenomena with a single etiology to one characterized by multiple manifestations of partner violence and multidimensional etiology proposals. One evident consequence of this in the literature has been the renaming of the problem from 'violence against women' or 'domestic violence' to 'intimate partner violence' (IPV), in an attempt to address the problem beyond its initial socio-historical gender-based definition, and as recognition of the existence of violence in same-gender intimate relationships (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). A corollary of this tension between paradigms has been the transition from the socio-punitive approach to the rehabilitation approach in the field of intervention with perpetrators of IPV characterized by an increasing pressure for building evidence-based proposals to inform practice (Barner & Carney, 2011). This, in turn, has encouraged the idea of tailoring psychological-based treatment for certain types of offenders within specific types of violent relationships (Alexander et al., 2010; Amor, Echeburua, & Loinaz, 2009; Brown, 2012; Johnson, 2006b; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Kelly & Johnson, 2008;

Levesque, Ciavatta, Castle, Prochaska, & Prochaska, 2012; McGuire, 2004; Murphy & Baxter, 1997; Murphy & Meis, 2008; Saunders, 1996; Stark, 2009, 2010).

Some authors look askance at the advance of this psychology-based approach and their new 'treatment' proposals, given that dominant pre-existing psychological theories and clinical models do not take into account the contextual factors associated with abusive behaviour, miss the gender issues associated, and tend to overlook the complex process of change and change maintenance (Burrowes & Needs, 2009; Gondolf, 2011; Morran, 2011). Others suggest that proposals based on traditional psychotherapeutic models focus only on remediating personal deficits while displacing responsibility from perpetrators (Lehmann & Simmons, 2009; Van Wormer & Bednar, 2002; Ward & Maruna, 2007). According to these authors, traditional psychotherapeutic models promote an understanding of IPV as caused by pathological conditions requiring medical treatments, and ignore gender variables and neglect personal agency, ethnic diversity, social determinants and community participation.

Despite their growing presence in the literature, psychologically-based understandings of IPV have not yet penetrated the realm of intervention, which remains focused on gender-based interventions (Ehrensaft, 2008). Some authors have claimed that this is the result of the political activism of the gender approach (Babcock et al., 2007; Dixon, Archer, & Graham-Kevan, 2012; Dutton & Corvo, 2007a, 2007b; Dutton, Hamel, & Aaronson, 2010); while others have blamed the lack of appropriate funding for implementing new psychologically-based treatment proposals (Waltz, 2003). In contrast, Gondolf (2011; 2012) has pointed to the gap between practitioners and gender-neutral researchers, which he sees as generated by the efforts of the latter to reduce the complexity of the phenomenon to a limited and rigid set of methodological tools.

A number of authors have stressed the need to search for new perspectives and to look 'outside the box' in developing innovation in MBCPs. They argue for abandoning polar thinking about causes and cures in the effort to understand, from a practice perspective, the complexity of promoting and sustaining change in IPV (Lehmann & Simmons, 2009; Morran, 2011). Unsurprisingly, there is no consensus

in the literature on what the 'box' represents. For some authors 'the box' means a gender-based approach (Dutton, 2008, 2012a; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Dutton et al., 2010); while for others it represents the experimental evidence-based paradigm (Gondolf, 2012), and its rigid adherence to conceiving MBCPs as medical treatments where the cultural context and subjectivity are irrelevant for the change process (Morran, 2006).

Despite efforts in terms of policy change, legal reforms and program implementation, and even with the recently reported decline of IPV in the USA (Catalano, 2012), many women continue suffering abusive relationships as illustrated, for example, in reports of an 82% increase in the number of family violence incidents between 2000 and 2010 in the State of Victoria, Australia (Family Violence Sexual Assault Unit, 2012). Although current knowledge on how to promote and support change among perpetrators remains uncertain (Walker et al., 2012), intervention programs for perpetrators of IPV are still urgent and necessary. For example, the Australian National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children declared that, even when the knowledge of successful approaches to work with perpetrators of IPV has been weak, "it is essential that we persevere in building a strong body of knowledge about the most successful methods of intervention and remediation" (NCRVWC, 2009, p. 19).

2.3   Do gender-based intervention programs for perpetrators of IPV work?

A major point of contention in the literature is the issue of MBCPs effectiveness. Different interpretations have been raised around the empirical evidence of the limited effectiveness of these programs for reducing IPV recidivism. For some, the evidence reflects the lack of scientific support for the gender theory of IPV, and unveils its ideological nature, representing the need to redirect policy and program design towards scientific-based models (Dutton & Corvo, 2007b; Stuart, 2005). For others, conversely, the evidence reflects the methodological shortcomings of the dominant empirical models of program evaluation, suggesting the need for different approaches to program evaluation and revision of the concepts guiding these evaluative processes (Gondolf, 2004; Gondolf, 2011; Gondolf, 2012; Stark, 2009, 2010).

The literature on MBCPs effectiveness suggests that the gender-based model results in a small average reduction of IPV recidivism (Eckhardt et al., 2006). This suggestion is based on a limited US meta-analysis of a handful of empirical studies using experimental and quasi-experimental designs; where those few with experimental approaches are taken as more reliable for building conclusions, due to their use of randomized groups (Babcock et al., 2004; Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005; Eckhardt et al., 2006; Gondolf, 2004; Holtzworth-Munroe, 2001; Labriola, Rempel, & Davis, 2005). Interestingly, when viewed in detail, these studies are not homogeneous in their conclusions about program effectiveness, varying from pessimistic (Eckhardt et al., 2006; Feder & Wilson, 2005) through moderately optimistic (Babcock et al., 2004) to optimistic (Gondolf, 2004). However, all of them concur in emphasizing the urgent need for more research and more diverse research on the topic. Early reviews of recidivism rates in early 1990s reported no significant difference between men who were arrested and received treatment and men who were arrested but were not referred for treatment (Rosenfeld, 1992). However, later reviews were mixed: while Levesque and Gelles (1998) reported small effect sizes, Davis and Taylor's (1999) meta-analysis reported that "the effect sizes in batterer treatment studies are quite substantial" (p. 85).

Babcock, Green and Robie's (2004) meta-analysis is the most cited work in the literature to support the claim that there is little to no effect on recidivism of U.S. gender-based and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based programs for perpetrators. They selected 22 studies with comparison groups and post treatment follow-up, not relying on batterer's own reports, to evaluate efficacy through controlled quasi-experimental and experimental designs that tested the impact of the gender-based and CBT-based interventions. They found that treatment design had a small influence on effect size in the comparison of the gender-based and CBT models, with a small overall treatment effect in reducing recidivism over and above the effect of being arrested. However, the authors were cautious, stressing the limitations of their analysis due to the significant variability in the quality of the research studies, and noting that "even the experimental studies are hindered by problems with high attrition rates, inconsistencies in reporting recidivism for dropouts, and low reporting rates at follow-up" (Babcock et al., 2004, p. 1046). They also stated that "meta-analyses are only as robust as the individual studies taken into account" (p. 1047),

highlighting in their conclusions that studies showing large-size effects included motivational interviewing, and suggesting the inclusion of motivational interviewing in future research.

The second most cited meta-analysis in literature supporting low or no effectiveness of MBCPs was published by Feder and Wilson (2005). They selected six quasi-experimental and four experimental studies published between 1984 through 2003, examining the effect on recidivism of court-mandated batterer interventions, in comparison with what would be expected through routine legal interventions in the US. All selected studies used the Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979), or CTS-based measures, for victims' reports and official records. They found a mean effect size of zero in experimental designs, and small- or negative-effect sizes for treatment in quasi-experimental designs. Among the studies, three revealed positive effects, four negative, and none were statistically significant. The authors report their results as mixed, finding support for modest benefits of program intervention based on official reports, but no effect when based on victim's reports. They conclude that their meta-analysis did not offer strong support for the claim that court-mandated treatment reduces the likelihood of re-assault, and that additional experimental research was needed. They also draw attention to the differences with Babcock, Green and Robin's (2004) review, dismissing their findings of moderate effects by considering them the result of methodological weakness. However, they also question the generalizability of their own findings, because of the potential biases inherent in the use of official reports, the validity of estimates of victims' reports due to low reporting rates, and the validity of comparing treatment completers to rejectors, no-shows and dropouts, in quasi-experimental designs.

Later, a large empirical study by Labriola, Rempel and Davis (2005), using a randomized controlled trial, tested whether batterer educational programs in conjunction with judicial monitoring added any protective benefit beyond that provided by judicial monitoring alone in New York, concluding that "batterer programs did not produce a reduction in the rate of re-arrest and that neither assignment to a batterer program nor type of judicial monitoring affected the likelihood of new abusive incidents in the year after sentence" (p. 50). They also warn about the false sense of safety for women when perpetrators were referred to MBCPs,

and draw attention to the punitive intention of some women when preferring a MBCP to a jail sentence, because it required the men do more as consequence of their violence.

In a subsequent study in the same city, Cissner and Puffett (2006), using official re-arrest records, compared two programs for perpetrators of IPV to explore the impact of program models on predicting program completion and future violence. They found no difference in predicting re-arrest and completion rates between a 26-week long psycho-educational gender-based program, which charged a fee and strictly upheld attendance and timeliness requirements, and a 12-week cognitive behaviour-oriented program, which did not charge fees and held a laissez-faire attitude toward attendance. They also found that offenders with a prior criminal conviction, prior drug conviction, and who were black, were most likely to have a new arrest. Offenders who were older, had a greater stake in conformity, were married, and showed early compliance, were most likely to complete their program, and less likely to have a new arrest. The authors concluded that assessed-intervention programs were not successful in reducing re-arrest, and appeared to be more a tool to ensure perpetrators' accountability rather than a mechanism of rehabilitation.

Contrasting with studies dismissing the effectiveness of MBCPs, Gondolf and Snow Jones (2001) examined program effect in a multi-site evaluation of gender-based and CBT approaches. They found that completers reduced their likelihood to re-assault by 44% to 64% for these two approaches, respectively, but there was no difference between 3-month and up to 9-month programs. Similarly, Gondolf's four-year multi-site study reported that "the vast majority of men referred to batterer counseling appear to stop their assaultive behavior and reduce their abuse in general" (Gondolf, 2004, p. 623). They claim that the existence of program effects supported the notion of 'one size fits most', based on data indicating that 56% of men did not show evidence of personality disorder or major psychological problems; and the data also indicates that most of those who exhibited problems were suitable for CBT counseling (Gondolf, 2004; White & Gondolf, 2000). More recently, outside of the US, Brown and Hampton (2009) report that 59% of perpetrators ceased physical and other associated violence toward their female partners after participating in MBCP in Victoria, Australia. Similarly, Day and colleagues (2010), in a 12-month follow-up

study, reported positive changes for a court-mandated program in Queensland, Australia.

2.3.1   Conflicting evidence

A series of publications have brought into question claims about the alleged ineffectiveness of MBCPs, raising a number of methodological issues regarding the suitability of experimental designs in evaluating these, suggesting that this approach may say more about the procedure of referring and retaining men in programs rather than about program effectiveness (Gondolf, 2004; 1997, 2010). Coinciding with this criticisms, Eckhardt et al. (2006) point out serious issues with experimental approach in natural conditions regarding alternative explanations of intervention effects because this approach make difficult to attribute any effect to specific aspects of the intervention, requiring a number of plausible alternative explanations before any causal conclusion about intervention program efficacy can be drawn. Additionally, studies using victims' reports and official reports as an outcome measure appear to explore two fundamentally different issues (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005). Others have asserted that focusing on dichotomous outcomes such as the cessation of physical violence over other forms of violence is too narrow for the study of the effectiveness of MBCPs (Eckhardt et al., 2006; Scott, 2004), especially when, ultimately, women's general wellbeing or quality of life needs to be considered (Gondolf, 2004). Some have emphasized how the use of narrow definitions of success may prevent an awareness of three relevant aspects: the broader impact of programs on victims and the community (Gondolf, 2012); the additional variables that may contribute to the cessation of violence (Morran, 2006); and the complex trajectories of men's change and women's safety over time (Jones, Heckert, Gondolf, Zhang, & Ip, 2010).

Even when quasi-experimental studies appear to be more appropriate in examining the effectiveness of MBCPs in their natural state, Gondolf (2004) asserts the need to improve the analysis through the use of more sophisticated models and the necessity to look for alternative designs that take into account the dynamic context of the program which may substantially contribute to programs outcomes. Such contextual factors include not only the immediate context but also additional interventions, help

seeking, and circumstances. Gondolf (2004) points to the more complex large-scale sophisticated analyses developed in the public health field, and the social constructionist approach, as plausible alternative designs. However, he warns of problems with both alternatives: the first "is admittedly costly and sometimes impractical to achieve" (p. 612); and the second is hard to generalize from due to the subjectivity of the process.

Supporting the effectiveness of gender-based interventions, Gondolf (2004) stresses the systemic nature of the Duluth model, discouraging its definition as a psychological treatment in research. In their four-year follow-up multi-site study, Gondolf and Deemer (2004) identified the relevance of a coordinated community response with regard to program effectiveness, suggesting a shift in focus, from curriculum change and intervention diversification to program structure and system coordination. He thus underlines the importance of monitoring men during the program's early phase, the need for more intensive outpatient alcohol treatment, swift court responses to place men in programs after arrest, and better court responses to non-compliance (Gondolf, 2009a, 2009b). Others have reached similar conclusions, pointing out that domestic violence courts might still reduce recidivism through the deterrent effects of increased monitoring and consequences for non-compliance (Labriola, Rempel, O'Sullivan, & Frank, 2007).

Labriola et al. (2009) explored the evolution, rationale and operation of criminal domestic violence courts in the US, finding consensus on the goals of increasing victims' safety and offender accountability, and deterring further violence, but reporting divergence in practices related to the availability of victim services and safety measures in courts, the use of offender assessment and programs, and practices related to offender accountability.

The evidence on community responses is also inconclusive. Even specific projects such as the Judicial Oversight Demonstrations in the US showed mixed and weak results in IPV offenders' recidivism. These results suggest that it is time to correct the imbalance in investment between criminal justice responses and other responses to IPV (Peterson, 2008), given the fact that the majority of resources have been consumed by mandated law-enforcement policies and procedures (Barner & Carney,

2011). In their historical analysis of US policy, Barney and Carney (2011), observed a shift towards a criminal justice-led perpetrator-centric paradigm of mandatory arrest and prosecution, and mandated behavioural intervention and treatment, as central to the community response to IPV; reporting several inconsistencies related to race and cultural competence. They assert that criminal justice approaches are often 'color blind' and incapable of creating an environment that helps minority groups succeed in treatment, suggesting that a more in-depth analysis of the phenomena of IPV is necessary to develop more socio-culturally sensitive responses (Barner & Carney, 2011).

2.3.2 *The uncertain current status of MBCPs*

Interestingly, contemporary literature shows a tendency to resort to the meta-analysis discussed above to highlight the lack of empirical support for MBCP effectiveness as implying the scientific weakness of the gender-based model, while giving less attention or simply omitting the concerns expressed by the authors of the these meta-analyses about the limits of their studies. In some cases, the evidence supporting at least moderate effects of MBCPs is discredited through its labeling as an "alternative perspective", and dismissed from the analysis (Lawson, Kellam, Quinn, & Malnar, 2012, p. 191).

Gondolf (2004) suggests that meta-analytical evidence can be misleading, due to its tendency to neglect conceptual problems with design and implementation, and to decontextualize research by detaching it from period, circumstances, and issues in the field at the time of each evaluation. The last point is very important when considering the studies of Labriola and colleagues (2005) and Cissner and Puffett (2006), as these studies may reflect only a local reality in a particular moment. Another caution pointed out in the literature is that most of the evidence showing poor outcomes has not included further developments in the design of MBCPs (Brown & Hampson 2009).

In this regard, it is important to draw attention to how the recent literature often labels the Duluth model as an ideologically-based psycho-educational program (Babcock et al., 2007; Dutton, 2008), but at the same time recognizes that any distinction between

CBT and the Duluth model is increasingly unclear, as both routinely address aspects of behaviours and beliefs (Babcock et al., 2004; Lawson et al., 2012). Moreover, the portraying of MBCPs as similar to CBT contrasts with the initial Duluth model design, in which Freire's ideas on pedagogy, community action and empowerment were emphasized over individual rational thinking and frontal teaching (Miller, 2010). Perhaps the depicting of MBCPs as increasingly similar to CBT reflects the evolution of the former according to the US cultural context, where the latter holds a privileged power position (NIMH, 2016). This might have contributed to developing, understanding and evaluating MBCPs as individual treatment conceived as medicalized interventions, rather than as a socio-political form of social transformation (Gondolf, 2011; Gondolf, 2012).

In summary, the reviewed studies do not permit categorical assertions about the effectiveness of MBCPs. Rather, they appear to reflect mixed results highly dependent on the methods used and the contextual conditions in which they were conducted. As noted previously, the findings of existing research on MBCPs' effectiveness remain inconclusive and controversial (Arias et al., 2002; Mackay et al., 2015). However, there is consensus among researchers that the results are not unambiguously positive, so that further efforts are needed to improve both programs and evaluation strategies (Gondolf, 2012).

The uncertainty about MBCPs effectiveness has provided an opportunity to promote the use of psychological theories for intervention design (Whitaker & Niolon, 2009). The literature exhibits a plethora of psychotherapy-based offers to improve or replace existing programs, ranging from highly specific psychotherapeutic treatments (Waltz, 2003), through conjoint therapy (McCollum & Stith, 2007; Sexton et al., 2011; Stith, McCollum, Amanor-Boadu, & Smith, 2012), to the incorporation of psychotherapeutic evidence-based processes (Alexander & Morris, 2008; Alexander et al., 2010; Babcock, Canady, Senior, & Eckhardt, 2005; Eckhardt & Utschig, 2007; Levesque et al., 2012; Levesque et al., 2008; Murphy & Maiuro, 2008; Scott & Wolfe, 2003). Generally, the low effectiveness of existing MBCPs is used as the argument to introduce a supposedly scientific and non-ideologically-driven ways to understand IPV (Dutton, 2006a, 2008); followed by a particular proposal to cope with a set of variables claimed as central for IPV etiology but neglected by the gender-based

paradigm, such as gender-symmetric violence, the special psychological needs of specific types of perpetrators, and the universality of the stages of the change process.

2.4   Does gender matter?

For some authors, the low effectiveness of MBCPs is explained by the inability of the gender-based paradigm to cope with the heterogeneity of the IPV problem derived from its ideological adherence to gender theory in explaining violence etiology, and the insistence on using a 'one size fits all' program design prior to a full understanding of the etiology and dynamics of IPV (Capaldi & Kim, 2007; Capaldi & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2012; Dutton, 1994b, 2006a; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Dutton & Nicholls, 2006; Holtzworth-Munroe, 2001; Kim, Laurent, Capaldi, & Feingold, 2008; Shortt et al., 2012). According to this view, the empirical data on gender symmetry is considered a major anomaly for the gender-based paradigm, reflecting the biases in IPV estimations made by feminist researchers due to selective sampling (Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011) and the need for better frameworks for analysing the phenomenon of IPV (Winstok, 2011).

From a gender-based perspective, IPV is understood as part of men's continuous effort to create, maintain and sustain male dominance; whereas hurtful women's behaviour is understood as an attempt to deal with their inferior and vulnerable situation. Thus, IPV is not symmetrical, and has to be examined in the historical context of gender-based structural violence towards women (Paymar, 2000; Pence & Paymar, 1993). Conversely, a gender-symmetry approach indicates that men and women are equally likely to be intimate partner aggressors (Winstok, 2011), on the basis of empirical data from large-scale survey reports in the US (Babcock, Miller, & Siard, 2003; Brown, 2012; Capaldi & Kim, 2007; Dutton, 2012a; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996).

The National Family Violence Survey by Straus and Gelles (1990) is the most cited study holding that the majority of physical domestic violence incidents in the US are equally perpetrated by both genders, and that a roughly equal number of women and men reported initiating violence, coinciding with more recent small-scale studies

(Brown, 2012; Capaldi & Owen, 2001; Dutton, 2006c; Dutton & Nicholls, 2006; Eisikovits, Winstok, & Fishman, 2004; Williams & Frieze, 2005). In addition, Archer's (2000) meta-analytic review of 82 studies of sex differences in physical aggression concluded that women were more likely than men to use one or more acts of physical aggression, and to use such acts more frequently; however, men were more likely to inflict injuries, and 62% of those injured were women. More recently, Fiebert (2010) looked at 221 empirical studies and 65 reviews, with an aggregate sample size exceeding 371,600, declaring that the weight of evidence demonstrated that women were as physically aggressive or more aggressive than men in their relationships with their male partners. Women are also frequently the initiators of the aggression (Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007), and women's use of IPV increased the frequency and severity of men's IPV (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005).

For some authors, the notion that women do not initiate IPV is misleading to custody assessors, who must consider risks to children as part of the child's best interest (Dutton, 2006c). They argue for the need for gender-neutral developmental approaches to understand the risk factors of IPV perpetration in both partners, particularly personality disorders in the emerging adult period (Ehrensaft, Cohen, & Johnson, 2006), and on dyadic patterns of IPV (Godbout, Dutton, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2009; McCollum & Stith, 2007; Shortt et al., 2012; Stover, Meadows, & Kaufman, 2009). However, there is no consistency in the literature on this topic. A significant number of arguments against gender-symmetry have been raised. For instance, Reed and colleagues (2010) hold that gender-symmetry paradigm defies international consensus and empirical data that supports the claim of the gendered nature of IPV, mentioning how the WHO and other major health authorities frame this problem as unambiguously rooted in the social construction of being female due to the vast burden it places on women's health, lives, development, and economic security (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; WHO, 2005).

2.4.1 *Methodological flaws of gender neutral approach*

There are disparities in empirical reports of the symmetry of IPV. In a survey conducted in 1992, the US Department of Justice found that more than 1,000,000 women and 143,000 men were violently victimized by intimate partners in the US

(Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The National Violence Against Women Survey conducted in USA in 1996 revealed that men assaulted women three times more than women assaulted men, and that slightly more than 11% of women living with same-sex partners reported being raped, physically assaulted, or stalked by a female cohabitant, compared with 30.4% of women with a live-in male partner. The survey also showed that 15% of men living with male live-in partners reported having experienced violence, compared with 7.7% of men with female live-in partners (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In addition, the evidence of gender asymmetry of IPV in regard to sexual violence and violence by ex-spouses contrasts with gender-symmetry perspectives (Kimmel, 2002; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010); as also evidenced in the large numbers of women and girls who seek care in emergency rooms for injuries caused by their male partner (Reed, Raj, Miller, & Silverman, 2010).

An important group of critics have highlighted the weak methodological basis of the estimates on which the gender-symmetry approach rests (Johnson, 2010; Kimmel, 2002; Reed et al., 2010; Winstok, 2011). For example, the understanding of IPV has relied on a wide variety of qualitative and quantitative evidence where the large-scale surveys, often considered the most reliable, can be distinguished into two distinct types: crime victimization studies, which rely on large-scale aggregate data on crime victimization; and family conflict studies, measuring the prevalence of aggression between couples. These two sources of data find very different rates of IPV: crime studies find that IPV is rare, serious, escalates over time, and is primarily perpetrated by men, because they miss those events that are neither perceived nor reported as crimes; while family violence studies tend to find higher rates of IPV, stable levels of severity, low rates of injury, and that it is perpetrated equally by women and men, because they exclude crimes such as sexual abuse, embedding IPV within a context of family conflict (Kimmel, 2002).

According to the literature, research that relies solely upon the CTS tells just one part of the story, contributing to massive under-reporting and neglecting of the contexts, meanings, and motives of abuse. Therefore, it is necessary to develop measures that better capture contextual factors and underlying themes present in conflicts, and the relation between violence and power (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). For Kimmel (2002), "the evidence of gender

symmetry is largely a myth" built from the captious misinterpretation of large scale surveys relying on the CTS (p. 1354). In his view, CTS underestimates violence through being unable to capture an ongoing systematic pattern of abuse and violence over many years, as it only enquires into frequency in the previous year, focusing only on acts, without taking into account the circumstances under which abuse occurs. In addition, it doesn't indicate who initiates the violence, the relative size and strength of the people involved, and the nature of the relationship that shapes the experience of violence. Furthermore, CTS relies on retrospection, asking people to accurately remember what happened during the past year, biasing the estimations, and it doesn't measure the consequences of physical assault (such as physical or emotional injury) or the causes of the assault (such as the desire to dominate). Kimmel highlights that interpretation of the data explicitly underscores the ways in which gender identities and gender ideologies are embodied and enacted by women and men, leading to different experiences of violence, and different reports of their use of violence and victimization in women and men (Kimmel, 2002).

Interestingly, Gelles and Straus (1999) have criticized the use of their own report (p. 424):

> (…) [P]erhaps the most controversial finding from our 1975 National Family Violence Survey was the report that a substantial number of women hit and beat their husbands. (…) Unfortunately the data on wife-to-husband violence has been misreported, misinterpreted, and misunderstood. Research uniformly shows that about as many women hit men as men hit women. However, those who report that husband abuse is as common as wife abuse overlook two important facts. First, the greater average size and strength of men and their greater aggressiveness means that a man's punch will probably produce more pain, injury and harm than a punch by a woman, and second, nearly three quarters of the violence committed by women is done in self-defense.

The sampling methods appear as another frailty of gender symmetry studies. For instance, the widely cited meta-analysis by Archer (2000), supporting gender symmetry, relies on college students' data, with 33 studies targeting cohabiting couples and 47 non-cohabiting respondents. For some authors, this report is skewed

in favor of young people and community samples of which the majority is not cohabiting, making the sample not equivalent to the data of cohabiting couples and respondents from shelters (Brown, 2012; Johnson, 2011). Others have suggested that all major sampling methods are biased and these bias are the source of the gender symmetry debate, because family violence estimations rely primarily on general community samples studies where heterosexual IPV appears roughly symmetric in terms of perpetration, whereas feminist estimations rely on shelter, hospitals, and law enforcement, showing that IPV is largely male perpetrated (Johnson, 2011; Kimmel, 2002; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010).

Reed et al. (2010) assert that the gender-symmetry framework appears to be US-derived and increasingly prevalent as a result of the influence of research on dating violence, which has been considered different from domestic violence. In their review, they found that 95% of the studies on dating violence published in 2008 used a gender-symmetry framework, while 20% of studies used such a framework when examining adult IPV. Of the gender-symmetry studies, 93% were US-based studies.

According to Johnson (2011), the data from different samples reflects the existence of different types of IPV that must be taken into account when theorizing IPV and designing intervention programs. Similarly, Straus (1999) suggests the existence of different types of IPV when recommending using a broad definition of violence for research; emphasizing that injury may be most useful for informing intervention programs for offenders or victims; and that research focusing on the act of assault may be most useful in informing programs of primary prevention.

Despite the apparently irreconcilable differences regarding gender symmetry/asymmetry, two non-controversial issues have been identified in the literature: the notion that injuries resulting from violence are asymmetrical in terms of gender (Archer, 2000; Ehrensaft, 2008; Kimmel, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000); and the notion that IPV is heterogeneous, implying that different types of IPV relationships may be identified in the light of coercive control and the severity of the violence (Brown, 2012; Capaldi & Kim, 2007; Capaldi & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2012; Johnson, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2010, 2011; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010; Stark, 2009, 2010).

2.4.2   *Intimate partner violence as a relationship*

According to Stark (2010), the whole system of IPV prosecution, and a large part of IPV research, is narrowly focused on incident definition of abuse, disregarding the pattern of the abusive relationship. Gender symmetry/asymmetry cannot be resolved when violent acts are abstracted from their historical and experiential context and evaluated merely on their physical valence because, from this perspective, parity in violence appears to reflect relative symmetry in abuse (Stark, 2010). Moreover, research in IPV focused only on the nature of the offence and on perpetrators' individual characteristics, without taking into account the relational history of abuse, miss the opportunity to develop more comprehensive and effective ways to predict the risk of re-abuse (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005; Foa, Cascardi, Zoellner, & Feeny, 2000; Kuijpers, van der Knaap, & Lodewijks, 2011; Kuijpers, van der Knaap, & Winkel, 2012; Stark, 2009). For some authors, the mandate to not to blame the victim, supported by the gender asymmetry perspective, has not only influenced the theoretical understanding of IPV and the prosecution processes, but it has also limited the exploration of victim participation and what they can do as a way to empower themselves (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005).

For a number of researchers, a broader scope for IPV implies of the inclusion of individual victim-related variables in order to understand the risk of re-abuse in an evidence-based manner. Such researchers hold that little is known about how victim-related factors affect risk for re-victimization, such as victims' dynamic individual characteristics (e.g. prior partner violence; psychological difficulties; resilience), and victims' resource levels in terms of quality of life, socioeconomic status, subjective experience of the system, and ability to appraise their own risk (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005; Foa et al., 2000; Kuijpers et al., 2011; Kuijpers et al., 2012). Others, however, have given more relevance to dyadic dynamics for comprehending different types of IPV, in order to understand re-abuse and develop tailored intervention programs (Bonham & Vetere, 2012; Capaldi & Kim, 2007; Johnson, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Kim et al., 2008; Marshall & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2010; McCollum & Stith, 2007; Sexton et al., 2011; Shortt et al., 2012; Stark, 2010; Stith et al., 2012; Stover et al., 2009; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan, & Snow, 2008).

The controversies around considerations of symmetry/asymmetry in IPV have helped focus greater attention on addressing and differentiating relationship dynamics in IPV. The concept of 'coercive control' has aroused particular interest in this regard as, in the light of this concept, bidirectional violence in couples appears more complex than the data suggest, and more multifaceted than as has been previously explained (Johnson, 2006b, 2006c, 2010, 2011; Stark, 2009, 2010). Johnson and Ferraro (2000) identified different dyadic patterns when linking coercive controlling behaviours to both partners who reported bidirectional violence, finding that control accounted for the most variance in predicting violent behaviour, and noticing the existence of different types of violence in these dyads. They labeled 'common couple violence' for the most frequently observed type of violence, consisting of couples where the conflict occasionally got out of control leading to minor forms of violence. On the other hand, Johnson (1995) previously identified another type of pattern that he labeled 'patriarchal terrorism', where the violence is perpetrated exclusively and repeatedly by one partner, usually male, with the aim to control their partner's behaviour, leading to severe forms of violence and injuries (Johnson, 1995). Later, both types of violence were relabeled as 'situational couple violence' and 'coercive controlling violence', respectively (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Similarly, Graham-Kevan and Archer (2003) concluded that situational couple violence and coercive controlling violence represent two very separate types of violence, in relationships where there are differences in physical aggression, controlling behaviours, injuries, and fear of injury.

More recently, a new typology was proposed, consisting of three types of IPV: 'intimate terrorism', characterized as the smallest proportion of the violence in couples but the predominant form of violence among cases that come to shelters, law enforcement and other agencies, involving combinations of physical and/or sexual violence with a variety of non-violent tactics of control, such as economic abuse, emotional abuse, the use of children, threats and intimidation, invocation of male privilege, constant monitoring, and blaming the victim; 'violent resistance', characterized as the responses of victims of intimate terrorism, understood as instinctive reactions, even leading to homicide; and 'situational couple violence', characterized as occurring when a couple's conflict becomes arguments that turn into aggression that becomes violent, being roughly gender-symmetrical, not part of the

general pattern of coercive control, and representing the most common form of IPV (Johnson, 2011).

The acknowledgement of at least two patterns of IPV has changed the old monolithic view of domestic violence, encouraging the conducting of further research in the quest for a better understanding of the development of these patterns, for more accurate ways of identifying these patterns (Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007).

2.5   Attempts to improve program intervention effectiveness

Regardless of the acknowledgement of at least two different patterns of IPV, there is no agreement on how to intervene. For instance, some have argued for the need to redirect policy based on the notion that the most common form of IPV is situational couple violence, claiming that the gender-based paradigm has contributed privilege responses to unidirectional violence, while relaxing policy responses for situational couple violence and hindering wider coverage of situational couple violence (Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011). On the other hand, others have suggested that, given the existence of severe unidirectional gender-based IPV, gender-sensitive responses must be strengthened by providing necessary funding for specialized intervention, while less severe manifestations of IPV should be focus of primary prevention and/or community-based interventions for couples (Brown, James, & Taylor, 2010; Capaldi & Kim, 2007; Stark, 2010; Stover et al., 2009).

Langhinrichsen-Rohling (2010) argues that specific services for each type of violence are needed, suggesting that existing intervention programs would be improved through the assessment of violence exercised by both members of the dyad to determine if the violence is unidirectional or bidirectional. By doing this, it would be possible to address the interactions between individual problems, relationship dysfunctions, and cultural beliefs about gender. Contrastingly, Dixon and Graham-Kevan (2011) suggest that, given the prevalence of bidirectional violence, gender-neutral systemic couple therapy is needed as a more effective strategy. Further evidence indicates that perpetrators who were categorized as perpetrating situational couple violence were most likely to complete their program, while those categorized as coercive controlling were less likely to complete their programs (Eckhardt,

Holtzworth-Munroe, Norlander, Sibley, & Cahill, 2008). According to some, this evidence supports the relevance of distinguishing among types of IPV relationships with respect to their different responses to existing treatment programs (Brown, 2012).

But in spite of the convergences in differentiating patterns of IPV outlined above, the significance of the gender variable in these remains as a source of divergence. For some feminist authors, different types of IPV patterns imply a need to confront the limits of the gender approach to IPV in order to expand it (Mills, 2008) by including other factors besides patriarchy that might be related to IPV perpetration; suggesting that such factors should preferably be identified through qualitative methods (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007; Johnson, 2010, 2011). For a number of family violence researchers, the existence of different IPV patterns has proven the feminist paradigm's failure in explaining and effectively addressing IPV, and has revealed the need for psychopathological understandings of IPV (Babcock et al., 2003; Dutton, 1994a, 1994b, 2006a, 2006c, 2012a; Dutton & Corvo, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Dutton et al., 2010; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005, 2006) as well as intervention (Aymer, 2008; Brown, 2012; Brown et al., 2010; Eckhardt, Samper, Suhr, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2012; Ehrensaft et al., 2006; Lawson, 2010; Sexton et al., 2011; Welland & Ribner, 2010). For these researchers, in addition to differentiate subtypes of IPV patterns it is also essential to distinguish between different subtypes of perpetrators in order to match them with appropriate evidence-based treatment.

2.5.1 Typologies of IPV perpetrators

Fueled by the call for evidence-based interventions in IPV and shaped by a psychological approach, the differentiation of types of IPV perpetrators has received considerable attention in IPV research with the assumption that, through a reliable categorization, subjects could be matched with the appropriate treatment and this, in turn, will improve treatment effectiveness (Ehrensaft, 2008). Though the differentiation of types of perpetrators from a psychopathological approach has been rejected by feminist scholars, arguing that this approach fails to hold perpetrators accountable for their violent behaviours and hinders efforts to change social structures that support abuse against women (Paymar, 2000; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Schechter & Ganley, 1995), the literature shows a large number of proposals for

psychopathology-based perpetrators' typologies (Echeburúa & Amor, 2010; Echeburúa, Fernández-Montalvo, & Amor, 2003; Fernández-Montalvo, Echeburúa, & Amor, 2005; Gondolf, 1988; Holtzworth-Munroe, 2000; Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2003; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Huss, & Ramsey, 2000). In the last fifteen years, several psychology-based typologies of IPV perpetrators have been proposed, drawing on cluster analysis of empirical data, to integrate different psychological and demographic variables with different patterns of violence (Chiffriller & Hennessy, 2010; Gondolf, 1988; Gottman et al., 1995; Greene, Coles, & Johnson, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Johnson et al., 2006a; Saunders, 1992).

In their report on a study comparing perpetrators with non-abusive males, Hamberger and Hatings (1986) differentiated three types of perpetrators: narcissistic-antisocial, borderline, and passive-dependant-compulsive. They asserted that IPV perpetrators showed more personality disorders and dysphoria than non-abusive males (Hamberger & Hastings, 1986). Edward Gondolf (1988), using cluster analysis and descriptive variables, proposed a typology differentiating three types of perpetrators: sociopathic, antisocial, and typical batterers. Similarly, Saunders (1992) differentiated family-only aggressors, generally-violent aggressors, and emotionally-volatile aggressors. He found the family-only type as the most satisfied with the marital relationship and least likely to be violent outside the home, to experience marital conflict, or to be psychologically abusive. The generally-violent type was the most likely to have been abused as a child; while the emotionally-volatile type was younger and better educated than other perpetrators. Green and colleagues (1994), examining the relationship between psychopathology and anger expression, proposed another typology, differentiating a four-cluster typology composed of: the histrionic, depressed, normal, and disturbed types; the last considered as the most pathological. Gottman (1995) incorporated biological, personality and behavioural traits to differentiate two types of perpetrators: Type I, also called 'Pitbull', who exhibited low to moderate levels of physical violence within relationships, increased heart rate using violence, and higher levels of emotionally dependent personality traits; and type II, also named 'Cobras', who exhibited decreased heart rate when using violence and higher levels of extreme violence outside their relationships.

Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's (1994) model stands out as the most influential typology of perpetrators in the IPV literature. Proposed as an evidence-based theoretical approach, it has proved to be the most robust and empirically supported (Holtzworth-Munroe, 2000; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Lohr, Bonge, Witte, Hamberger, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005; Thijssen & de Ruiter, 2011; Waltz, Babcock, Jacobson, & Gottman, 2000). Based on three descriptive dimensions, comprising severity of marital violence, generality of the violence (towards the wife or others), and psychopathology/personality disorders, they identified three types of IPV perpetrators. The 'family-only' perpetrator type showed low severity of violence, low generality of violence, low criminal involvement, low to moderate depression and alcohol abuse, and moderate levels of anger. The 'dysphoric/borderline' type was predicted to have moderate to high levels of marital violence, violence outside of the family and criminal involvement; and to exhibit borderline or schizoidal personality disorder, moderate levels of alcohol abuse, and high levels of anger and depression. The 'generally violent/antisocial' type was predicted to have moderate to high levels of violence, high levels of violence outside the family, antisocial personality characteristics, and criminal involvement; with high levels of alcohol abuse, moderate anger levels, and low levels of depression.

This model also proposed a developmental stance, taking into account distal correlates occurring during early childhood such as violence in the family of origin and association with deviant peers, and proximal correlates occurring during adulthood such as attachment disorder and negative attitudes toward women. Those correlates represent potential risk factors for each type of perpetrator, indicating that family-only perpetrators have the lowest level of risk factors, perpetrating low severity and infrequent violence during an escalating marital conflict. In contrast, dysphoric/borderline offenders are proposed to exhibit more distal and proximal problematic correlates, reporting moderate levels of domestic violence and moderate to high levels of childhood abuse. These factors are theoretically associated with a preoccupied or fearful attachment style and borderline personality organization producing a high risk of using violence toward their partner when they perceive a threat of abandonment. Finally, generally violent/antisocial perpetrators are proposed to show moderate to high levels of domestic violence and abuse in childhood, high levels of association with deviant peers, negative attitudes toward women, and

positive attitudes toward violence. These factors are associated with a dismissive attachment style. The model suggests that violence towards partners in this latter type of perpetrator is an expression of their antisocial personality.

Donald Dutton (2007 ; 1994a; 1994; 1996; 1993; 2012b) has largely explored the relation between personality disorder, attachment disorders, and IPV perpetration, challenging commonly-held beliefs that experiences with or exposure to IPV, and gender role socialization, are the primary factors in IPV etiology. For Dutton, patriarchy by itself does not explain abuse, but must interact with psychological variables to account for the great variation in power-violence data (Dutton, 1994b). In early research, he found significant correlations between borderline personality and wife abuse (Dutton & Starzomski, 1993). In a subsequent comparative study, he confirmed the relevance of borderline personality organization as discriminant function analysis (Dutton, 1994a). He concluded that male and female IPV perpetrators are persons affected by attachment disorders, proneness to shame, and a tendency to turn anger into externalizing behaviours against their significant others (Babcock et al., 2004; Dutton, 1994a, 1995, 2007; Dutton & Corvo, 2007b; Dutton, Denny-Keys, & Sells, 2011; Dutton et al., 1996).

Dutton and Golant (1995) differentiate three types of batterer: the 'borderline batterer' type, characterized by cyclical phases of violence with high levels of jealousy, use of violence predominantly or exclusively in intimate relationships, and exhibiting high levels of depression, dysphoria, anxiety-based rage, and ambivalence to partners related to a fearful-avoidant attachment style; the 'psychopathic batterer' type, characterized by using violence inside and outside the home, having a history of antisocial or criminal behaviour, associations with a criminal marginal subculture, history of abuse as a child, low empathy, and a dismissive-avoidant attachment style; and the 'over-controlled batterer' type, characterized by having flat affect or being a constantly cheerful individual, being conflict avoidant, having high emotional dependency and having high social desirability, alcohol abuse, and an anxious-preoccupied attachment style.

From Dutton's perspective, early developmental attachment experiences matter more than social messages about gender relationships in explaining violence propensity and

intergenerational transmission (Corvo, Dutton, & Chen, 2008; Dutton, 2000; Dutton, 2006b; Dutton, 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Dutton et al., 2011; Dutton & Haring, 1999; Dutton et al., 1996; Dutton & Starzomski, 1993; Dutton & White, 2012b). From his perspective gender-based intervention is inadequate, as it tends to rely on confrontational techniques that may exacerbate shame, accentuate isolation, and leave abusive tendencies untouched (Dutton, 2007 ; Dutton & Corvo, 2006, 2007b).

Cavanaugh and Gelles (2005) propose a new typology as a synthesis of previous models, identifying three types of perpetrators: the 'low risk offender', characterized by low severity of violence, low frequency of violence, and presenting little to no psychopathology and no criminal history; the 'moderate risk offender', characterized by moderate level and frequency of violence, as well as moderate level of psychopathology; and the 'high-risk offender', characterized by higher levels of severity and frequency of violence, high levels of psychopathology, and a criminal history. Based on the review of previous empirical studies addressing perpetrator typologies, they asserted that offenders do not escalate over time from low to high levels of risk, and that it is unlikely that an offender will move from one type to another.

Johnson and colleagues (2006a) studied the distribution of subtypes of IPV perpetrators using psychometric measures and cluster analysis in a sample of 230 men who had either been court ordered to attend a domestic violence probation program, or who were assessed for their suitability to attend the program. They identified four subtypes of offenders: low pathology, borderline, narcissistic, and antisocial; pointing out that the identified subtypes were broadly comparable with the family-only, dysphoric/borderline, and generally violent/antisocial types proposed by Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994).

More recently, Chiffriller and Hennessy (2010) report an empirically-based typology, based on a cluster analysis of the differences in attachment style, violent and nonviolent conflict resolution tactics, psychopathology, jealousy, and alcoholism, in a sample of 201 men enrolled in MBCPs. Five discernable clusters emerged, namely, pathological, sexually violent, generally violent, psychologically violent, and family-only. The authors conclude that pathological, generally violent and family-only

subtypes share behavioural and personality characteristics with corresponding subtypes in previously revised models, but also differed from their counterparts on a number of dimensions, including degree of alcoholism, attachment style, and form and severity of violence. In addition, they identified sexually-violent and psychologically-violent perpetrators types not previously described in the literature: the 'sexually violent type', characterized by their use of severe sexual coercion, including the use of threats or force to coerce their partners into oral, anal, or vaginal sex, who were also found to be the most physically abusive and most likely to cause severe injuries when in conflict with their partners; and the 'psychologically violent' type of perpetrator, characterized by their use of severe psychological aggression tactics such as destroying their partner's belongings and threatening to throw things at their partners, and who were found to be very physically abusive as well, second only to the sexually-violent batterer type. Based on these findings, they pointed out that, given their report of two additional subtypes, "the heterogeneous nature of the batterers is more extensive than the majority of models suggest" (Chiffriller & Hennessy, 2010, p. 20).

In spite of such diverse classifications, a number of common elements have been identified among the proposed typologies, including the severity of the violence, the extension of the use of violence, and the relevance of personality and psychopathological characteristics (Amor et al., 2009; Capaldi & Kim, 2007). However, the growing number of different subtypes of perpetrators and the accepted heterogeneity of perpetrators casts doubts on the utility of these typologies for tailoring interventions and predicting outcomes (Boxall, Rosevear, & Payne, 2015).

2.5.2   *Typologies in practice*

While in the literature there is consensus about the heterogeneity of IPV perpetrators and about the existence of at least two clearly distinguishable sub-groups - those who are violent outside of the family and those who are not (Dutton & Golant, 1995; Gondolf, 1988; Gottman et al., 1995) - there are discrepancies in the demographic, behavioural and personality characteristics associated with each subtype of perpetrator (Waltz et al., 2000). There are also a number of inconsistencies between the conceptual models just discussed and empirical data that have been identified

(Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005). There have been discrepant estimates of the prevalence of personality pathology among IPV perpetrators. While Flournoy and Wilson (1991) found 63% of personality pathology in a group of 56 perpetrators measured with the Minessota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Langhinrichsen-Rohling and colleagues (2000) found only 49% of perpetrators had personality pathology in their community sample, using the same measurement. Other studies, using the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI), have reported 88% of perpetrators showed personality pathology in their sample (Hastings & Hamberger, 1988), and 79% of perpetrators in a sample of domestic violence intervention program (Dutton et al., 1994). Contrastingly, Gondolf (1999b) report that personality pathology among IPV perpetrators was lower than in a psychiatric sample classified by clinical diagnosis, whereas White and Gondolf (2000), using MCMI, found severe personality pathology only in 15% of their sample. More recently, Gibbons and colleagues (2001) report 37% of severe personality pathology in a sample of 177 perpetrators assessed with MCMI.

The empirical evidence has not resolved the question of the prevalence of personality pathology among IPV perpetrators and its relationship with typologies. Mixed evidence may reflect differences in sample sources and sample sizes. Community samples showed lower personality pathologies than legal systems samples; and legal systems samples varied in personality pathology estimation according to their sample size, measurement procedures, and instruments (Dutton, 2003; Gondolf, 1999b; Gondolf & White, 2001).

Despite identifying certain subtypes of perpetrators of IPV, the usefulness of these typologies for improving MBCPs effectiveness has been called into question. This is because they rely on complex cluster analysis, which is difficult to operationalize and turn into quick and easy forms of measurement in the field of intervention (Boxall et al., 2015). Additional reasons for questioning the usefulness of these typologies of perpetrators is their low predictive value for intervention success (Edleson, 2012) and their low predictive value for risk of re-abuse (Heckert & Gondolf, 2004). Furthermore, a contradiction, between the principles of subtype stability in cluster analysis over time, and the empirical evidence showing the opposite, has been observed (Gondolf, 2000; Gondolf & Snow Jones, 2001; Jones et al., 2010).

2.5.3 *Predictors for re-abuse and program completion*

The interest in predicting violent behaviour has also led to the exploration of framing measures of risk factors for IPV. These actuarial measures are considered more reliable than perpetrator self-reports, and crucial in evaluating the potential danger for the victim, allowing scarce resources to be directed towards intervening with the most dangerous perpetrators by giving them services first, and by intensifying treatment and monitoring. (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005). Predictors of re-abuse have been primarily shaped by the Risk-Need-Responsibility model of offender assessment (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), which attempts to predict re-abuse from the individual level and in a perpetrator-centred way, given the psychological base of the model (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005). Mirroring offending careers, age appears as a factor consistently found to negatively relate to recidivism in the IPV research literature (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008; Hamberger & Hastings, 1990; Walton-Moss, Manganello, Frye, & Campbell, 2005); while other socio-demographic factors have been routinely grouped in the literature under the criminological concept of 'stake in conformity' (Toby, 1957).

'Stake in conformity' is used to refer to the extent to which an actor faces a risk of losing something if caught; and it was later introduced in the field of IPV, as a result of the Spouse Assault Replication Project (1984), to give an account of the extent to which a subject adheres to the norms of conventional society. This concept emphasizes social bonding and labeling theory (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005; DeLeon-Granados, Wells, & Long, 2005; Sherman et al., 1992), including variables such as marital status, residential stability, employment, education, economic status, and history of arrest (Babcock et al., 2004; DeLeon-Granados et al., 2005; Feder & Dugan, 2002; Thistlethwaite, Wooldredge, & Gibbs, 1998; Wooldredge & Thistlethwaite, 2002).

'Stake in conformity' has proved to be useful in predicting which perpetrators complete treatment programs and whether they re-abuse (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005; Feder & Forde, 2000; Thistlethwaite et al., 1998). Sherman and colleagues (1992) conducted a series of experimental studies within the Spouse Assault Replication Program (SARP) to empirically test if arrests deterred subsequent violence better than

did less formal alternatives. Those perpetrators with high stakes in conformity (i.e. employed, high school graduates, white, married, who have cohabitated for over two years) experienced a deterrent effect of arrest; while those with low stakes in conformity (unemployed, dropouts, etc.) did not show the same effect. Although it has been also observed that arrest makes some men more frequently violent against their partners, contradicting their previous findings supporting pro-arrest policies in US (DeLeon-Granados et al., 2005). Maxwell and colleagues (2001) revisited the SARP data, reporting a modest-sized reduction in recidivism associated with arrest when compared with the effect of other variables such as perpetrator's age and prior criminal record; and stating that employment was the only stake in conformity variable that interacted with arrest.

Feder and Forde (2000), using an experimental design, contrasted a 12-month follow-up outcome of probation with six months of MBCP attendance on the one hand, and probation only on the other hand. Based on perpetrators' self-reports, victim reports, and official reports, they found no differences on measures such as beliefs about wife-beating and attitudes toward treating IPV as a crime. However, men most likely to re-offend had low stake in conformity, measured by education, marital status, home ownership, employment, income, and length of residency. Specifically, younger men lacking residential stability were significantly more likely to self-report acts of severe physical IPV. Wooldredge and Thistlethwaite (2002) looked at the interactions between court dispositions and offender's stake in conformity of 3110 men, finding a significant lower likelihood of re-arrest for higher stake in conformity offenders undergoing a counseling program.

Cattaneo and Goodman (2005) reviewed 64 research reports on empirically validated risk factors, finding that, despite some differences in research design, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that, at the individual level, the perpetrator's ethnicity, the victim's age, the perpetrator's history of abuse in family of origin, and their beliefs about abuse are not supported as predictors of re-abuse, and that stake in conformity variables seem to be the only important predictors of re-abuse.

It has also been reported that stake in conformity is useful in predicting program completion. Cissner and Puffet (2006) found that perpetrators who were employed

were more likely to complete their program mandate than unemployed defendants, and that early compliance was the single strongest predictor of program completion, while marital status did not predict program completion. Similarly, Catlett and colleagues (2010) report that men who were on a low income, and no longer intimately involved with the abused women, were most likely to drop out of the program. Other researchers have suggested that immigrant status in US is also related to a higher stake in conformity: because of the fear of deportation, men were more likely to complete their program mandate (Rothman, Gupta, Pavlos, Dang, & Coutinho, 2007).

Others have explored the relationship between stake in conformity and the experience of survivors of IPV. Demaris and Kauniken (2008) report that survivors had higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) when police arrested partners of average or below-average stake in conformity. In contrast, survivors of partners characterized by higher than average stake in conformity did not show elevated PTSD due to their partners having been arrested (DeMaris & Kaukinen, 2008).

Despite the empirical support of stake in conformity as a significant variable to consider in IPV deterrent and program completion research, there is no consensus in the literature on how to operationalize this variable, and to what extent these risk factors are reflective of the individual or their environment. While some have placed a great emphasis on defining stake in conformity by identifying perpetrator characteristics (Feder & Forde, 2000; Maxwell et al., 2001; Wooldredge & Thistlethwaite, 2002), others have stressed how these variables are related to the context where the perpetrator lives, that may reflect some aspect of social disorganization and the corresponding lack of community influence rather than individual commitment to social norms (DeLeon-Granados et al., 2005). According to Kingsnorth (2006), the deterrent effect of a stake in conformity remains unresolved, as the evidence is too conflicting to allow confident conclusions regarding the impact of a number of important variables on IPV re-victimization.

Measurements of risk involve the reduction of complex situations, behaviours, and life histories, to a set of abstract factors. According to Salter (2012), measurements of risk provide a useful but partial perspective on the complex lives and relationships of

perpetrators and survivors of IPV, where the actuarial language of 'risk' and 'recidivism' can mask the range of personal and social issues that must be researched if lasting change is to be achieved.

2.6   The change process

As part of the efforts to clarify what works and for whom in the field of interventions for perpetrators of IPV, a growing number of researchers have suggested that it is necessary to look towards the perpetrators' change process in order to find ways to improve program effectiveness (Alexander et al., 2010; Dobash & Dobash, 2000; Walker et al., 2012). Again, the controversies between gender-based and gender-neutral researchers are reflected in the literature. The creation and dissemination of mandatory or voluntary Duluth-based standards that prescribe a manualized course stipulating the content and length of the intervention program has been a major subject of criticism due to the alleged lack of scientific support for the model and its dominant presence in public policy that is seen as representing a hindrance in developing more effective models (Feder & Wilson, 2005; Whitaker & Niolon, 2009). For some, the Duluth model has created a 'dummy proof' methodology, focused on content rather than on the relationship between facilitator and the subject or the group. This relational issue, is contended, might contribute to improve program effectiveness, suggesting the need to look at other factors related to change process, such as, for example, those identified by Common Factors Theory in psychotherapy (CFT) (Eckhardt et al., 2012; Lehmann & Simmons, 2009; Sheehan et al., 2012).

2.6.1   Common factors in psychotherapy

According to CFT, different psychotherapy models have common elements that account for outcomes more than components that are unique to each model. This view is in opposition to the traditional medical model of psychotherapy, centred on specific and critical ingredients in treatment as the cure for specific problems. Empirical researcher has shown that 40% of the change variance is related to the client's extra therapeutic factors (strengths, skills, motivation, social support, social context, and so on); 30% to therapeutic alliance (referring the quality of the client's participation in the therapeutic process); 15% to the therapist attitude in providing a sense of hope to the client; and only 15% to the specific therapeutic model used (Lambert & Ogles,

2004; Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 2004 ; Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 1997). For some, the evidence of the centrality of the therapeutic alliance contrasts with the use of confrontation and shame in the Duluth model, and could thus explain the low effectiveness and high dropout from programs (Eckhardt et al., 2006; Lawson et al., 2012). Others, however, have suggested that the scarce attention paid to the facilitator-user relationship reflects problems of training and program implementation rather than problems of the model itself (Morran, 2006; Schrock & Padavic, 2007) and that the Duluth model does not encourage confrontation and shame (Miller, 2010).

However, in spite of their potential usefulness to understand change in IPV, the elements associated to the inner life and the environment of the perpetrators, conceptualized in CFT as extra therapeutic factors and considered as the most relevant factors in accounting for change (Sprenkle & Blow, 2004), have been routinely overlooked by most research on MBCPs. Rather than examining these elements in an attempt to develop a specific model of change in IPV, the literature shows a preference for the examination of perpetrators' change process from existing generic models generated outside of the field of IPV, as discussed below.

2.6.2   *The Transtheoretical Model of Change*

Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM), and its component, Motivational Interviewing (MI), have been suggested as the best way to match intervention choices with the IPV perpetrator's place in the change process, and to improve the working alliance, respectively; in order to enhance intervention effectiveness for IPV perpetrators (Murphy & Baxter, 1997). Given the promising empirical results of TTM in understanding and intervening in a wide range of health problems, including alcoholism, drug abuse, and health prevention (Brown-Peterside, Redding, Ren, & Koblin, 2000; Johnson et al., 2006b; Levesque, Cummins, Prochaska, & Prochaska, 2006; Prochaska et al., 2005; Velicer et al., 2006), the investigation of the applicability of the model to clarify the change process and improve the outcomes of IPV intervention has flourished in recent years (Alexander & Morris, 2008; Alexander et al., 2010; Burrowes & Needs, 2009; Eckhardt et al., 2008; Eckhardt, Babcock, & Homack, 2004; Eckhardt & Utschig, 2007; Hellman, Johnson, & Dobson,

2010; Levesque et al., 2008; Meis, Murphy, & Winters, 2010; Murphy & Baxter, 1997; Murphy & Maiuro, 2008; Scott & Wolfe, 2003).

The TTM involves the idea of progression between discrete and identifiable stages towards behavioural change. In the 'precontemplation stage', the person is not actively thinking about changing the behaviour pattern within any specific time frame. The 'contemplation' stage begins when the person thinks more specifically about the need for change and weighs the pros and cons of changing. The 'preparation stage' consists in developing a plan and making preparations for change. The 'action stage' is when the person accomplishes the behaviour change. In the 'maintenance stage' the person continues practicing new behaviour while avoiding a return to the old pattern of behaviour (Murphy & Baxter, 1997; Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska, 2011; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984). The model implies that people come to treatment at different stages of change, thus, if they are, for example, in the 'precontemplative stage', their readiness for change will be low. The order of the stages is presumed to be invariant; but the speed at which any one person moves through the stages is variable. In this trajectory, returning to an earlier stage is relatively common (Murphy & Baxter, 1997).

Scott and Wolfe (2003) examined the progress of 119 men in a MBCP using TTM stages. Analysis of change in abuse, empathy and communication showed that the magnitude of men's change varied significantly according to their stage of change. Men at an early stage of a program showed significantly less change in these domains than men in later stages. Eckhardt et al. (2004) found that the majority of perpetrators arrive for intervention in the contemplative stage; individuals in more advanced stages of change reported using more behaviour and experiential change processes to become nonviolent. Murhpy and Eckhardt (2005) conclude that TTM stages may be adapted for intervening with perpetrators of IPV. At the beginning of the intervention, the researchers were able to distinguish between early stage men, who typically deny violence and blame their partner and/or the judicial system for their misfortune, and later stage perpetrators, who acknowledge the use of violence and its consequences. They suggest that intervention could be tailored to target self-motivated change and self-appraisal behaviours in order to increase program completion and improve intervention outcomes.

The TTM-based research in IPV has mainly focused on distinguishing types of perpetrators according to their stage of change, and on predicting treatment completion. Alexander and Morris (2008), using the University of Rhode Island Change Assessment (URICA), identified two different stage of change clusters among a sample of 210 court-ordered perpetrators. One stage reflected a precontemplation-unmotivated profile; and the other reflected a contemplation-preparation profile characterized by greater readiness to attempt change. However, partners reported no difference in perpetrated violence between the two clusters. Eckhardt and colleagues (2008) report four readiness-to-change clusters in a sample of 199 court-mandated perpetrators, using URICA and Holztworth-Munroe typology: a reluctant cluster (17.6%); the unprepared-action cluster (16.1%); the pre-participation cluster (42.7%); and the decision-making cluster (23.6%). The study found support for Holtzworth-Munroe subtypes as predictors of program completion; but not for pre-program readiness to change (Eckhardt et al., 2008). Similarly, Brodeur and colleagues (2008) found five clusters of stage of change in a study with a sample of 302 men; where, contrary to their expectation, TTM constructs did not predict dropout from treatment programs.

In a more outcome-focused study, Levesque and colleagues (2012) examined the effect of providing one TTM-based treatment complement, named 'Journey to Change', in a group of 492 court-mandated treatment males, by comparing groups assigned to regular intervention (RI) and regular intervention plus Journey to Change (RI+JC). They report that participants who received RI+JC were more likely than the RI group to be at the action stage at the end of treatment, and to seek help outside of the group. According to survivors' reports, RI+JC participants were less likely to engage in physical violence during the 12-month follow-up.

2.6.3 *Motivational interviewing*

A growing number of authors have pointed out the benefits of using MI as a pretreatment procedure for improving treatment adherence and outcomes, by helping people to think differently about their behaviour and to consider what might be gained through change (Maiuro & Murphy, 2009; Miller & Rollnick, 1991). MI has been introduced in the field of IPV intervention to reduce initial hostility toward

treatment, facilitate verbalization of motivation to change, resolve ambivalence, and increase receptivity to structured group therapy (Musser & Murphy, 2009). MI has also shown promising results when matched with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) group therapy (Alexander et al., 2010; Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2008; Murphy & Meis, 2008). For example, Murphy and colleagues (2012) tested predictions of differential responses to a two-session motivational interview for male perpetrators of IPV, compared with structured intake as control group after completing a CBT intervention program. The greatest benefits occurred in men who initially appeared reluctant to change, in terms of working alliance, homework compliance and the number of sessions attended.

The literature on TTM and MI applications in IPV interventions shows a strong association with CBT as the preferred intervention model (Alexander et al., 2010; Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2008; Musser & Murphy, 2009). However, some authors criticize the growing mixture of gender-based interventions and CBT interventions in IPV, given the relaxation in training in CBT techniques and the difficulties of its application in group settings, where is not possible to address individual differences in readiness to change and comorbid conditions (Murphy & Meis, 2008).

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm of many psychology-based researchers involved with TTM, and despite the preliminary evidence of high scores of precontemplation in predicting re-abuse (Brodeur et al., 2008; Eckhardt et al., 2008), stage of change cluster studies have not found support for TTM constructs in predicting program completion. In addition, a series of limitations in studies using TTM have been also pointed out. For example, the methodological shortcomings associated with distortion, denial and inaccuracy of self-reports of men involved in the criminal justice system based in the use of URICA (Eckhardt et al., 2008); and the inherent limitations of cluster and profile analysis of reports using TTM, given the descriptive nature and the practical problems in measuring TTM constructs (Murphy & Maiuro, 2008). For some, these latter issues represent more than practical problems: they denote theoretical problems of coherence and level of explanation in TTM constructs (Burrowes & Needs, 2009) and conceptual limitations of the change process, reflecting "the more complex reality of change" (Gondolf, 2011, p. 349).

Other critics have targeted the conceptual core of the TTM, asserting that its oversimplifies the change process by overemphasizing individual's decision making and under emphasizing the role of contextual factors; and that the model lacks of theoretical strength due to problems with its predictive accuracy, internal coherence and explanatory depth (Burrowes & Needs, 2009). According to Burrowes and Needs (2009), cognitive processes are necessary but not sufficient factors for understanding the change process. They stress the need to include contextual factors such as the role of other persons, the justice system, and personal history and experience, in contributing to change; and suggest that the main factor underlying TTM's popularity is the lack of alternative frameworks.

2.6.4 *Empirically-based IPV models of change*

A different approach to understanding change process in IPV has attempted to develop a model of change on the basis of empirical data rather than on adapting theoretical models of change from other fields. In an evaluation of British Criminal Justice responses and intervention programs for male perpetrators of IPV, Dobash and colleagues (1999) used qualitative and quantitative data to delineate patterns of personal change. They proposed a stage-based conceptualization of the change process for IPV perpetrators, differentiating eight stages. The first stage, named 'Change is Possible', implies the individual's movement from impossibility or undesirability of change to viewing change as a real prospect. 'Motivation to Change' involves the individual's desire for change development. 'Why Change' corresponds to the stage of recognizing the costs and benefits to self, and an expansion to include 'the other' in perceived benefits. 'What Changes' is related to the shift from a view of the self as an object, to self-conceptualization as a subject who makes decisions, implying the assumption of responsibility for one's actions. 'General Mechanism of Change' includes the passage from the need of external surveillance and constraints to internal controls. 'New Discourse' entails the progression from denial, minimization and blaming others for the exercised violence, to notions of rights, respect and responsibility. The 'Medium of Change' incorporates accounts of the means by which the process is promoted, including learning, talking and listening. Finally, 'Specific Elements of Changes' refers to the incorporation of cognitive and behavioural skills from men's programs.

However, the model proposed by Dobash and colleagues has not penetrated US research on IPV. In US literature TTM remains as the dominant framework informing research on matching perpetrators with appropriate intervention, where the model is considered as the most promising direction for a paradigm shift in working with male perpetrators of IPV (Lehmann & Simmons, 2009; Murphy & Eckhardt, 2005; Murphy & Meis, 2008). Perhaps, the only exception to this dominance is the attempt by Scott (2004) to integrate Dobash and colleagues' model with TTM; where, however, the emerging model remained centred on rational decision making about who goes through the stages of change, reducing the attention to contextual factors related with change.

2.7   Subjectivity and change

Even though the concept of a turning point has been previously studied in developmental psychology, personality psychology, aging studies, developmental psychopathology, and criminology, to address change and life transitions along the life-course (Laub & Sampson, 1993; McAdams, 1985b, 1993, 2005; McAdams et al., 2001, 2006; Rutter, 1996; Sampson & Laub, 1996, 2005), it has only recently been mentioned in the field of research on change in perpetrators of IPV. Responding to the neglect of contextual and subjective factors associated with change in perpetrator's behaviours in TTM-based research, Sheehan and colleagues (2012) conducted a systematic review of qualitative studies that investigated the factors, situations, and attitudes that facilitate perpetrator's decisions to change their abusive behaviour. They identified only six publications that matched these criteria, concluding that external events can be used as a trigger for internal motivation to change. Criminal sanctions, fear of losing their partner or family, and the men's awareness that they were becoming like their abusive fathers, were identified as turning points for change. They also identified the assumption of responsibility for past abusive behaviour, and the experience of autonomy, as consistent themes across studies of men who changed; as well as the relationship between the perpetrator and facilitator as an important factor for change.

However, Sheehan and colleagues (2012) point out the lack of clear definitions of successful behavioural change in reviewed studies, remarking that, "given the limited

understanding of the process of change in perpetrators of IPV, investigating turning points qualitatively in this population would be useful in determining why and how perpetrators change their behavior" (p. 31). In addition, the detailed examination of the studies reviewed by Sheehan and colleagues (2012) reveals that these studies were narrowly focused on within-program intervention factors, did not use the concept of turning point, and did not take into account women's perspectives of success (Pandya & Gingerich, 2002; Scott & Wolfe, 2000; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Moreover, one of these studies investigated a therapy group process without discriminating between good and poor outcomes (Pandya & Gingerich, 2002); and another used an a priori, theory-based coding system (Scott & Wolfe, 2000); which was used by a subsequent study, also included in Sheehan and colleagues' review (2012), as a framework to organize coded data (Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006).

Despite its methodological weaknesses, emerging qualitative evidence has revealed the importance of external factors, such as turning points, and internal factors, such as motivation to change, as well as the suitability of qualitative research in the study of the change process in IPV (Sheehan et al., 2012; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006; Stefanakis, 1999). Even more interesting to note is that the notion of 'turning points', used to understand change in IPV, is linked to the concept of 'desistance', as explored in the study of change processes in criminal behaviour within the field of criminology (Carlsson, 2012; Farrall, Sharpe, Hunter, & Calverley, 2011; Gadd, 2006; Gadd & Farrall, 2004; Maruna, 2001; Maruna et al., 2004; McGuire, 2004; Sampson & Laub, 2005; Vaughan, 2007).

2.7.1 *Desistance*

Although not associated with perpetration of IPV, a growing number of criminology studies have addressed the issue of how desistance from crime works as a means to overcome the limitations of research based on the Risk Need Responsivity Model, which is focused on crime causes (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Ward & Maruna, 2007); a model that has also become influential in research in IPV (Stewart, Gabora, Kropp, & Lee, 2014). Desistance is understood as the termination point in offending (Maruna et al., 2004), involving a process that causes and supports the termination (Laub & Sampson, 2001). This includes both an objective transformation in offenders'

circumstances and a range of subjective phenomena (Gadd & Farrall, 2004), along a gradual process (Carlsson, 2012).

However, studies of desistance do not reflect a unified paradigm, since discussions on the issues of agency and structure have led to controversies among different research groups as to how to explain desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1996, 2005). Consequently, it is possible to distinguish between three theoretical approaches in the literature on desistance: Maturation Theory points out that individuals break from offending when they mature mentally and physically (Glueck & Glueck, 1974); Social Control Theory highlights the relevance of informal social bonds in desistance, including a number of structural elements such as family formulation and employment as turning points in the deviation from crime (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Laub & Sampson, 1993); and Narrative Theory emphasizes subjective changes such as transformations of offenders' perspectives on themselves (Maruna, 2001). More recently, some authors have differentiated primary and secondary desistance: the first referring to the process of termination of crime; and the second describing the process of 'going straight' after termination of crime (Maruna & Farrall, 2004; Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004; McNeill, 2012).

Based on the evidence that desistance occurs away from the criminal justice system (Ward, Yates, & Willis, 2012), recent desistance studies and theory development have stressed the need to understand the change process beyond a narrow focus on 'what works' in programs. This approach has been criticized for being colonized by medical treatment research approaches, focused on treatment specific components and individual characteristics, and overlooking the complex relationship between the social and individual dimensions (McNeill, 2006, 2012; Ward & Maruna, 2007).

2.7.2   *Personal Identity*

Building on empirical research, a growing number of authors in criminology hold the view that, to successfully maintain an abstinence from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent pro-social identity for themselves, by developing self-narratives that describe to themselves and others how they have transformed themselves from criminals into new-reformed identities, within a supportive social context for such

changes (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). This view has encouraged qualitative research on life stories and life transitions, where the personal identity of the person is considered a key concept to integrate the social and the individual (Gadd & Farrall, 2004; Maruna, 2001; Maruna et al., 2004; Vaughan, 2007). In this regard, McNeill (2012) recently asserts that it is important to address the relationships between the evidence about the process of desistance from crime and the theory and practice of rehabilitation; and points out that understanding why people offend "may be a key part of building rehabilitation theories, but increasingly criminologists recognize the need for another kind of explanatory theory concerned with the etiology, not of crime, but of desistance from crime" (p. 9). McNeill remarks that it is in secondary desistance that the person experiences or accomplishes the fourth stage in Giordano's model: "the transformation in the way the actor views the deviant behavior or lifestyle itself" (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1002).

Empirical studies have supported the centrality of subjective changes for desistance from crime, suggesting that people who desist make identifiable changes to their personal identity, producing a new self which no longer coheres with offending (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). Carlsson (2012) also found empirical support for the relevance of the subjective meanings attributed by the individual to 'turning points' to desisting from offending; concluding that the exploration, analysis and understanding of life-course processes in depth makes it possible to understand the interplay between the individual and the wider social community and culture. Morran (2006) earlier asserts that, for male perpetrators of IPV, "to begin and sustain change it is clear that a programme will play only one part in this process" (p. 16); stressing that much is yet to be learned about the processes and circumstances, and the relationship between these, that make desistance from IPV possible. In this regard, he has argued that it is necessary to understand the recovery process beyond Duluth mandates for perpetrators' accountability, because accountability is not a transformative process (Morran, 2011).

Even when IPV is widely considered as a crime in western countries, criminology has been noticeably absent in theorizing IPV etiology and intervention (Fisher & Lab, 2010). The striking similarity between the challenges for criminology in addressing desistance from crime, and the challenges in psychological research to understand

how perpetrators stop IPV and remain non-violent, suggests that desistance theory and personal identity construction may be especially useful for informing further empirical research on the change process of IPV perpetrators. Contemporary criminological understandings of desistance have been overlooked in the study of interventions with perpetrators of IPV (Walker et al., 2012). Psychological and social accounts of the process through which an individual desist from violence are missing from literature, and they are needed to inform further developments in interventions programs (Göbbels, Ward, & Willis, 2012). Although recent studies have incorporated desistance theory in the exploration of change process in IPV (Giordano et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2015), these studies have overlooked the aspects associated to the individual's negotiation of personal identity change, which is considered central for desistance (Maruna, 2001). The implications of this omission, and the contrast between these studies and the present study, are discussed in Chapter VII of this thesis.

2.8   Conclusion

The review of the empirical and theoretical literature on intervention with IPV perpetrators reveals a field characterized by uncertainty about how best to assist perpetrators stop their use of violence. The evolution of intervention programs for male perpetrators of IPV shows an early and still growing questioning of the effectiveness of gender-based models; which has been accompanied by an increasing expansion of psychological-based theories and CBT-based intervention models, within a literature dominated by US publications. This psychological-based expansion has fueled the controversy among two groups of scholars, one supporting gender-based theories of IPV etiology, and the other supporting psychological-gender neutral theories of IPV etiology. Such controversy seems to operate under the assumption that theories of the causes of IPV are essential in guiding the improvement or the replacement of existing intervention programs, to better address change in IPV perpetration.

A large number of conceptual and empirical efforts emulating medical research have attempted to improve intervention outcomes through the matching of specific types of IPV perpetrators with specific types of interventions, or by isolating specific 'active'

components of the intervention. Unfortunately, the evidence appears to show that the complex problem of IPV refuses to fit into the medicalized research paradigm, thus making it critical to transcend that paradigm when attempting to understand change in IPV.

The literature shows that our knowledge about change and the sustainability of change in IPV perpetrators is unclear and incomplete. As the studies on desistance from crime suggest, rather than extrapolating theories and models generated around other issues, it seems necessary to understand change in IPV based on men's perspectives, transcending binary-outcome definitions and the narrow focus on intervention as the source of change. An examination of the underexplored territory of the subjective dimensions of desistance from IPV can potentially contribute to understanding the interplay between the sociocultural context, the characteristics of the interventions, and the men's subjective experiences, in promoting and sustaining change. This knowledge, in turn, could help in the critical examination of local MBCPs, and in the developing of needed innovations in the sector. In this regard, the assertion of Miller (2004), regarding the problem of model-focused outcome research in psychotherapy, seems to fit well with the challenges of outcome research in interventions for perpetrators of IPV: "the field needs to use outcome to guide process and inspire innovation" (p. 6).

CHAPTER III:
A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO THE SUBJECTIVITY OF MEN WHO USE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: THE STUDY METHOD

3.1   Introduction

The previous chapters have shown that the subjective experience of the men who ceased using IPV is a potential source for new insights that shed light on the intricate paths of change in the use of IPV (Morran, 2011). However, this territory remains scarcely explored and conceptualized, as well as the interaction between the men's subjectivity and the surrounding socio-cultural forces. In this uncharted territory, given the limited existing information and the urgent need to build knowledge about this particular group, the qualitative exploratory research approach appears to be the most appropriate way to start drawing the lines of a map that could potentially contribute to a better understanding of the phenomena of IPV cessation (Stebbins, 2001). However, as with most exploration, this journey starts from a specific position, with a set of intentions and a number of recommendations about where to look during the exploration; which are important to clarify in order to situate the research and explain its particular methodological approach (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, this chapter examines, in the first place, the epistemological and theoretical assumptions underpinning the decisions taken in conducting this study (Carter & Little, 2007; Spector-Mersel, 2010). This is followed by a description and explanation of the study design, a discussion of ethical issues involved in researching men who use IPV, and a description and justification of the data collection strategy and data analysis procedures.

3.2   Constitutive assumptions of the research

Controversies regarding the appropriateness of qualitative and quantitative research for studying different types of phenomena can be traced to Dilthey's (1977) argument for a distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences. Dilthey suggested that natural sciences could be conducted through external observation and

explanation of regularities of physical phenomena, while the human sciences should search for meaning or understanding.

This distinction has been preserved in contemporary literature in social research, particularly regarding the tensions between these two forms of inquiry, which are commonly considered as pertaining to two distinctive epistemologies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similarly, this epistemological distinction has also been addressed in discussions of research traditions in psychology, which have been conceived as two poles on a continuum: on one end, are the 'modern sciences', representing the positivistic epistemological foundations of the quantitative approach, where concepts such as 'truth', 'rationality', 'objectivity', 'individual knowledge', 'evidence', and 'scientific progress' are central; and on the other end, the 'postmodern sciences', representing research approaches rooted in phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical traditions, where concepts such as 'social construction of knowledge', 'situatedness', 'multiplicity', 'reflexivity' and 'language' are the most relevant (Gergen, 2001). Therefore, as the primary interest of the present research is to explore and understand the subjective experiences of men who have ceased their use of IPV, the qualitative research approach is considered to represent in general the best match for this research.

However, qualitative research is also subjected to the influence of different broader understandings of what is considered to be legitimate inquiry (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992); therefore, qualitative research is not a monolithic approach, but an evolving and pluralist paradigm (Atkinson, 2005; Patton, 1990). The polyphonic nature of qualitative research is clearly represented in Guba and Lincoln's (1994, p. 109) distinction between three forms of qualitative inquiry based on their ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations; which has been further developed in every new edition of Denzin and Lincoln's Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005, 2011). This diversity - which also raises tensions and controversies within this still-evolving paradigm (Charmaz, 2007) - renders crucial the researcher's ontological and epistemological positioning at the onset of the research (Bong, 2002; Crotty, 1998), in order to increase the reflexivity and rigour of the study (Carter & Little, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

The relevance of epistemological decisions to the research activity has been addressed and well documented by Guba and Lincoln (1994), Crotty (1998), and Carter and Little (2007). These authors concur in considering a statement of epistemology as inescapable for research activity, and stress the need for the reflexive researcher to actively adopt a theory of knowledge. Guba and Lincoln and colleagues (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2013) have consistently maintained their distinction between alternative inquiry paradigms on the basis of their ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, tracing a line between positivistic and interpretive approaches. Within the latter approaches, they consider constructivism as an influential paradigm for conducting qualitative research; which, in their view, has established legitimacy within the social sciences over the last three decades (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Guba and Lincoln (2013) position themselves within the constructionist approach, stating that "criteria for judging either 'reality' or validity are not absolutist, but rather are derived from community consensus regarding what is 'real', what is useful, and what has meaning" (p. 207). For them, "the meaning-making activities themselves are of central interest to social constructionists/constructivists, simply because it is the meaning-making/sense-making/attributional activities that shape action (or inaction) [and] can be changed" (p. 237). According to Denzin (2002), "the 'God Trick' no longer works; there is no objective position to write from" (p. 57). Thus, in the present research a constructionist stance is adopted, as outlined in section 3.3.

3.3   Epistemological positioning: The constructionist stance

Constructionism can be understood as a meta-theoretical paradigm in social science that posits knowledge as socially created and not discovered by the individual mind. It states that human understanding and meaning are generated, legitimated and circulated through social interaction by means of language systems, which play a constitutive role in creating what we call reality: "Constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artefact of communal interchange" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). In this regard, constructionism denies the possibility of having direct and unmediated access to reality, contesting the essentialist stance posited by positivism from which phenomena are conceived as inherent trans-historical essences independent from human knowledge (Burr, 1995;

Gergen, 1997). According to Gergen, "both as an orientation to knowledge and to the character of psychological constructs, constructionism forms a significant challenge to conventional understandings" (p. 266). In the constructionist approach, human subjectivity gives shape to the facts that are taken as objective, resulting in constructed, fluid and multilayered realities (Gergen, 1997). Therefore, the main interest of social research is to look at the ongoing and dynamic process of social construction of reality, challenging the conception of naturally-occurring psychological and sociological realities waiting to be discovered beneath appearances (Shotter, 1993).

Given the interest of the present research in understanding men's subjective experiences of desisting from IPV, with its particular emphasis on how these men build a sense of self, this study embraces the central postulates of the constructionist paradigm, regarding the centrality of the meaning-making process for understanding human action, and its epistemological position of the socially-constructed nature of human knowledge. Consequently, the knowledge produced by the present study is interpretative and culturally sensitive. However, as the constructionist paradigm is also diverse (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Czarniawska, 2004; Gergen, 1985; Schutz, 1970), further specification of the researcher's positioning within this paradigm has been shown to be necessary for the reader to fully understand the epistemological assumptions of this research.

3.4   Specifying the epistemological position: The narrative turn

Based on the constructivist premise that language systems play a constitutive role in what we consider to be reality, the literature in social sciences has demonstrated increasing interest in narratives as a particular area within the constructionist paradigm (Czarniawska, 2004). In this specific area, the language systems that give shape to the reality through social interaction are conceived as having primarily a narrative form (Bruner, 1990); while storytelling is regarded as the most common social practice for circulating meaning in human societies (Bamberg, 1997; Bruner, 1991).

The position holding that 'we live in a story-shaped world' posited by the 'narrative turn' in social sciences (Riessman, 1993) has brought the insight "that our lives are storied and identity is narratively constructed" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 5). Narrative has aroused much interest in the social sciences because it is considered as an alternative to the depletion of cognitive metaphors in theorizing about the construction of meaning (Bamberg, 2004), and more importantly, because it has opened the possibility for understanding the interaction between culture and individual (Bruner, 1990). According to Czarniawska (2004), "every student of social life, no matter of which domain, needs to become interested in narrative as a form of social life, a form of knowledge, and a form of communication" (p.13).

Narrative in the social sciences entails a set of particular epistemological features that are relevant to the discussion, since they give shape to what Gadamer (2004) terms the 'horizon', to refer to the framework that a person uses to interpret their experiences; which, according to the interpretive research approach, a researcher must reflexively clarify (Diebel, 2008). According to Spector-Messer (2010), narrative offers a more specific answer than the general constructionist paradigm to how humans shape reality and interpret it, by explaining how this takes place through the use of stories. 'Narrative knowing' (Polkinghorne, 1988) has been proposed as one of the primary modes of thought through which people make sense of their experiences (Bruner, 1991), and as the means to make sense of personal identity (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1985a). Narrative, therefore, is considered as the organizing principle of human experience (Sarbin, 1986), so that social reality is primarily a narrative reality (Bruner, 1991; Spector-Mersel, 2010). From this perspective, narrative blurs the borders separating ontology and epistemology (Smith & Sparkes, 2008).

Epistemologically, narratives are rooted in the narrator's current situation; this means that stories are told from the perspective of the present. But no story can contain all the lived experiences, so they are selective and undetermined (White, 1987), and form complex units that require, to be properly interpreted, taking into account the interdependence of whole-parts in terms of the understanding of the listener/reader (Labov, Waletzky, & Helm, 1967; Taylor, 1989). In addition, narratives are influenced by the intersubjective relationships within which they are produced. Narratives are moulded by the social circumstances in which they have evolved and

are shaped by the cultural metanarratives that provide meaning to the particular stories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Spector-Mersel, 2010). As narratives are fluid and context sensitive, they are not the individuals' exclusive creations, but are co-authored. However, despite the apparent freedom to 'write' our stories, they are limited by the practices and the dominance of other metanarratives present in the social context within which the narrative is co-produced, as well as by components of social structure such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, health, marital status and economic situation (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Consistently, contemporary narrative research in social sciences shares an anti-essentialist view of the self and identity, in which these are examined in a multidimensional way in order to explore their connection with social, historical, political and cultural context (Smith & Sparkes, 2008).

The previous discussion points out the extent to which epistemology is relevant for the present research, and how social constructionism, and particularly the narrative paradigm, set the conditions for "what constitute legitimate inquiry and warrantable knowledge" (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992, p. 98). However, qualitative research activities are also shaped by their theoretical models (Carter & Little, 2007; Crotty, 1998). Gergen (2001) states that, as the world does not speak through us, "what we 'find' depend importantly on the theoretical and meta-theoretical paradigms already embraced" (p. 11). Theoretical models are also influential for the questions raised and the decisions taken in the present study; so they must also be addressed in order to provide a more precise positioning of this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Willis, Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007).

3.5 The place of theoretical underpinnings in research aimed at theory building

The place of extant theory in qualitative research has been identified as one of the major tensions for qualitative research, arising from the contrast between inductive discoveries of theory and deductive applications of theory (Charmaz, 2007). According to Charmaz (2000), the objectivist qualitative approach assumes an objective reality that takes for granted a neutral observer and views categories as directly derived from data, while a constructivist qualitative approach "recognizes

that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523). This notion of the researcher as data creator, held by constructionist researchers, has fuelled controversies regarding the role of the researcher's previous knowledge in conducting research aimed at developing theory (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Barney Glaser, 2012); such as the issue of whether it is appropriate to conduct a literature review before starting this type of research (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007), and to what extent it is possible for the researcher to not have substantive theoretical assumptions (Flinders & Mills, 1993; Polanyi, 1967) or an ideological interest (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). Charmaz (2007) suggests that research can be theoretically informed but not theoretically preformed; so that concepts may play a role in sensitizing the researcher but must be used as "initial analytical handle rather than as permanent explanatory tools" (2007, p. 80).

Gilgun (2005) highlights the value of integrating the analyses with related research and theory to enhance, amplify, and lend significance to the results of the analysis. The relevance of conducting a literature review at the outset of a study has been portrayed as a way of ensuring the pertinence and quality of the research (Dunne, 2011; McGhee et al., 2007). Moreover, the interplay between the theory or conceptual model being developed and the available deductive theories is considered necessary to justify the scientific relevance of the qualitative procedure, without which a qualitative research "would be no more than just another way of cataloguing and describing empirical facts without any connection with broader phenomena and theories" (Bendassolli, 2013). This latter statement reflects the notion, held in the philosophy of sciences, stating that phenomena are determined by theory and only partially confirmed by evidence (Bogen & Woodward, 1988; Woodward, 2010). Thus, phenomena are conceived as being always theory-laden (Feyerabend, 1993; Schindler, 2011); and the qualities of the phenomena considered relevant for research as substantively dependent on its integration into a research program or a theoretical web (Lakatos, Worrall, & Currie, 1980; Quine & Ullian, 1978). According to Lakatos et al. (1980), research programs define their phenomena of interest and specify their methodological criteria at the same time, so that methods, as techniques, need to be understood in the theoretical context of a research methodology (Crotty, 1998). If it is not possible to prevent foreknowledge from permeating a theory generating-oriented

research (Polanyi, 1967) but, on the contrary, it is considered desirable to approach the research with some theoretical "initial handles" (Charmaz, 2007, p. 80), then the impetus to theorise must be considered as neither deductive nor inductive, but dialectical (Mason, 2002).

Three analytical 'handles' were used in conducting this research, because these offered advantageous, evidence-based approaches to the examination of subjective processes associated with life transitions in general, lifestyle changes in offending in particular, and the discursive configuration of masculinity positions. Although these theoretical perspectives were discussed earlier in Chapter II, they are now briefly described to help make sense of their influence on the research design.

3.5.1   *Narrative identity*

As discussed in Chapter II, empirical evidence supports the value of narrative identity theory and narrative methods for the study of personal identity and life transitions across a range of issues (McAdams et al., 2001). From the narrative identity approach, to understand change in IPV perpetration and the subjective accommodations that make it possible for men to sustain that change over time, self-narratives of men who desist from IPV must be examined in detail and contrasted with those of men who have not desisted (Maruna, 1999).

3.5.2   *Desistance*

Contemporary criminological research on the causal process underlying the termination of offending, generally known as desistance (Laub & Sampson, 2001), has provided empirical support for the distinction between primary and secondary desistance. While primary desistance involves a gap in offending, secondary desistance has been described as entailing the assumption of an identity that no longer coheres with offending, which requires the narrative reconstruction of the personal identity (Maruna & Farrall, 2004). From this perspective, attention must be paid not only to the narratives associated with stopping IPV, but to the narratives extending beyond this point in participants' accounts of their lives.

3.5.3 *Hegemonic masculinity*

Despite the controversies in the field discussed in Chapter II, the relevance of gender issues for understanding IPV remains uncontested (Dutton & White, 2012a; Stark, 2007). Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' offers a conceptual understanding of masculinities that is epistemologically coherent with the theory of narrative identity. As masculinities are conceived as discursive positions, this allows for scrutiny of the interplay between the individual and culture in the discursive construction of the masculine identity. Therefore, the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' constitutes the third theoretical model influencing the questions raised in this research and the approach taken for examining men's life stories. In order to understand the role that masculinity discourses play in desisting from IPV, and with the aim of identifying potential symbolic resources for non-hegemonic masculinities available in the participant's culture, the gender positioning embedded in men's self-narratives must be also analysed.

3.6 The research aim

Given the under-researched status of the subjective experience of men who have ceased using IPV, and the underdeveloped status of theory in the study of the process of change in men who use IPV, it is both reasonable and necessary to make efforts towards enhancing understanding of the process of desistance from IPV from these men's perspectives, in order to begin the development of a specific conceptual model of sustainable change for men who use IPV; which can then guide further research and innovation in gender-based intervention programs for men who use IPV.

The purpose of transcending the description of the men's experiences and developing a conceptual model of change in IPV is based on the notion that middle-range theories have a practical interest in guiding further research (Merton & Aut, 1968), so they can be useful across several client populations and practice settings (Lasiuk & Ferguson, 2005). Theories are not only instruments for deducting hypotheses and predictions; as they do not reflect the world but reconstruct it according to a pragmatic interest, they can be also considered as devices to systematize experience

and as resources for semiotic mediation (Bendassolli, 2013): "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1951, p. 169).

According to Balashov and Rosenberg (2002), the value of a theory lies in its capacity to solve problems of practical interest, not in its capacity to reflect the truth of essential facts of the world. From this point of view, building an empirically-based conceptual model of desistance from IPV contributes not only to enhancing understanding of how men who desist from IPV build a sense of self and how this is related to dominant cultural representations of personal identity and masculinity in a particular context. It can be also useful to guiding future research, and providing a framework to critically analyse the ways in which local MBCPs are designed and implemented. More generally, a conceptual empirically-based model of desistance from IPV can contribute to understanding why these programs are not as effective as required, and how they could be potentially improved (Walker et al., 2012).

3.6.1 Research question

The guiding question posed by this research is: How does the personal identity constructed by men who desist from IPV against women compare to that of men who do not desist from IPV?

A number of subsidiary questions have been also posed for guiding the exploration and taking full advantage of the analysis:

1. Is there similarity in the personal identities constructed by men who desist from IPV?

2. Is there similarity in the personal identity constructed by men who do not desist from IPV?

3. Is there difference in the identities constructed by men who desist from IPV compared with men who do not desist from IPV?

4. What masculinity positions articulate the narratives of men who desist from IPV and men who do not desist from IPV?

5. How do the masculinity positions articulated by men who desist from IPV compare to those of men who do not desist from IPV?

3.7 Designing the research

Research design is defined as "the strategy that justifies the logic, structure and the principles of the research methodology and methods and how these relate to the research questions, hypothesis or proposition" (Davies, 2006, p. 266). Research design is critical for demonstrating that the research will produce valid and credible conclusions, for setting out the inquiry strategy that facilitates its understanding, and for guiding the researcher through the research process (Davies, 2006). The research question is regarded as essential to establishing an appropriate design of the research (Richards & Morse, 2007); which, in turn, has to show how the research question is associated with the relevant data sources and the research method. The selection of the method must be justified by taking into account the issues of validity, reliability and generalizability, comparative issues, ethical considerations, and feasibility (Davies, 2006).

Although research design cannot be prescribed, different approaches in qualitative research have been considered as overall research designs that can be used to conceptualise a particular study. Creswell and Creswell (2013) distinguish five qualitative research designs: narrative research, case studies, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies. In their view, research design refers to these different approaches "that encompass formulating research questions and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and reporting findings" (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007, p. 237). According to Creswell and Creswell (2007), all these designs have in common a general process of research that starts with the identification of a research problem, proceeding to the questions, the data, the data analysis, and report. Although they consider that there are similarities between narrative research, ethnography, and case study, that allow for the study of single individuals from any of these approaches, they stress that the type of information each collects differs considerably. While narrative research focuses on stories told by the participants, ethnography focuses on the context of their culture, while in case study the single case is used to illustrate an issue. In addition, they highlight fundamental differences between all these approaches regarding the data analysis procedures and the primary objective of the study. From their perspective, "exploring life is different from

generating theory" (2007, p. 77). However, as discussed below, this statement has not aroused the agreement of the community of qualitative researchers.

It is widely accepted that constructing empirically-based conceptual models requires a deeper and contextualized understanding of the experiences of the people involved in the phenomena under scrutiny (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). The literature strongly supports the suitability of a qualitative research approach for this end (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Creswell and Creswell (2007), Grounded Theory (GT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is the most influential qualitative design for theory building, given its primary interest in the discovery of regularities, further defined as identification and categorisation of elements, and exploration of their connections (Bong, 2002). Nevertheless, internal conflictive issues regarding GT's ontological approach have inclined researchers within this approach to adopt narrative research as the overall design for answering the questions. These issues include: the split of the approach into a Straussian and Glaserian perspectives (Barney Glaser, 2012; Kelle, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990); criticism about inconsistency between the prescriptive nature of GT with its open and creative interpretation of the data, which has led to a suggestion that the constant comparative method might be the only component of the model worth keeping (Thomas & James, 2006); and the existence of alternative qualitative approaches for theory building that are best suited for addressing personal identity (Lieblich & Josselson, 1997; McAdams, 2001), The rationale for the adoption of the narrative research method is explained next.

3.8   Narrative research

Narrative research is a type of qualitative research that "revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them"(Chase, 2011, p. 421). This approach is based on the consideration of narrative as a distinct form of discourse that enables meaning making "through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or other's actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the sequences of actions and events over time" (Chase, 2011, p. 421). But narrative inquiry is not confined to a purely descriptive purpose, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2007): narrative research

can also be used to develop theory from data (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). It is, indeed, considered as a form of case study that has been "used throughout history to form theoretical propositions", since it "is grounded in close study of the particular" (Riessman, 2007, pp. 12, 18). Mishler (1990) and Wells (2011) also argue for the merits of the narrative case study approach for theory development. Furthermore, according to McAdams (2011a), narrative research, in the context of discovery, involves the exploration of narrative accounts "for broad patterns, themes, images, and qualitative characterizations in order to generate new theories about people's lives" (p. 16). In this approach, the "researcher explores a particular phenomenon in detail in order to develop new ways of describing and understanding the phenomenon" (p. 17); therefore, narrative research fits well with the aim of developing a conceptual model of desistance from IPV.

According to Creswell (2007), when compared with other qualitative approaches, narrative research is best suited for capturing the details of the history or life experiences of a single individual or a small number of individuals. In the last three decades, narrative has attracted an increasing interest in the social sciences, which is reflected in the coining of the term 'narrative turn', commonly used in contemporary qualitative research literature to refer to what has become a major influence in social sciences in general, and qualitative research in particular (Czarniawska, 2004; Riessman, 2007). Czarniawska states that one of the reasons for this attraction towards narrative as means of study in both the humanities and social sciences "might be that it is useful to think of an enacted narrative as the most typical form of social life" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 3). According to Denzin (1989), the growing interest in narrative in the social sciences has been facilitated by the shift from realism to constructivism, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In psychology also, certain authors have coined the term 'narrative psychology' to trace a distinction with the tradition of a monadic positivistic psychology (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) assert that narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. Likewise, Riessman (2007) defines narrative studies as "family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a storied form" (p.11); adding that what makes these texts 'narrative' is their characteristic sequence and consequence, where events are selected, organised,

connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience, shaping at the same time people's interpretations about the world and their experience in it. More importantly, Riessman highlights that narrating, as a form of social interaction, has effects that other forms of communication do not have: "individuals and groups construct identities through storytelling" (Riessman, 2007, p. 8). Hence, narrative research is a well-suited approach to answering the questions raised in this research regarding the identities of men who desist from IPV.

In addition, narrative research can be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personal identity (Lieblich et al., 1998). Thus, it can be used to analyse personal or collective narratives (Riessman, 2007). However, there is considerable variation in definitions of personal narrative depending on the researcher's discipline. For example, in anthropology, narrative can refer to an entire life story, which can be composed by interviews, observation, and documents (Myerhoff, 1980); while, in psychology, "personal narrative encompasses long sections of talk-extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple interviews" (Riessman, 2012, p. 1). Life narratives, in particular, are considered relevant for giving voice to "individuals from groups underrepresented in research studies to at least balance out the databases that have been relied on for so long in generating theory" (Atkinson, 2012, p. 118); as is the case of men who desist from IPV, whose voices, as discussed in the literature review, have been systematically overlooked in the study of change in IPV perpetration.

3.8.1 *Typologies of narrative research*

Narrative research is considered a pluralistic and still flourishing field (Chase, 2011); and has been portrayed as a "veritable garden of cross-disciplinary hybrids" (Riessman, 2007, p. 14). Reflecting this plurality, a number of typologies of narrative research have been proposed, as ways to clarify its boundaries and to provide researchers with guidance in selecting the best-suited design and model of analysis for their research questions (Bamberg, 2012; Chase, 2011; Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2007).

Bamberg (2012) recently proposed a helpful distinction for understanding the fuzzy picture of narrative methods, differentiating two broad general types of narrative research. He distinguishes between "research *on* narratives, in which narratives are the object of study, and research *with* narratives, in which narratives are the tools to explore something else - typically aspects of human memory or experience" (p. 77). Bamberg points out that, while most social sciences focus on researching *with* narratives, the integration of these with insights gained from researching *on* narratives can strengthen the methodological procedures for such research.

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) differentiate types of narrative research according to their analytic focus, as poles on the continuums of two different dimensions: holistic versus categorical; and content versus form. While categorical analysis focuses on dissecting a text in sections, and is more suitable for studying groups of people, the holistic approach is interested in understanding a story as a whole, interpreting the parts in the context of the whole narrative, and is more suitable for studying the development of individual's current position. The dimension of content versus form refers to the interest in explicit content (what happened) and implicit content (plot, sequencing, coherence), respectively. These two dimensions are usually mixed together to form four different types of narrative analysis: 1) holistic-content analysis, focused on life-story content to understand specific parts; 2) holistic-form analysis, looking at the plots or structure of complete life stories; 3) categorical-content analysis, interested in matching specific extracted contents with pre-existing categories; and 4) the categorical-form, focused on the use of language.

Riessman (2007) distinguishes between the thematic, structural, and interactional/dialogical narrative approaches. The first is characterized by an interest in the content of the text, in which the researcher is focused on *what* is said, typically the narrator's experience. Thematic approach looks to theorise across a number of cases through the finding of common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report. Thematic approach often assumes that language is a direct route to meaning, so that the form and context of the narrative is not considered in the analysis. The structural approach emphasizes the *way* a story is told, and is focused on how the content is organized by the narrator; so that it considers language and narrative itself as an object of study. Although it is useful for uncovering embedded

meaning, its requirements of syntactic and prosodic features of talk makes this approach more suitable for detailed analysis of single cases rather than for multiple cases. The third approach focuses on the dialogic process between teller and listener, in order to take into account the contextual forces and the interactive process of co-construction that gives shape to the story (Riessman, 2012).

Bamberg (2012) offers another tripartite typology of research with narratives that is based on the analytical orientation, particular backgrounds, basic unit of analysis, and analytic procedures. He differentiates between two approaches concerned with content and thematic structuring, and one approach interested in the interactive process of narration. In the first group he places: 1) the textual approach to narrative, focused on the linguistic structure, with interest in words, sequences, and topical cohesiveness, characterized by a bottom-up analytic procedure; and 2) the conceptual approach to narrative, which assumes that the conceptual whole is more than its linguistic components, within which the conceptual units are understood as universally-shared story grammars (or cognitive structures) brought by people to the telling situation, and which is characterized by a top-down analytic procedure. In the second group, he defines the 3) interactive-performative approach as one that is interested in storytelling as activity, including the events prior and subsequent to the telling. Although it also incorporates thematic and structural components, its main focus is on what is accomplished by the narrator through the telling. Bamberg suggests that the use of both textual and contextual approaches makes the analysis more robust (Bamberg, 2012).

The previous typologies of narrative research make clear the relevance of the analytic interest and the analytic procedures for distinguishing between different approaches to narrative analysis. However, their authors also warn about the fluidity of these differentiations, given that this is a field considered to still be under development (Chase, 2011). Moreover, the authors converge in suggesting the selection of a particular approach on the basis of the research questions; and highlight the benefits of combining more than one of these approaches in order overcome the limitations that each type has when used separately (Bamberg, 2012; Chase, 2011; Lieblich & Josselson, 1997; Riessman, 2007).

Consequently, as the aim of the present study is to understand how men involved in IPV against women in a particular sociocultural context build a sense of self, and how this is related to dominant cultural representations of masculinity in that particular context, this study can be conceptualized as research *with* narratives of the personal identity constructed by these men in their life stories (Bamberg, 2012). Given the specific interest in understanding the identity positions constructed by men who desist from IPV, participant's life stories were collected, transcribed, and analysed holistically, with a primary focus on the narrative form, to take advantage of contrasting plots and themes (Lieblich et al., 1998). Therefore, and because of the interest in theorising across a number of cases, this study can be more precisely defined as thematic narrative research (Riessman, 2007). However, and as a way to enrich and strengthen the analysis, structural and contextual dimensions of narratives have also been considered in the data analysis, following the suggestions of Riessman (2007) and Bamberg (2012).

3.9   Ensuring research rigour

Regardless of the approach taken, the scientific worth of any research is evaluated by peers and readers through the assessment of its rigour and quality, by looking at the reliability and validity of the work. The term 'trustworthiness' has been widely adopted in qualitative research for referring to the need of the researcher to explicitly demonstrate how they arrived at their analysis and conclusions (Gilgun, 2005), and why the findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The most influential model for assuring trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry was proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985); equating the notions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability with the respective quantitative notions of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Patton, 2002). However, according to Riessman (2007), "fixed criteria for reliability, validity, and ethics developed from experimental research….are not suitable for evaluating narrative projects" (Riessman, 2007, p. 185). Similarly, Mishler (1990) argues that the development of alternative validity criteria for qualitative research grounded in the standards of positivistic research, such as those proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is not satisfactory because, as long as they retain the dominant quantitative model, the alternative criteria continue to be seen as useful only, and temporary, until

the time that 'real' scientific methods are found. More recently, Loh (2013) has suggested that narrative inquiry can benefit from integrating trustworthiness criteria found in the broader qualitative field, in addition to their own; which is a persuasive argument when validity is understood as "a function of intersubjective judgements" within a community (Polkinghorne, 2007).

Since, from the constructivist stance, multiple interpretations of a data set are conceived as possible and expected (Gergen, 1997), the justification of the selection of particular interpretations and the indication of whether any analysis is valid and credible becomes a central issue for establishing the trustworthiness of the entire research; which justification ultimately depends on how it fits with "the parameters and debates of the particular social science discipline, and the epistemologies and theories that ground the empirical work" (Riessman, 2007, p. 185). The criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of the analysis carried out in the present research are mainly based on the criteria proposed by Riessman (1993; 2007).

3.9.1 *Persuasiveness and plausibility*

It is relevant to establish if the researcher's interpretations are plausible and persuasive: that is, interpretations must be reasonable and convincing in the context of participant's stories. This entails the need for displaying how interpretations are grounded in the participant's narratives, through the inclusion of segments of the participant's transcribed stories in the analysis. Additional alternative interpretations should be also considered; and evidence for the selected interpretation should be explicitly articulated.

In the present thesis, the description of themes and plots are presented alongside participant's narratives and excerpts, in order to enable the reader to verify the interpretation drawn. Understandings regarding the function of the participant's use of narrative were derived and examined, providing and discussing alternative interpretations. For instance, two interpretations were raised about the narrative function of the desisters' portrait of the internalization of negative attitudes towards women as the result of power relations and emotional states during early life. It was suggested that this portrait might reflect an attempt by the participants to evade

responsibility for their violence (see the section 5.3.1.2 entitled 'Learning to be a man' in Chapter V). Alternatively, it was suggested that desisters were attempting to construct themselves as accountable for their violence as adults while simultaneously protecting their identity from negative moral attributions through the use of gender frameworks acquired at MBCPs and social learning understandings. Support for the latter was offered; and it was concluded that the portrait of the internalization of negative attitudes towards women as the result of influential power relations and emotional states served the narrative function of opening the space for identity transitions out of the patriarchal worldview.

3.9.2 Correspondence

In research relying on constructionist perspectives, "the correspondence of reported events in a personal narrative with other kinds of evidence is not as relevant as in realist tales" (Riessman, 2007, p. 187), since understanding the meanings for individuals and groups is more important than verifying the facts. Researchers can only interpret people's interpretations; therefore, correspondence must be established in the researcher's interpretative work. This involves the supporting of theoretical claims by documenting sources and bringing the reader to "uncover a trail of evidence, and critically evaluate each piece in relation to others" (Riessman, 2007, p. 188). Correspondence is evident throughout the analysis in terms of consistency between the interpretations drawn by the researcher and those of the participants. This is particularly clear, for example, in the section entitled 'The Learning of Masculine Violence' in Chapter V, where the excerpts presented show the participants' explicitly breaking from the storytelling to assign meaning to the events described. In addition, correspondence is also evident in the progressive accumulation of evidence from Chapters V to VI, upon which the interpretative account of the findings were made.

3.9.3 Coherence

Riessman (2007) advises abandoning the search for text-based coherence in life narrative research, due to the contradiction of the notion that people experience life consistently, reflecting an unitary self, with the constructionist understandings of the self (Gergen, 1991). Instead, she stresses that validity rests on the coherence of data

interpretation; and recommends strengthening the coherence of the analysis by situating personal narratives in their social and political contexts, analogously to other qualitative research approaches that consider links from data to context and provide a sense of the wholeness of the situation as central to the coherence and credibility of a qualitative report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, narrative study can strengthen its trustworthiness by relying on detailed transcripts: identifying and making sense analytically of the points where individual's narratives converge thematically or split apart; considering in the analysis structural features of the discourse; and having a comparative approach (Bamberg, 2012; Riessman, 1993).

Coherence is made evident in a number of features of the present research. The analysis was based on detailed verbatim transcripts of the interviews; the participants' personal narratives were situated in a specific socio-historical context; and the data was linked to their contextual conditions of production during the analysis. In addition, the analysis considered structural narrative features, such as shared story grammars, and maintained a comparative approach, which is manifest, for example, in the comparison of the life narratives of two groups of participants. Finally, the research findings, discussion, and conclusions were developed with a focus on the convergences and divergences between the participants in each group and between the two groups.

3.9.4   Pragmatic use

The acceptance and use of produced narrative research by members of the scholarly community represents the ultimate test of its validity. Although narrative research is a type of case-centred inquiry that has largely demonstrated its trustworthiness within the history of sciences (Flyvbjerg, 2006), it is important to increase the possibilities for the acceptance of the research by adding transparency to the report through the provision of explicit rationales for the methodological decisions, describing how the interpretations were produced (including alternative interpretations), and making primary data available to other researchers where appropriate.

The above aims for the present research have been considered by: framing the study as a case-centred analysis aimed at developing context-dependent knowledge;

interrogating atypical cases - since, according to the evidence discussed in Chapter II, desisting from IPV is not the norm; focusing on the life of IPV perpetrators beyond their use of violence and their participation in an intervention program; and paying attention to the details of the participants' stories. In addition, the research provides an explicit rationale for the methodological decisions, describing how the interpretations were produced and making the data available for the reader. More importantly, the research has generated novel findings for the field of intervention with men who use IPV, such as for example: the centrality of the qualities of the relationship that facilitators establish with the men; and negotiating the transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation to change.

3.9.5   Additional trustworthiness criteria

Additional criteria used in interpretive qualitative research that are coherent with the epistemological underpinnings of the present study have also been included in order to increase the persuasiveness of the analysis.

3.9.5.1   Credibility.

To increase credibility of the data, the present research has incorporated the strategy of 'prolonged engagement' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in order to gain an adequate understanding of the local context of interventions with men who use IPV, and establishing a relationship of trust with program workers. This involved: presenting at a national level conference on working with men who use IPV; observing various aspects of program provision through regular meetings with the agencies collaborating with the study; participating in group work; and developing familiarity with the NGO that sets standards and monitors the provision of programs for men locally. This approach provided the researcher with a richer understanding of the philosophy and the practices characterizing local MBCPs.

Regarding the credibility of analysis, this research included the use of 'external audit' through the participation of a female analyst with experience in narrative research, who independently analysed the data, which was de-identified so as to ensure participants' confidentiality. The interpretations produced by each analyst were

subsequently compared, providing a check on selective perception and blind interpretive bias, particularly regarding issues of gender (Patton, 1999). Implementing this procedure was not intended as a means for seeking true interpretations, but as a way to enrich the analysis through the discussion of alternative interpretations. In line with this purpose, the research also incorporated a 'peer debriefing process' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), via regular formal supervision and daily debriefing with the female research collaborator, allowing for the discussion and widening of emergent hypotheses, providing alternative approaches for emerging challenges and feedback on developing conceptualizations.

3.9.5.2   *Reflexivity.*

According to Brewer (2003), two different types of reflexivity can be found in qualitative research: descriptive reflexivity, which is concerned with the description and examination of the contingencies during the data collection as potential sources of bias on the outcome of the study, in order to provide a secure realist-like foundation to the research; and analytical reflexivity, which deals with the explanation of the processes by which understanding and interpretation were produced, and how any change in understanding from prior conceptions occurred. The latter, analytical reflexivity is widely considered as the most relevant practice for assuring rigour in qualitative interpretive research (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Berger, 2013; Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Denzin, 2001) ,and as a key feature of constructionist research (Gergen, 2001), involving the awareness and discussion of the meta-theoretical, theoretical and ideological assumptions brought by the researcher into the study (Bong, 2002; Horsburgh, 2003; McGhee et al., 2007).

Reflexivity is also conceived as another layer of the analysis (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000), requiring the positioning of the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), and the research to be subjected to the same critical analysis the researcher deploys when examining their topic (Schwandt, 2007). Creswell and Creswell (2007) suggest that this procedure entails the researcher's examination of their own experiences with the phenomenon being explored, and a discussion of how these experiences and previous knowledge shape their interpretation of the central phenomenon.

The present research has addressed issues pertaining the positioning of the researcher in the Chapter I, to provide a description of the context of the study. In addition, a research diary with personal notes taken during every stage of the research was used to foster ongoing reflexivity and critical self-awareness about the research process (Riessman, 2007). Personal notes and reflections were integrated into the conclusions of the research through the discussion of the influence of the researcher's position in generating and analysing the data, including professional background, gender and social status.

3.10   Establishing the research: Feasibility

Two previous research designs were discarded after evaluating their feasibility in the context of Victoria, Australia, with the research supervisor and the local NGO that is the Victorian state-wide peak body of organisations and individuals working with men to end their violence and abuse against family members. A mixed-method design was discarded on the basis that it requires a N>30 of men who desist from IPV, in a context where, according to the NGO, former clients of MBCPs are a considered a hard-to-reach population given that local MBPCs are not funded sufficiently to conduct regular follow-ups. Participatory action research was also discarded due to the need for collaboration between agencies posed by this type of approach, which contrasts with the highly fragmented and competitive status of the local sector (State of Victoria, 2016, p. 19). Consequently, qualitative case studies were considered the alternative of choice, as they typically involve small samples; which, in turn, increased both the research feasibility and ability to clarify an underexplored field of study.

Feasibility of the current research was determined through an exploration of the willingness to collaborate from a number of local MBCPs providers, including two regional areas in Victoria. Each program was contacted by the researcher, with the help of the NGO acting as peak body in the sector. Meetings were held with the program teams interested in participating in the research, in order to explain the aim of the research, and to collect feedback from the program teams for the recruitment process of the study. Notwithstanding the expectation of meeting the sample requirements for the proposed design, an alternative design excluding the comparison

between groups of men who desist from IPV and men who do not was also submitted to and approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee.

3.11 Ethical positioning

Since the research instrument in qualitative research is the person, confronting ethical issues represents the need for confronting the self of the researcher in terms of the choices made in constructing knowledge from a particular approach, taking into account the potential impact of these choices in the lives of people involved in the research (Soobrayan, 2003). In this sense, constructionist narrative research stresses the relevance of reflexivity concerning both methodological and ethical matters, requiring the researchers to "be open in disclosing their methods and honest in presenting their findings" (Bachman & Schutt, 2011).

Reflections on ethical issues for this study have been primarily based on the distinction, traced by Flinders (1992), between four frameworks that are useful for understanding the ethics of research and foreseeing ethical problems. While utilitarian and deontological frameworks represent a better match for protecting participants in positivist quantitative research; relational and ecological frameworks are considered best suited for the particular demands of qualitative research fieldwork and reporting. Nevertheless, both types have been addressed in the present research, given the institutional base upon which this research was situated. Particular attention was paid to ethical considerations of narrative research, and to the ethics of conducting research on IPV.

3.11.1 Ethics for qualitative research

Ethical issues regarding frameworks better suited for qualitative research were carefully considered in designing, conducting and reporting this study, encompassing specific considerations posed for narrative research and researching in IPV.

Relational ethics has been the most relevant framework for thinking about the ethics of the present research. This framework recommends locating moral reasoning "not in rules and obligations as such, but in our attachments and regards for others" (Flinders, 1992, p. 106). Research decisions were taken having in mind a caring attitude towards

participants and research collaborators (Gilligan, 1982). Particular attention was paid to constructing relationships of trust with participants, both for ethical and practical reasons. Narrative research technically requires endeavours to obtain data from genuine, empathetic and respectful relationships to the participants, about important and meaningful aspects of their lives. These relationships then drive the ethical mandate for the researcher to treat the material obtained through this approach with respect and compassion (Josselson, 2007). The concrete practice of respect and acceptance of the participant as a legitimate other (Maturana, Rowesin, Verden-Zöller, & Bunnell, 2008), for building what Josselson (2007) calls the 'implicit contract', was based on the researcher's clinical training and experience; which training and experience also played an important role in avoiding the imposition of ethical values and beliefs, and in confirming participants' best motives on the basis of a genuine interest in their individuality (Flinders, 1992).

Consistent with the relational ethics, reciprocity (Glazer, 1980) was also an integral part of the ethical approach of this study. A gift voucher of four times the national minimum wage per hour in Australia was given to participants at the end of the interview as compensation for the 2 to 3 hours they spent. Participants knew about the gift prior the interview, but they were not informed about the amount. Honest and open information to participants regarding the purpose of the study was also provided; however, this was delivered in two phases to prevent inducing the participants to take a particular stance at the beginning of the interview (Josselson, 2007). An overview of the purpose of the study was delivered during the first contact and at the beginning of the interview, and a full description of the research aim was supplied the end of the interview. In addition, participants were invited to reflect and comment on their experience of the interview before the end of the meeting.

Ecological ethics has been also relevant in conducting this research. The narrative approach to personal identity reinforced the consideration of individuals as constitutive parts of larger systems in which they are also constituted as individuals; and the focus on language enabled cultural sensitivity for individual variations within these conglomerates. More importantly, however, the research as a whole embodied ecological ethics as its main interest is in contributing to the prevention of relapse in IPV against women, increasing the awareness and proliferation of non-violent

masculinities, and advocating for men's voices to be heard in understanding how to best help them to desist from violence.

3.11.2 Utilitarian and deontological ethics

Despite this research being defined as a qualitative narrative inquiry, the utilitarian and deontological ethical frameworks, posed by a positivist quantitative understanding of the ethics of research associated with biomedical research, have been also met, as they are typically enforced by institutional research ethics committees (Josselson, 2007). Utilitarian ethics of research pose the need for examining decisions on the basis of positive and negative consequences for individuals, providing the rationale behind the informed consent, avoidance of harm, and confidentiality (Flinders, 1992). Approval for conducting the study was granted by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MURHEC) on September 2013, prior to the commencement of field work; and additional ethics applications were also granted by the Department of Human Services Centre for Human Services Research and Evaluation (DHSRE), the Kildonan Uniting Care Research Advisory Group (KRAG), and Latrobe Community Health Service Ethics Committee (LHS), before initiating the recruitment process (see appendix H). In all the reviews, the research informed consent document and procedure was required and examined (see appendix E); and avoidance of harm was assessed regarding the recruitment process, with particular attention given to the potential harm for men's partners or ex-partners, which was ultimately satisfied through the implementation of an indirect strategy of gaining women's reports of further IPV, as described in the section 3.10.1.1 addressing this research component. Interview setting and contents were also examined. Major concerns were raised, regarding the potential harm for the researcher, and the possibility of disclosure of further IPV during the interview, due to the stigmatization of men who use IPV as generally violent men. Requirements concerning these issues were met through restricting the conducting of the interviews to program facilities in order to safeguard the researcher's safety, and through the inclusion in the explanatory statement of the need to report to the MBCPs if further IPV was disclosed in interviews. Confidentiality conditions were met through the careful replacing of the names of persons and places in collected narratives, to prevent participants from being identified in the report and data storage.

From a deontological perspective, focusing on whether the research procedures conform to accepted codes of behaviour intended to protect participants and researchers, this research met the standards of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and distributive justice, enforced by The National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council, and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013); because these constitute the regulatory framework for both MURHEC and DHSRE regarding ethical standards for evaluating research projects involving humans.

3.11.3 *Ethics of researching with perpetrators of IPV*

Ethics have been considered as part of the research in its aim (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and in the way it was conducted (Josselson, 2007); but also in its particular condition of researching with men who perpetrated IPV. The researcher has thought through and given reasonable consideration to the possible effects the interview and entire inquiry could have on participants, on the basis of his background as clinical psychologist working with men who use IPV and his experience as a researcher in this field. Specific relevance was given to the ethical stance encouraging research on violence and abuse to support men involved in the use IPV to make changes and choices in their lives, through the provision of opportunities to reflect on their lives throughout the research process (Downes, Kelly, & Westmarland, 2014). The narrative interview and interview setting used in the present study purposefully promoted these opportunities for participants to reflect on their lives as a whole, supporting accountability and encouraging imagined futures as possible life projects free from violence.

3.12   Sampling

Desistence from IPV appears as an outstanding outcome, in the context of the body of research showing that relapse is the expected outcome for MBCPs (Eckhardt et al., 2013). Therefore, men who desist from IPV can be considered as an extreme or deviant case in this context. Consequently, extreme-case or deviant-case sampling (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009) was the guiding principle for the sampling strategy of this research. Selecting men with the experience of desistance from IPV, which can

also be understood as a purposive sample, has the potential to teach greater lessons about this under-studied phenomenon (Patton, 1990). Moreover, according to Creswell and Creswell (2013), a good life-history study carefully selects the research participants by looking at their representativeness. In the present research, the implementation of purposive sampling of extreme cases facilitated enormously the selection of participants from a difficult-to-reach population (Nakhid & Shorter, 2014).

Participants chosen for a narrative research must be an appropriate sample to meet the particular criteria established by the research question, so that the aim of the research can be achieved (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). Although the main research question could have been answered by sampling only men who desist from IPV, the researcher considered that much more could be learnt if the life stories for men who desist from IPV were compared with those of men who do not desist. Furthermore, the narrative approach taken in this research fitted well with this purpose, since comparative issues are a relevant dimension for selecting a particular method (Davies, 2006), and narrative method enables the comparison among groups and individuals (Lieblich et al., 1998).

In narrative research, according the aim of a particular study, the sample can be homogeneous, including individuals who have similar experiences and characteristics, or heterogeneous, involving people that vary from each other regarding the phenomena of interest (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). While the main focus of the present research is to understand desistance from IPV, subsidiary questions are raised attempting to identify differences between the identities construed by men who desist from IPV and men who do not desist from IPV; making the heterogeneous sample the best suited type for this inquiry. This sampling strategy was intended to maximise the potential for within-group and cross-group comparisons (Lacy, 1997).

3.12.1 Sampling Procedures

In narrative studies, the researcher needs to demonstrate that the participants have the particular knowledge and experience of the phenomenon examined (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). According to Maruna (2001), to desist from something, one

"needs to have been a quite regular participant in the activity" (p. 46). In the present study, this was defined as having been involved in one or more years of monthly use of IPV prior to getting involved in MBCP, according to the program's report. Conversely, desistance from IPV was initially established as twelve months of being violence-free, according to the Feld and Straus (1989) criteria. However, given the difficulties expressed by MBCPs in contacting former clients, the criteria was loosened to no less than six months violence free since program completion.

3.12.1.1 Women voices

Literature examining the impact of MBCPs point out the lack of women's reports as one of the most common methodological flaws of this type of study (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005; Eckhardt et al., 2006; Gondolf, 2004); this being also a regular weakness of research looking at the change process of men who use IPV, as these have tended to rely only on men's and facilitator's reports for establishing cessation of abuse (Pandya & Gingerich, 2002; Scott & Wolfe, 2000; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Women's reports have been considered as the most credible approach for establishing the cessation of violence (Eckhardt et al., 2013; Westmarland, 2012). Consequently, and as a way to enhance the credibility of the study, the present research relied on women's reporting of violence cessation, gained through the partner contact worker of each program, as the selection criteria for participants recruited for the group of men who desist from IPV. Once potential participants were identified by each program among former clients, men's partners were contacted telephonically by the program's workers in order to check if they have experienced further IPV after the men's discharge from the program. Only men whose partner reported cessation of violence since the men's discharge from program were selected for the study. Women who reported further violence were referred by program's partner contact worker to appropriate intervention programs and legal aid within the local network.

3.12.1.2 Recruitment of men who desist from IPV

Once the ethical approvals were obtained from MURHEC, DHSRE, KRAG, and LHS, the researcher approached MBCPs participating in the study to explain the nature of

the research and its expected outcomes. Program workers were informed about the reasons and details of the recruitment process, and were asked to form a list of potential participants for the group of men who desist from IPV. Potential participant's partners and ex-partners were contacted via a partner contact worker in each MBCP, in order to confirm that the potential participant met the criteria of being violence free since program completion. Only men confirmed by their partner or ex-partner as desisting from IPV were contacted later by program workers in order to explore their willingness to participate in the study; which study was described as aimed at collecting and comparing life stories of men who attend and attended MBCPs to understand how they view themselves. There was no mention of the gift for the participants at this stage. Potential participants who expressed their interest in joining the research were asked for permission to pass their name and telephone number to the researcher.

At the moment of the first telephonic contact with the researcher, potential participants heard the full explanatory statement and had the opportunity to clarify their understanding of this and of their participation in the research. Only those who decided to take part in the study were invited for the interview, which was arranged to be held at the facilities of the program they attended. Before initiating the interview, the researcher was personally introduced to the volunteers by program workers at the MBCP's facilities. Then, in a private room, the volunteer was formally informed about the research. The explanatory statement of the research was delivered and discussed, stressing the potential risks and benefits of the research, and highlighting also the limits to researcher confidentiality and the need to report to the MBCPs any disclosing of further family violence during the interview (see appendix C and D). Only after gaining informed consent to participate confidentially in the study, did the interview began. Consent was orally re-checked at the end of the interview.

3.12.1.3   Recruitment of men who do not desist from IPV

Men who do not desist from IPV were identified by MBCPs facilitators among men who had been involved in one or more years of monthly use of IPV prior to entering the intervention program, and who, according to the facilitator's perception, were likely to participate in the research by sharing their story. The recent use of IPV was

established by drawing on the men's self-reporting within MBCP work. Potential participants were approached by program facilitators to let them know about the research and to pass them the researcher's contact details; so that men who were interested in taking part in the research could contact the researcher to arrange a preliminary meeting at the program facilities. Interviews were conducted at the program facilities according to the same procedure described for the group of men who desist from IPV.

3.12.1.4   Sample size

Sampling in narrative research can rely on a very small number of people, as depth rather than breadth in data collection is sought (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). According to Patton (Patton, 2002) the "validity, meaningfulness and insights of qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size.' (p. 245). In narrative research, the sample size depends on the phenomenon or group under study and the rationale of the research (Riessman, 2007). Although a narrative approach to sampling does not demand that the sample be saturated, as it should be in grounded theory, a larger sample size is needed when various groups of people are involved in the research, as in heterogeneous sampling.

Although the present study was designed as contemplating two groups of eight participants each, the difficulties of recruiting participants, associated with the scarcity of personnel to conduct follow-ups with former clients in MBCPs, extended the recruiting process well beyond the time expected. Given the time constraints associated with the realization of this study, the recruitment was ended when this reached one year of extension. As a result, six participants for the group of men who desist from IPV and five men who do not desist from IPV were interviewed.

3.13   Participants' demographics

3.13.1 Men who desist from IPV

The demographics for the group of men non-desisting from IPV are displayed in Table 3.1. The group included five participants, whose average age was 41 (SD = 6.6).

Two of them had a fulltime job, and the remainder varied between having a precarious employment to no employment and receiving government aid. Three men completed technical tertiary studies, one had incomplete technical tertiary studies, and one had an incomplete secondary education.

Our participants of this group were living with their partners (who reported IPV against themselves) and children at the time of the interview, and one was living with his mother, having regular contact with his daughter. Persisters had two or three children, with an average age of 14.4. Desisters' partners' average age was 42.6, and exhibited diverse backgrounds: two were Australian-Italian, one Indian, one Turkish, and one Japanese. All but one participants' partners had part-time jobs.

Men reported various health conditions before entering the program: three reported alcohol and drug abuse only, and one drug abuse and a disabling physical illness with chronic pain. Three men stated having stopped alcohol and drug abuse prior to entering the program, and a fourth revealed alcohol abuse during the interview, although he did not recognize it as a problem, reporting being in psychiatric treatment for a sleeping disorder.

Four of the five men attended the MBCP by court mandate, and one voluntarily. One man reported having participated in a parenting re-education program in parallel with MBCP. Persisters' average time since their intake into the program was 2.9 months. However, it is important to note that they greatly varied in this respect: while one man was in his first month of attendance, others had already finished the program two months before the interview.

Table 3.1 Demographics of group of men who desist from IPV

Participant Code Name	Age	Employment	Highest Level of Education	Partnership Situation	Background	Partner age	N° children	Previous interventions	Health issues	Referral	Months since comple- tion
Steve	49	No	Incomplete secondary	Partnered living with children	Australian	48	2	Gambling Anonymous Psychiatrist	Bipolar depression	Court	12
Daniel	46	Part-time	Incomplete secondary	Single living alone	Australian	48	1	MBCP, IPV anger management, Counselling, Alcohol abuse	Alcohol & Drugs abuse	Voluntary	12
Harry	41	No	Incomplete secondary	Partnered living with children	Australian	38	1	IPV anger management, Men's chat group	Back pain	Voluntary	7
Neil	45	No	Incomplete secondary	Single living with children	Greek	41	2	MBCP, Drug abuse	Drugs abuse	Voluntary	7
Mason	41	Full-time	TAFE	Partnered living with children	South African	46	2	Psychotherapy, Psychiatric Intervention	Depression	Court	25
Matt	37	Full-time	Incomplete primary	Partnered living apart	Australian	37	6	Correction, Alcohol abuse	Alcohol abuse	Comm. Health	8

Table 3.2 Demographics of group of men who do not desist from IPV

Participant Code Name	Age	Employment	Highest Level of Education	Partnership Situation	Background	Partner age	N° children	Previous interventions	Health issues	Referral	Months since intake
Veer	37	Fulltime	TAFE	Partnered, with partner and children	Indian	34	1	Alcohol abuse, Sleeping disorder	Alcohol abuse	Court	4
Tony	42	No	Incomplete secondary	Separated, living with his mother	Italian	42	3	No	Alcohol & Drugs abuse, arthritis	Court	2
Sami	46	Part-time	TAFE	Partnered, living with partner and children	Turkish	45	3	Parenting program	Alcohol abuse	Court	1.5
Robert	54	No	Incomplete TAFE	Partnered, living with partner and children	Australian	44	2	Correction	Alcohol & Drugs abuse	Voluntary	1
Damian	50	Fulltime	TAFE	Partnered, living with partner and children	Maltese	48	3	Couple therapy	No	Court	6

3.13.2 Men who do not desist from IPV

The demographics for the group of men non-desisting from IPV are displayed in Table 3.2. The group included five participants, whose average age was 41 (SD = 6.6). Two of them had a fulltime job, and the remainder varied between having a precarious employment to no employment and receiving government aid. Three men completed technical tertiary studies, one had incomplete technical tertiary studies, and one had an incomplete secondary education.

Four participants of this group were living with their partners (who reported IPV against themselves) and children at the time of the interview, and one was living with his mother, having regular contact with his daughter. Persisters had two or three children, with an average age of 14.4. Desisters' partners' average age was 42.6, and exhibited diverse backgrounds: two were Australian-Italian, one Indian, one Turkish, and one Japanese. All but one participants' partners had part-time jobs.

Men reported various health conditions before entering the program: three reported alcohol and drug abuse only, and one drug abuse and a disabling physical illness with chronic pain. Three men stated having stopped alcohol and drug abuse prior to entering the program, and a fourth revealed alcohol abuse during the interview, although he did not recognize it as a problem, reporting being in psychiatric treatment for a sleeping disorder.

Four of the five men attended the MBCP by court mandate, and one voluntarily. One man reported having participated in a parenting re-education program in parallel with MBCP. Persisters' average time since their intake into the program was 2.9 months. However, it is important to note that they greatly varied in this respect: while one man was in his first month of attendance, others had already finished the program two months before the interview.

3.14 Data collection

3.14.1 Producing life stories: The life narrative interview

Although life stories can be accessed through documents and archives, the individual face-to-face interview is the most common way for approaching life stories in narrative research (Lieblich & Josselson, 1997; Riessman, 2012). Qualitative interviews have been regularly categorised in literature as unstructured, semi-structured, and structured (Fontana, 2005). Whereas unstructured interviews are mostly used in ethnography, accompanied with field notes, other qualitative approaches tend to rely on semi-structured interviews as the sole data source, being usually scheduled in advance and carried out outside of everyday events (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), as was done in the present research.

In life-narrative research, "the phenomenon to be observed is likely to be a set of psychologically rich and detailed autobiographical stories, often derived from interviews of people who are biographically involved with the phenomenon of interest" (McAdams, 2011a, p. 17). The life story interview can be considered as a form of semi-structured interview, and as the best way for accessing life story data (Platt, 2012). Nevertheless, life story data is not necessarily a life story or a personal narrative. Despite the considerable variation in the definitions of personal narrative in social research, most researchers accept that oral narrative refers to a broad class of discourse types, in which the 'story' is one particular type (Riessman, 2012). According to Riessman (2012), the defining features that differentiate narrative from other interview discourses such as brief question-and-answer exchanges, expository statements of beliefs, chronicles, and other speech acts, is that "narratives are a sequence of ordered events that are connected in a meaningful way for a particular audience in order to make sense of the world or people's experience in it" (p. 370).

What is important in conducting interviews aimed at producing life-story narrations is to promote the telling of a story (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000) as a fairly complete narration "of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects" (Atkinson, 2012, p. 119). Although the act of telling a story is considered simple and natural (Bruner, 1991) and story-telling appears to follow universal rules guiding the process of story making (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978;

Labov & Waletzky, 1997), interviews should take care in addressing both the chronological dimension, as a sequence of events, and the non-chronological dimension, encompassing the creation of a whole from successive events (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Moreover, as narrators in their life story can construct a synchronic sense of self through the positioning of themselves as similar or different to other characters in their internal (psychological) attributes, and a diachronic sense of self by contrasting their different identities of self over time and space, when researching personal identity it is central to encourage the diachronic sense of self, since the navigation of the continuity/discontinuity dilemma is considered the most relevant aspect of identity formation and identity change in narrative research (Bamberg, 2011). Life-story narratives are an effective means of gaining an understanding of how the self evolves over time, and positions in society, culture, and history (Atkinson, 2012).

Although "personal narratives can emerge at unexpected moments in research interviews, even in response to fixed-response questions" (Riessman, 2012, p. 336), narrative researchers interested in personal identity have developed the narrative interview as a specific technique for eliciting storytelling and enabling narrative data collection (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). "The narrative interview envisages a setting that encourages and stimulates an interviewee to tell a story about some significant event in their life and social context" (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 58), producing a first-person text, in the words of the storyteller, which can be examined through the lens of any theory or research question applied to it; where the relevant issue, beyond the historical facts, is how people see themselves at this point in their lives and want others to see them (Atkinson, 2012). Narrative research demands taking care to not direct the participant's attention to a particular phenomenon that the researcher wants to study. "If one wants to know how a particular experience is interwoven in a participant's life, narrative research technique often mandates asking about the life rather than the experience" (Josselson, 2007, p. 540). Through this approach to the interview, the researcher is able to reduce the contextualization of the participant's live narratives from the specific experience, which may ultimately hamper the understanding of the experience in the context of the participant's lives.

McAdams (McAdams, 1985a; McAdams, 1985b, 1993) developed a life-story interview protocol as a template designed to facilitate life-story narrations for inquiries aimed at understanding personal identity formation and evolution. This protocol has been adapted for use in a range of topics, such as life transitions (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; McAdams et al., 2001), developmental psychology (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), happiness (Bauer et al., 2008), and desistance from offending (Carlsson, 2012; Maruna, 1997). This study used an adapted version of McAdams' life story interview (McAdams, 2008) to produce the participant's life story narrations (see appendix F), because of: its appropriateness for facilitating the sequencing of the entire experience of life as a whole; for highlighting the most important aspects of the life story of the person; for addressing its chronological and non-chronological dimensions; for addressing the continuity/discontinuity dilemma; and for being empirically proven as a useful tool in the exploration of a variety of phenomena related to the formation and evolution of personal identity across the lifespan.

3.14.2 Relationship between participants and researcher

The literature warns that doing a life-story interview is not purely a technical issue that can be solved with a guiding template. It demands both art and science to develop the required collaborative context that facilitates a rich and fluid storytelling (Atkinson, 2012), as well as an ethical awareness of the considerations regarding the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Josselson, 2007).

The relationship between the researcher and the participants is of major importance for both ethical and practical reasons. For practical reasons, the participants should feel confident in the situation and not in awe of the researcher or the research implications for them. Trust and rapport must be developed in order to generate reciprocity, which is central for research purposes, as only through a collaborative relational circumstance can the researcher and participants create narrative meaning (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). Only by means of an empathetic, nonjudgmental and emotionally responsive attitude from the interviewer, can sensitive memories and affect-laden data be disclosed, in that "the greater the degree of rapport and trust, the greater the degree of self-revealing" (Josselson, 2007, p. 539). For ethical reasons, the material obtained through this relationship of trust should be treated with respect and

compassion, according to the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982) that often guide most narrative research (Josselson, 2007), as explained in the section 3.9.1 regarding ethical issues above.

The researcher relied on his extensive experience as an MBCP facilitator and case manager in working with men who use IPV, and his experience and training as a clinical psychologist, to ensure the appropriate building of the needed collaborative, empathetic and emotionally-responsive context for the conducting of the interviews, while guiding the sequentialized and fluid telling of the life story. It is worth mentioning that no questions about the origin of participant's IPV or about the cause or process of desisting from IPV were raised, in order to avoid inducing the telling of narratives created around this experience or about the influence of the program in this, and as a way to privilege the understanding of how desisting from IPV was interwoven in the participant's life (Josselson, 2007).

3.15   Data analysis

According to Patton (2002), the essence of data analysis is turning "raw data into knowledge" (p.432). In qualitative research in general, and in narrative inquiry in particular, this process requires interpretation (Riessman, 2007). Interpretation involves developing codes, formation of themes from the codes, and organizing themes into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2013).

Given the under-studied nature of the phenomenon of desistance from IPV, and the interest of the present research in understanding this and developing a conceptual model of desistance from IPV, the general analytic approach taken in this study was open-ended, exploratory, and discovery-oriented (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007). The analysis was textually oriented (Bamberg, 2012), with a thematic approach (Riessman, 2007), guided by shared-story grammars (Bamberg, 2012), and proceeding on the basis of the constant-comparative method of themes and plots identified in the transcribed narratives (McAdams, 2011a; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The analysis involved a careful listening of the participants' narratives during the interview, an exhaustive verbatim transcription of the interviews, and the regular reading and re-reading of transcribed interview texts (Riessman, 2007). The collaboration of the second analyst commenced once the de-identified transcription of the interview was completed. Transcribed, de-identified life narratives were first examined by looking at each participant's life story as a whole, by each analyst separately. This resulted in the posing of an initial understanding about the point of the story, its general plot, central themes, and the personal identity claimed by the interviewee. Results of this stage were compared and discussed between the analysts in order to reach consensual understanding of the story features mentioned - often requiring joint reading of specific passages of the life narratives - before moving to the next participant's life story.

As a second step, stories that make up the life narrative as a whole were identified by each analyst for each participant, according to Labov's and Waletzky's (1997) five narrative structural features, since these stories are considered as conceptual units that speakers and story comprehenders bring to the telling situation as universal templates to make the story particulars fit (Bamberg, 2012; Bruner, 2001). These include an *abstract* of the story, followed by an *orientation* (or setting description), followed by the *complication* (also known as crisis or problem), that leads to an *action* (or orientation to the resolution), resulting in the *resolution* (or failure to solve the problem/crisis), finishing with a *coda* (closure) (Bamberg, 2012). Themes and plots of each identified story within the life narrative were derived from the text, and were extracted in a bottom-up manner as inferences from extended passages of text, through repeated readings of the whole interview and the specific story; keeping a running tally of tentative inferences (McAdams, 2011a), while examining the part-whole relationship in a top-down manner to make sense of their connection (Bamberg, 2012). Themes were identified and coded using participants' own language. Stories were also interrogated in terms of the narrator's masculine positioning, ascribed agency, expressed values, and story evaluation, and were also coded using participants' own language. Results of this phase were also discussed between the analysts in order to reach a consensual understanding of the coded themes and the meaning of the sequences. Derived themes and plots were supported by verbatim textual examples, using Excel software as data manager. Subsequently, the identity

claims generated in the first step of the analysis were reviewed and modified in the light of these results. An outline of the coding process performed for each interview is summarized in Figure 3.1, adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2013, p. 207).

Figure 3.1 Coding process for each interview
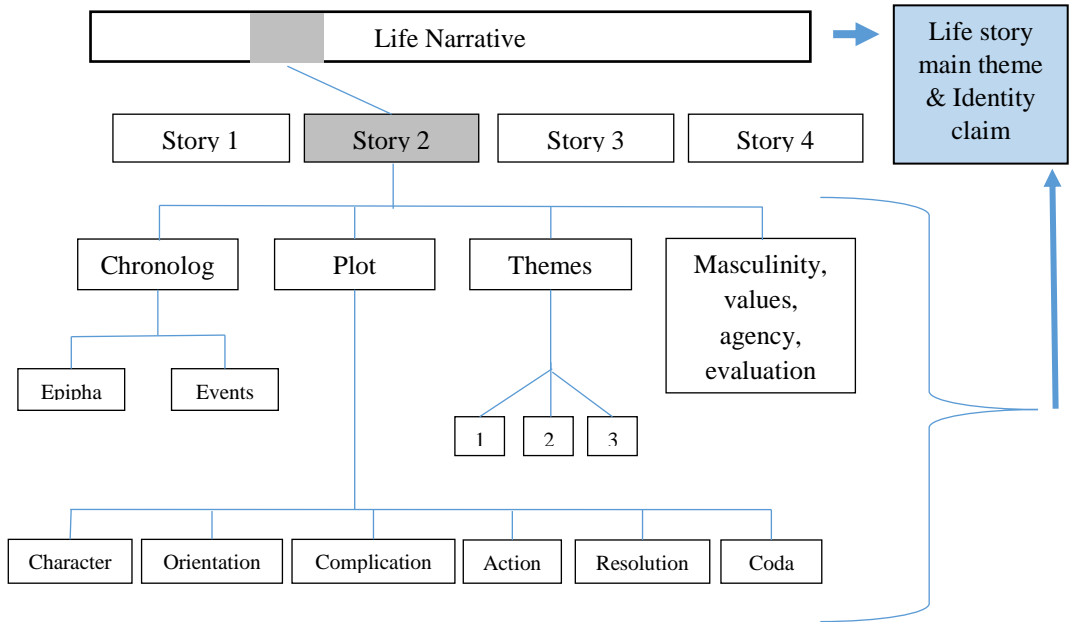
The large amount of data produced turned out to be difficult to handle when attempting multiple comparisons between individuals and groups. However, at this point there was no more guidance to be found in the literature on how to represent the narrative data to allow for cross-case examinations. A crafted method for representing the data was therefore developed. After testing a variety of approaches, including the use of data management software ATLAS Ti, entering of the data resulting from the analysis of the narrative components and the overall story into an individual massive datasheet per participant proved to be the most practical solution to allow for the display of all the data in one view. The juxtaposing of the printed sheets of each individual facilitated the cross-individual comparison and cross group-comparison.

Prototypical portraits of desistance and persistence of IPV were constructed through a constant comparative method (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Emerging portraits of desistance and persistence from IPV were contrasted with and improved by subsequent within-group and cross-group comparisons (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Building on Maruna's approach to narrative analysis (2001), deductive and comparative analyses of themes and plots between the two groups was conducted in order to identify the common features of the narratives that are unique to men who desist from IPV, the characteristics of the narratives that are common or unique for men who do not desist from IPV, and the aspects of the narratives that are common for both groups.

As discussed in this chapter, the impetus for this research stems from the detected gap in the knowledge pertaining to the change process of men who cease IPV. However, the research journey did not start from a vacuum, but from a specific position: the epistemological principles of the constructionist narrative approach set the boundaries of what is considered as legitimate inquiry and warrantable knowledge in this study. Therefore, the knowledge produced in this research is interpretative and situated. Moreover, the specific design of this research to produce this knowledge was shaped by a general interest in understanding the subjective experiences of men who desist from IPV, and how these relate to their socio-cultural surroundings. This interest, in turn, was moulded by the theoretical underpinnings discussed earlier; resulting in a comparative study aimed at understanding how men negotiate a sense of self and a masculinity positioning, when desisting from IPV.

CHAPTER IV:
FINDINGS ON NON-DESISTING MEN

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter the analysis of the life stories of men who persist with IPV are presented. Given the cross-sectional nature of this research, the dynamic nature of desistance process, and that people "in the real world do not tend to fall into the neat dichotomies of desisters-persisters" (Maruna, 2001 p. 43), one might instead refer to these participants as 'men who have not desisted from IPV yet'; but for ease of reference they will be subsequently referred as 'persisters'.

The general aim of the analysis is to understand how persisters construct their personal identity through the telling of their life stories. To this end, the analysis focuses on identifying themes and plots that they articulate in the navigating of continuities and discontinuities in their personal identity. The analysis interrogates the role played by these continuities and discontinuities in the course of events they describe in each life story section and in their life stories as a whole, and how the themes and plots articulating identity claims relate to prevalent cultural discourses and narrative structures.

The analysis of the interviews is divided in two major sections, mirroring the interview structure. The first section, entitled 'Accounting for the Immediate Present', addresses the persisters' accounts of their current circumstances, and is organised along the lines of the different themes that emerged from the analysis. The second section, entitled 'Life Stories Accounts', is disaggregated according to the different major life stages accounted for by persisters, and the themes and plots that emerged from the analysis of each life stage. While each section involves the quotation of specific narrative and non-narrative segments, to exemplify how each theme was narrated, the different categories within each section identify the meanings of the quoted narratives and excerpts. All the co-produced narratives are used in the analysis; however, some participant narratives are followed with greater detail, in order to highlight the narrative flow.

4.2   Accounting for the immediate present

Persisters introduced themselves using both narrative and non-narrative genres. They informed of and commented on their job status, family situation, cultural background, involvement in MBCP, their current situation, and the reasons for attending the interview; following disparate sequences in these themes (demographics for this group are displayed in Table 2, Chapter III). Persisters commonly resorted to the narrative genre to account for their occupation and their involvement in MBCP.

4.2.1   Working men

Persisters' inclination to talk about their occupation was a salient feature of their self-introductions, evidencing the relevance of this theme for their identities. Employed persisters described their occupation by providing brief narrative accounts about their working trajectory, whilst unemployed men focused on their need and struggle to find a new job. Tony's narrative exemplifies the struggle for work:

> *I'm unemployed. I did get to Centrelink but it was too hard. I went there and I spent about four hours there and I still couldn't work out how to get in there. When I went there I had to go into the computer and I got no computers skills, I'm a computer illiterate, it made me just too nervous there, so I didn't worry about it. I was supposed to go back and see them, but I never went. It's just pretty hard for me, I just looked for a job by myself.*

4.2.2   Family situation

Persisters complemented their self-introduction by talking in non-narrative ways about their family situation, juxtaposing partnership, fatherhood, and the housing situation. The thin descriptions they provided for this area of their life contrasted with the more elaborated descriptions of their work activities.

4.2.3   Cultural background

Many persisters also addressed their cultural background, positioning themselves as migrants or migrant-descendants fully integrated into the Australian society. They

resorted to the narrative genre to explain their arrival, or the arrival of their parents, to Australia.

4.2.4 Involvement in MBCP

Except for Veer, all persisters accounted for the circumstances that led them to attend a MBCP. A salient feature of these narratives was the early positioning of persisters regarding the self-attributed agency in seeking for help. The following excerpts illustrate this:

> *Robert: Oh, you know, like basically, I threw something to my wife and hit her and it cut her, and it distressed her and it distressed me. I was extremely distressed and shocked. Not so much that I expressed anger or aggression, but just that I hurt her in that way; and so I didn't know what to do and didn't know how to experience it, and didn't know whether I should go to the doctor or what to do. So I called Men's Referral, men's line, men's help line I guess and I just spoke to someone, and basically went through what happened with the guy. And one thing leads to another, and he gave me a number, I called the program a couple of times. I was kind of pretty upset when I was talking to them and I just wanted something, the next thing to grab onto and to move towards some kind of resolution I guess.*

> *Sami: Well, it's bee up and down with my wife for a few years, and then… The worse thing that you can do is to have alcohol, because it fuels the anger. So just have a bit of um, I have a bit of too much drink one night, and… The kids were around but noticed no difference, because I was interested in my computer, having a drink, watching stuff. Um, I got a bit drunk; too drunk, and then my wife... We had a big, big fight. My oldest daughter got scared and called the police. And I ended up here.*

These excerpts reflect the distinctive ways in which these men addressed their violent behaviour and subsequent involvement in MBCP. While Robert recognized his action as aggressive and hurtful for his wife, positioning himself as an active agent that looked for help 'to move towards a resolution', Sami portrayed his use of violence as being the result of alcohol consumption within a symmetric confrontation with his wife, where the police intervention led him to end "up here" (at MBCP), reflecting his

self-positioning as being not responsible for his violent behaviour and as a passive agent regarding help seeking.

4.2.5 Evaluations of current situation

Persisters ended their introductory narratives with evaluative statements about their current situation; which, in the context of their life stories as a whole, appeared to be associated with their expectations for a personal change. Sami and Robert, who subsequently claimed the need for change, evaluated their present as slightly better than their non-distant past, suggesting that they saw their involvement in MBCP as the beginning of an expected positive change in their lives. Sami's account illustrates this:

> *I've tried to change my behaviour towards them now. Like, my youngest daughter is now screaming a lot; I think is all those feelings now she is just feeling, and the frustration and anger. I'm trying to talk to her now, (when) I see she's angry and wants to scream I always call her and say, what's wrong? I'm angry. Well, because you're angry you don't have to scream. That's what I'm trying to do now <laughter> just trying to communicate with them more; from what I've learning from here.*

Contrastingly, Tony and Damian, who subsequently claimed to have already changed, evaluated their current situation as worse than their non-distant past. Tony's account exemplifies this:

Since the separation with my ex-partner I sort of don't care about my health; but my work: I've worked all of my life and I don't know other way to live. I'm living with my mum now. She's sixty-two. I'm not happy about that situation… No other choice at the moment until we come free from solicitors and sell the house with my ex-partner… I'm not in a good spot at the moment.

Persisters who evaluated their life conditions as worse than before seemed not to expect the MBCP to contribute to improving their current situation. This is not surprising in the case of Damian, who was discharged from the program at the time of the interview; but for Tony, who was commencing MBCP, this pessimism seemed to be related the centrality of finding a job as his more pressing need and his apparent

discarding of any chance to get back with his ex-partner. Veer, the only man who claimed to not need to change, evaluated his current circumstances as not good, although not worse than his recent past.

4.2.6   Why persisters participated in the study

Although persisters argued different reasons for attending the interview, they all demonstrated interest in taking some personal benefit from it. While Veer seemed interested in the gift offered as compensation for his contribution to the study, the remaining persisters expressed therapeutic expectations from the interview. Tony's statement exemplifies this:

> *I think this could help me to get some lessons. I think is going to benefit me.*

Through their self-introduction, persisters were able to position themselves synchronically, differentiating and associating themselves from and with others at the same time: they were working men - or job-concerned men - with particular cultural backgrounds, who had recently experienced an acute life-crisis involving their partners and families, for which they held different degrees of responsibility. This life-crisis somehow led them - or forced them - to attend an MBCP.

Persisters portrayed themselves as men aware of their circumstances and evaluative regarding the programs they were attending, demonstrating a personal purpose for attending the research interview. Their self-introductions functioned as the initial orientation for their life stories, since they highlighted information they considered relevant to have in mind in order to understand the story about to begin.

4.3   Life story accounts

Persisters segmented their life stories into several chapters, structured around themes associated with particular stages of their lives and themes running throughout their life stories as a whole. They focused their narratives from childhood to early adulthood on the origin and development of their idiosyncratic characteristics; whereas narratives of adult life focused on the evolution of their relational and social

circumstances, and the impact of their idiosyncratic characteristics in these. They described a progressive decline leading to a dramatic downfall, which ended up with the men attending MBCP, and holding different perspectives about the resolution of their life-story.

4.3.1 Childhood to early adulthood

4.3.1.1 The origin of the self

Persisters resorted to the narrative mode to account for their childhood, adolescence and early adulthood as the most influential time in their lives in terms of their idiosyncratic characteristics. While Damian, Robert and Sami regarded their childhood as negative, and constructed this as the origin of their psychological problems, Tony and Veer regarded their childhood as 'happy', but accounted for a subsequent deterioration process, associated with drugs and alcohol abuse, that they located in their adolescence and emergent adulthood. Persisters added a second component in the formation of their self by accounting for the acquisition of a world view composed by a series of beliefs and practices related to the use of violence and gender relations, resulting from the influence of their social context between childhood and emerging adulthood.

4.3.1.1.1 The Inner Self

In their narratives of childhood and adolescence, persisters accounted for two different sources of their inner self. Men who claimed to have had a bad childhood built an understanding around their emotional trauma, whereas men who accounted for a good childhood constructed an understanding of their inner self based on innate dispositions.

Emotional trauma

Persisters who accounted for a bad childhood described a rapid decline in their life conditions in terms of affection and security, describing events where they were victimized or neglected. They considered those events in their lives as the cause of

their psychological deficits, which they portrayed as a set of personal vulnerabilities explaining their inability to cope with affective interpersonal problems and adverse life circumstances. These deficits also assisted them in understanding their subsequent use of violence against their partner. Sami's narrative exemplifies this:

> *Around this time my uncle and auntie got married, but they can't have kids; over two years they cannot have kids. (Then) my mother gets pregnant again and she says she wants a girl, she doesn't want to have another kid. My auntie says I cannot have any kids. If is a boy, can I have him? And my mother says; if is a boy, you can have him.*
>
> *(…) (My parents) basically left me there (…) and my auntie looked after me like their own (child), and good feeding, doctors, and all those sort of things and I survived. I've got out of the sickness and I'm three, four years old. I believed they're my parents, so I don't know the truth at this stage.*
>
> *(…) My auntie then has her first daughter, then another daughter and then a son, later on. But because she had kids my parents say: okay, now you have kids, now give my son back. Probably in 1973-74. My auntie says no, I now brought him up like my own son. So anyway, my parents came back and said we want our kid back; they (uncles) said no; then they went to court.*
>
> *(…) I don't know if the whole thing starts from here … of rejection, not to be rejected, not really wanting to be in a relationship, not wanting people to get close. That's what my problem is to that. That's why I'm here … of me being so jealous of my wife, my insecurities of being abandoned. That's probably what my problem with my wife is related to that.*

In these excerpts from a detailed story, Sami invites us into his remote past to explain how the actions of his parents caused him to develop his fear of rejection, which he regarded as the origin of his insecurities, and which, from his perspective, have caused the controlling and abusive behaviour towards his wife that led him to be referred to the program. Sami later reveals his expectation to address his insecurities through MBCP, something he made explicit at the end of his interview.

Emotional trauma constituted a critical theme for the persisters who accounted for a bad childhood to make sense of the impact of negative early-life events. They claimed this trauma to be the most salient feature of their self. Robert's narrative serves to illustrate this perspective:

> *My father had an affair with my mother's friend. My brother walked in on them having sex. That caused lot of problems and then became a domestic violence situation. They both (used violence), my father physically. This was a very traumatic experience for my whole family; many fights for a number of months, and alcohol; my father.*

> *The way I remember it was: my mother and father arguing and me and my brother sort of coming very distressed and saying stop this, stop this! Sort of intervening. I threw a cup to my dad one night because I used to kind of take sides; my mother's side I guess. And one night my next brother two years older threatened my father with a gun. (...) And my father; he has other children, he left, and when he left, when my mother and father separated and suddenly my family broke up (...)*

Robert reviews the events he considers as being the beginning of the decline in his life. His father's violence against his mother was a "traumatic experience" for him and his family. He explains how the "family violence situation" escalated to the use of weapons, and ended up with his family breaking up. He arranges this situation in his narrative as the cause for the events he recounts later:

> *I was often away from school and when I was there I was, I was antagonistic towards teachers and I just disconnecting and becoming a very aggressive individual, 'cos I'm hurting, because my family is falling apart and there is nothing I can do about it.*

Robert accounts for the impact that the family violence and subsequent family break up had in his life: he disconnected from school and became aggressive because he was "hurting":

> *I broke into a house and stole a jar with fudges and coins in it, and went to the local shop and bought cigarettes and lollies. I was thirteen years old, the cops came to my family's house in the night. Went to children's*

> *court a couple of times, I remember. I had to go to probation at least*
> *twice, maybe three times before fourteen.*

The implicit lack of support in Robert's narrative is dramatized by the contrasting punitive response he received to the emergent antisocial behaviour he storied as the result of his trauma. This lack of support in a critical moment of his life is constructed as the turning point towards an aimlessness life of offences and drug abuse.

Selecting sequences of negative early-life events allowed persisters to claim an inner self moulded by traumatic circumstances out of their control, which they used to navigate the diachronic sense of self. They resorted to the notion of emotional trauma to construct both subsequent actions and subjective responses to life events, as if they were the expression of a set of lasting nuclear components of their self that they were unable to fully understand and control. Robert's statement serves as an example of this:

> *I had post traumatic distress. I'm fucked up individual. But I didn't even*
> *know it. I didn't even know what sort of trauma was in my head.*

Innate dispositions

The two persisters who regarded their childhood as good also resorted to psychological understandings to navigate their diachronic sense of self. However, unlike persisters who claimed a traumatic childhood to make sense of their self and abusive behaviour, these men resorted to notions of innate dispositions. While one relied on notions of personality traits, the other resorted to the idea of human basic needs.

The black sheep. Tony stated that he was regarded as the 'black sheep' of his family since early in his life. He accounted for a sequence of stories of misbehaviour during his childhood and adolescence, characterized by rule breaking, poor school performance, school fights, disinterest in studying, and a strong inclination towards hedonism. He stressed his "black sheep" condition through the constant comparison of himself with his siblings and parents:

Excerpt from childhood

> *As a young kid I was happy, I always had a smile; so I was sort of the black sheep of the family. I never finished school <fading out>. Mum wasn't happy, but I don't think they're going to control me, they've never being able to sort of control me. They said; you'll always be the black sheep of the family. Everyone else was good ... academic; both of my sisters have good jobs, my brother built up a business.*

Excerpt from adolescence

> *(In) high-school I started to hang around, like the amusement parlour and stuff like that. I used to meet a few people I used to go with to an arcade centre and I started to experiment with marijuana. My brother didn't hang around with the same crowd, he didn't smoke cigarettes, he didn't smoke marijuana and anything like that.*

As Tony recalled, in having a happy childhood, he could not rely on notions of psychological trauma to understand his behavioural patterns. Instead, he and his family used the popular label of the "black sheep" to make sense of his deviation from the family lifestyle and the negative outcomes of his decisions in life. His condition was an internal force out of his control that made him prone to privileging hedonism over responsibility, and diminished his capacity to foresee potential risks; as, for example, in his initiation into marijuana consumption, the problem he eventually blamed for his life crisis.

Unmet basic needs. Veer also resorted to innate dispositions for his psychological functioning; but instead of using personality notions, he resorted to psychological ideas of human innate needs in order to build a sense of self, and to understand his life-crisis and use of violence:

Excerpt from adolescence

My parents said; we are paying a lot of money for your school, so don't go to the market, don't go to the shopping, spend the time at home, always studying like book worm and all these things. Because you have to sisters also, so then they got married and you have to look after them. So because of all these things, these five years of my life, my childhood is, we can say - excuse my manners- is fucked!

I think that on that stage some psychiatric problems, things to do with me. Like it started from very early years. We don't have like that time to spend with our friends; entertainment starkly finished for the five years, because engineer is a five-year course.

From Veer's perspective, the prolonging of his unmet need for relaxation caused his "psychiatric problems". Throughout the school years, he was deprived of relaxation and entertainment due to external pressures to succeed in school, and then his engineering studies again prevented the meeting of his needs. He used this cumulative process of unmet needs to explain his abusive behaviour:

Excerpt from recent past

In my class everyone is very, very educated. I think that the people that have less time for themselves, they are more sensitive, like they don't have time to enjoy, very less time like to spend the time with the family and the family they are like pushing and pulling everywhere, so sometimes people, they get violent. But they never look like. How they become violent?

In accounting for his recent past, Veer merges himself into a plural "they", to reinforce the generalized nature of the phenomenon he is explaining. In his view, it is the lack of time to "enjoy" that makes people "more sensitive", so that when they experience demands from their families they "get violent": we should not, therefore, look at people's characteristics to understand violence, because they "never look like"; we should instead look at their circumstances. From this perspective, to prevent further violence, no personal change is needed from the men but instead a change in their circumstances to set them free from family pressures and allow them to relax.

Despite their differences, all persisters turned to psychological constructs in order to make sense of their self. Dominant themes in persisters' first chapters of their lives were notions of the inner self as an emotional core, a set of personality traits, or as a source of urgent basic needs. These notions assisted them in constructing the self as an entity with an inner structure completely beyond their control. The weight given to the context in the shaping of the inner self was prevalent in these narratives. Emotional trauma was caused by external events and agents: the deviation from a good life - although facilitated by innate traits - was the result of peer influence, and the accumulation of unmet needs was also the result of external forces and agents. The construction of an inner self helped them to navigate constancy and change in constructing their identity and in explaining the behaviours they considered as causally linked with their most recent life-crisis.

Although these narratives can be interpreted as a strategy to evade responsibility, they can also be understood as a legitimate effort these men made to make sense of their personal identity on the basis of the symbolic resources provided by the culture. Considering these narratives in the context of their life stories as a whole, including their anticipated future, helps to understand the narrative function of these narratives, and prevents what Bruner called the "banalization of narratives" (Bruner, 1991) in automatically interpreting these narratives as mere common masculine excuses. Persisters who constructed themselves as emotionally injured envisioned a rehabilitative process as necessary to achieve a positive resolution for their life crisis; whereas men who constructed themselves as dominated by traits or needs did not consider a rehabilitative process as necessary, and did not see a positive resolution of their life crisis as possible.

4.3.1.1.2   The social self

Persisters complemented the formation of their inner self by describing a socialization process through which they were incorporated into the cultural beliefs and practices of masculinity by means of vicarious learning and social influence. They storied the process through which they were inculcated into the masculine use of violence, downgrading of women, and male privilege, in a way that resembles descriptions found in social learning theories.

The masculine use of violence

The learning of violent behaviour was recounted only by Sami and Robert, the persisters who acknowledged their violence as a problem associated with their recent life crisis. Fathers and peers were portrayed in their narratives as the most influential masculine models of violence. Sami's account exemplifies the intra-family transmission of violence:

Excerpt from childhood

> *Now I'm giving you another thing here: my father here, my real father is very pleasant, very calm and my uncle is the opposite; alcoholic, always bashed my auntie, so I lived in this violent … Do you get where I'm coming from? So I'm coming from zero to seven years from a violent, not towards me, towards my auntie. He always bashed her and drinking, he's alcoholic, still today.*

Sami identified his uncle as person who introduced him into masculine violence against women. He lived with his uncle until he was seven years old, before being claimed back by his biological parents. Sami highlights the influence of his uncle's violence with the rhetorical question, "Do you get where I'm coming from?" He is interested in demonstrating that violence was instilled in him, stressing his passive role in this process.

It is worth noting that Veer and Tony, the two persisters who claimed to have a good childhood, and Damian, who regarded his childhood as bad due to his father rejection, did not account for a learning process of violence. It appears that, as they disregarded their use of violence as their major problem, they did not feel compelled to try to make diachronic sense of this.

Downgrading of women

Although only persisters who accounted for a traumatic childhood addressed the learning of the masculine downgrading of women during this stage of their lives, via the influence of male models in their families, all persisters accounted for this process

as the result of social influence, mostly via peer group during adolescence and emergent adulthood. The objectification of women was the most salient feature of these narratives. Robert's account illustrates the construction of the social context as an influential force in the men's downgrading of women:

> *(...) I came into a society in seventy four, seventy five, which is like sexually kind of liberal I guess, where wife swapping and like; here I'm at twenty years old in Melbourne, in the early eighties and so I had like no sexual boundaries, no moral obligation to that one person.*

Robert constructs social context as a diffuse but powerful influence on his "liberal" sexual practices. However, as a heterosexual man, Robert is not talking here about sexual exploration beyond traditional masculinity, but about his values regarding women and gender relations. Having "no moral obligation" can be understood as the sense of no responsibility for the impact of his sexual behaviour on others, representing also the downgrading of women to sexual objects. His reference to the "wife swapping" without a "husband swapping" reveals his sexist framework. The following excerpt from a later chapter of his life confirms this sexist perspective:

Excerpt from adulthood

> *(...) We spend a couple of days together in a house in Gold Coast and then she became pregnant at that time. And at that time I was the father of that child and at the same time I was sort of in denial.*
>
> *I came back to Melbourne (...) and then the child was born and I went to Byron Bay for the birth of this child. I had this denial, so until the DNA results came, when the child was about two years old. By that time I was back in Melbourne and I was with somebody else (...)*

Robert's statement "she became pregnant" evidences his understanding of masculine sexual accountability. Even when Robert confirmed his paternity, he never assumed his paternal responsibility, excusing himself that he was "with somebody else". As he said before, he had "no moral obligation".

Sami's account exemplifies another common narrative of social influence in the learning of masculinity, in which peers are portrayed as the main socializing agents:

Excerpt from late adolescence

> *I came to stay with my dad for two and a half months. I got work, I got some money for myself and because when I was here I hung around with my friends and saw the culture here, and then… Oh! This is alright, you know what I mean? When you're seventeen you have the girls, you got into clubbing, and the girls over there, and the cars and the girls. Then I got back there (Turkey) and was like… Now that you've tasted that at seventeen the whole day, you'd only want to go back.*

Sami accounts for his decision to move from Turkey to Australia. Being on holidays here he got in touch with his old Australian childhood friends, who introduced him into the local masculine "culture", where he learned that being a young man in Australia was all about girls, clubbing and cars. In this narrative, women are portrayed as objects for masculine entertainment at the same level of cars, a consideration that Sami tries to generalize to all men with the use of "you" instead of "I".

Masculine privileges

Persisters also revealed the socializing process through which they learned a more subtle form of women's downgrading. They told stories of childhood where they described that normally women looked after the children whereas men focused on their jobs and played the role of head of the family, resulting in early internalization of patriarchal beliefs about male privileges such as the right to rule the family life and relaxing at home after a working day.

However, the internalization of masculine privileges extended beyond the family sphere. In accounting for their youth, persisters inadvertently revealed taken-for-granted masculine privileges as assumptions about how the world normally works. As young men, they did not perceive any risk of being sexually harassed when they went out with their friends and got drunk; they never mentioned the possibility of stigma

for their hyper-sexualized behaviour and their abuse of alcohol; nor did they need to worry about getting a job if they did not get into higher education. Sami's excerpt exemplifies this sense of security regarding alcohol abuse:

> *I don't normally drink that much, but when I drink, I drink a lot. Like; I don't drink once or twice a week, but if I got to a party and I drink from the start, I don't stop 'til I get hammered.*

Narratives from late adolescence to emergent adulthood portrayed alcohol abuse as connatural to the condition of being a young man. Although not expressed explicitly, these narratives reveal that young men do not worry about their safety when they go out at night to drink, even if they "get hammered" as Sami said, because men are not at risk of being sexually harassed or stigmatized. That risk is not part of the men's world.

Sexual desire. Another common feature of persisters' youth tales is the relevance that chasing girls and beginning a sex life had for them in terms of conforming to masculine ideals:

Excerpt from adolescence: Damian

> *Then I started to go out and I saw young ladies everywhere and I thought: this is fantastic! I sort of I don't want to go back home, I want to go into the world now, meet women.*

Excerpt from emergent adulthood: Robert

> *We would have sex for a few hours and then I would go back to my girlfriend.*

Persisters portrayed themselves as actively looking for sexual contact with other women despite already having a partner, revealing their unconcern about the perception other people could have about their prominent sexual interest in women, including the interviewer. Lust and promiscuity were depicted as natural masculine behaviours not needing to be omitted or explained.

Access to work. Most persisters reflected in their stories of youth their disinterest in education, which revealed the assumption of a masculine privilege of easy access to the workforce, as in Sami's account:

> *I didn't try to get into Uni, I tried mainly mechanical apprenticeship. But I think I was too old for apprenticeship. I didn't really like it because it's too dirty and that stuff. So I just went out and just got a job, factories, whatever is available; Toyota, Ford whatever.*

Narratives such as this evidence the assumption that men do not need to make a great effort to get into the workforce. Apparently, at the time of their youth, there were plenty of male-oriented jobs to get; "you just went out and just got a job", as Sami put it.

Although masculine privileges and the downgrading of women were portrayed as a narrative background, this is relevant for understanding persisters' interpretations and reactions performed during their life crisis. Masculine privileges eventually came to play a role when they perceived that someone or something was preventing them from having access to some of these privileges, such as in the case of Veer regarding access to relaxation after work. The downgrading of women also influenced persisters' interpretations and actions, as for example with Sami, who perceived the risk of his wife being objectified by other men in her work as a masseur.

Through their narratives of childhood and adolescence, persisters accounted for the origin and evolution of their inner self as moulded by early family life experiences, and by learning processes taking place both inside and outside of their families. In these narratives, they depicted themselves as passive victims of emotional traumas that marked their psychological functioning, or as victims of contextual forces that blocked their basic psychological needs or exacerbated a personality inclination to privilege gratification over responsibility; and who were socialized into the dominant cultural canons of masculinity, which they assumed, and assume, as natural.

In addition to providing the necessary story background, the narratives of the origin of the inner self also seemed to function as story orientation. The traumatic events that marked the protagonist's psyche can be interpreted as the inciting incident in the

life stories of the persisters who constructed a traumatized self, and as the excessive or insufficient parental control for persisters who placed innate dispositions at the core of their inner self. Through the narrative construction of an inner self, persisters were able to synchronically navigate constancy and change in their lives. This helped them to make sense of their life decline and crisis, and to set alternatives for possible resolutions of their life-story complications. Possible resolutions varied from rehabilitative discourses, where the main theme of the origin of the self was the psychological trauma; to deus ex machina resolutions, where the main theme was the innate psychological dispositions. These resolutions reveal the centrality of psychological discourses for persisters' construction of identity continuity and discontinuity.

It is worth noting that persisters' narratives of the origin of the inner self also reveal that young men are rarely given the opportunity to reflect upon the journey from boy to man, a gendered tradition that is omnipresent in their narratives, as shown for example in Sami's comment:

> *You don't look into those things unless you come into a men's behaviour*
> *and you digging more and more. (Sami)*

According to persisters' narratives, men are not taught and encouraged to reflect on and talk about their emotional experience and relational life.

4.3.2   Coming of age

Persisters constructed the entrance into the workforce as the starting point of their adulthood. In these narratives, the events were no longer referred as formative for the self. Particular events were selected as transformative for the self, but only in terms of learnings, not producing changes in their psychological functioning.

4.3.2.1   Partying and working

Getting into the workforce was commonly described as bringing a sense of increased independence associated with access to money. Persisters described this period as extending from their entry into the workforce to the establishing of a formal

relationship with a female partner, either through marriage or cohabitation. During this stage, entertainment was the dominant theme in their lives:

> *I was still at the house of Mum and Dad. They didn't care, they realized that I settled. I kept working, I worked long hours but I had a big group of mates, and that we go out and we do lots of things. We go to drive-inns, we go to the cafes, partying, going night clubs and stuff like that, drinking, smoking; it was good life. (Tony)*

> *I was into the Australian culture at that time; beaching, partying, not really giving a shit, smoking dope. (Sami)*

These statements exemplify the centrality that substance use had in what persisters considered as a "good life" during emergent adulthood, representing its dominance as cultural practice in the local context. However, for most persisters, substance abuse became a problem that eventually played a role in the precipitation of their life crisis; therefore, the self-characterization as substance abuser can be also understood as intended to have an explanatory function for their life crisis.

4.3.2.2   Signs of psychological problems

Persisters who accounted for a traumatic childhood described the behavioural manifestations during this stage of their lives of what they considered to be their psychological problems. Through this description, they established the continuity of their self from childhood to adulthood, reaffirming their psychological theories of the self with narrative evidence, and articulating a historical context to make sense of their crisis as the result of these vulnerabilities. Damian's narrative exemplifies this:

> *She was my first, you know, real love, the end of childhood. She was really a good person, (but) I wasn't ready; my maturity and I think I had insecurities. I still have them. She was lovely, she was confident, played music; she used to laugh a lot, and I was attracted to her, but then I started to be a little bit possessive with her.*

Damian's reference to past and present "insecurities", and their influence in his affective relationships, reveal the importance that psychological deficits have for his

diachronic sense of self. Events seem to be selected by persisters to demonstrate a theory of the self that assists them to explain their crisis and mitigate their responsibility for its precipitation.

4.3.2.3   Life plan

Although life planning at this stage was notoriously absent in most narratives, two persisters accounted for a life project in which they saw themselves as having a prosperous life as an adult. For these men, accounting for a life project was a necessary narrative argument for claiming the frustration of these expectations as a relevant factor in precipitating their crisis and in the evaluation of their present circumstances. Veer's account exemplifies this:

> *I studied hard to pursue my studies and I got engineering, after that I got*
> *the job in my field and they sent me to different parts of the world. I was*
> *alone and I killed myself to settle down, and now where I'm? I'm just a*
> *guard.*

Having life plans associated with expectations of prosperity represented for Veer and Damian the most relevant theme in their dramas. They saturated their life stories with complaints against the characters and forces that prevented them from fulfilling their dreams of prosperity. Subsequently, they used this frustration to explain their crisis and abusive behaviour, as described by Veer:

> *I've been to the psychiatrist a number of times (...) just to get the sleep*
> *because, if I drink, frustrations comes out sometimes, so that affects on*
> *my family.*

Working and partying characterized persisters' narratives of emergent adulthood. Although the themes in these narratives did not portray new relevant identity developments, in the context of their life stories as a whole these narratives accomplished the function of stressing the contrast between a life of freedom and entertainment and a subsequent stage of duties and responsibilities, which enabled the constructing of the stage of settling down with a partner as a personal sacrifice. For some men, it also provided the context for claiming the involvement in substance

abuse and frustration in the projects for prosperity as causal factors for their abusive behaviour; while for others it provided the narrative evidence of underlying psychological problems extending from past to present.

4.3.3   Married life before the crisis

Persisters depicted their early adulthood as an initially positive change in their lives followed by a gradual decline in their life conditions. The process of settling down with a partner and the arrival of children were depicted as the major turning points in this life stage. Although parenting was initially positive, most persisters focused on the negative impact of parenting in their couple relationships. Unexpected changes in life conditions were commonly constructed as negatives turns and precursors to the life crisis.

4.3.3.1   Settling with a partner

Settling down with a partner was commonly accounted as an unplanned positive development demarcating the end of the party lifestyle characterizing emergent adulthood. Tony's narratives exemplifies this:

> *Then I met my ex-partner that I just split up now; Margaret. I met her in a party of her brother (...) I had a sort of connection with her, but she had kids from a previous marriage. (...) I was still going out, partying and stuff like that. I started to hang around with her and her kids (...)*
>
> *I just started to slow down; my lifestyle started to change in a lot of ways. As I fell in love with her I didn't really want to go out and meet other women anymore; she treated me really good, the sex was good, we got along well, we had similar interests; similar taste in food, similar humour and had the same viewpoints in life [3 sec silence] I liked to spend time with her <fading out> (...) Then I moved in with her at her house, the first house that she had with her ex-husband.*

Tony's account reveals that going out was an activity primarily motivated by an interest in meeting women. As he "fell in love", this urge decreased, allowing him to focus on his couple relationship, because "sex was good" and they were "similar" in

many aspects. Tony depicts this life transition as a "lifestyle" change, suggesting the preservation of his personal identity.

Thin descriptions of relationship development with partners was a common feature of these narratives. Tony reflects this in his laconic statement, "I started to hang around with her and her kids". Likewise, low personal agency also prevailed in the narratives of settling down with a partner. For example, Tony was not looking for someone to settle down with, but was immersed in his party lifestyle, when he unexpectedly met his partner.

The focus on the introduction of partners and the introduction of other characters indicate that these narratives can be considered as part of the still-evolving exposition phase of persisters' life stories, serving the functions of constructing the character of their partners and providing background and orientation for more relevant events to come. The depiction of this life transition as a 'lifestyle' change reveals that persisters do not claim changes in their personal identity as a consequence of this transition; whilst the low agency they self ascribed in the transition into stable partnership exposes the construction of women as responsible for the affective relationship development.

It is important to note that two persisters differed remarkably in accounting for this life transition. Whilst Veer omitted this part of his life, focusing instead on his working life, Damian gave prominence to the starting conditions of his relationship with his wife:

> I met her on the dance floor, she was sweet. I think I was nineteen, she would've been sixteen. But her mother didn't want me! Because I wasn't from the same nationality; she's Italian. (...) But then, it proved in the years to come, she said; I didn't want him, but he ended up being my gold, I couldn't have asked for a better husband for my daughter.

> We had a very traditional old-fashioned type of relationship. She was brought up in a very strict Catholic family. We didn't even have sex before we got married. I suppose one of the last stories you're going to hear of from that generation.

Previous to marriage I saw the future with her as having a happy life, a prosperous life, but also too where my mistake was, is that I had high expectations. I had the vision to have parents when we get married, they'll be of some assistance to help us.

In Damian's life-story as a whole, this narrative also functions both as an introduction of his wife and in-laws and as the setting up of his subsequent crisis. Characterizing his relationship as "romantic" allowed him to represent a dramatic contrast with subsequent non-romantic married life after children, and characterizing his wife as a daughter of a "strict Catholic" family allowed him to claim a subsequent unsatisfactory sex life due to her conservative upbringing. These elements were later invoked as causal factors for his crisis, along with the frustration of the "high expectations" he depicted here as foreshadowing negative events to come. Therefore, the high agency displayed in this narrative seems to be necessary to claim a subsequent frustration of purposes.

4.3.3.2 The arrival of the children

Children were depicted as an important change in persisters' lives, although bringing forth conflicting meanings: they brought both joy and complications, representing for most persisters the starting point of their life decline. Tony's narrative serves to illustrate this:

(…) With Margaret we weren't as close as before. She thought she had a postnatal depression after our daughter was born, so sex life wasn't as good as was before and we wouldn't talk as much as we did, but we were still together.

The arrival of the children represents the point at which a satisfactory couple relationship ended; revealing the centrality of recreation and sex for persisters' appraisal of their intimate partnership. These narratives also expose the men's scarcity of resources for negotiating relational changes with their partners, and their lack of critical reflection regarding their role in the development of satisfactory partnerships, since the deteriorating process in these relationships was portrayed as the consequence of external forces beyond the men's control.

4.3.3.3   Married life with children as partnership decline

Persisters accounted for their married life with children with a focus on a sequence of increasing complications to represent a dramatic decline in their lives in general and their couple relationships in particular. Partners were portrayed as turning from being a source of gratification to being a source of demands in the context of unexpected negative changes in persisters' life circumstances. Through this sequencing, persisters constructed a context in which their psychological problems or pressing needs became more influential, configuring a precarious balance that set the stage for a potential dramatic turn in their lives. The following excerpts from Tony's account of his married life after children exemplifies this context:

> *The doctors realized that I had arthritis (...) I started to feel a little bit bad about myself. My life sort of changed; even though I had a beautiful baby girl (...) I started not to enjoy things anymore because I was unable to do what I was able to do when I was younger (...). I just started to lock myself; I started to go within my shell.*
>
> *(...) I didn't feel myself, because when you start to lose the ability to do things you don't feel yourself, you feel like not good enough as a worker (...) She never made me feel that I wasn't good enough, but it was more just myself.*
>
> *(...) We sold the house before I lost the job. She wanted a pool, so with the money that I got from my long service I put a pool in there because that was what she wanted. I thought that would make her happy.*
>
> *(...) She wanted to get married and I didn't want to get married. I don't know why; I couldn't even tell her why. Well, I probably wasn't the easiest person to live with because I smoked marijuana and sometimes if I didn't get my way I threw things around. I was angry, not just with her but with life in general. (...) I didn't look for help; I didn't even know that I had a problem.*
>
> *(...) I wish, in a way, I'd gone back to the tools because I didn't have the cushy job that I did (...) I went to work being in pain and come home being in pain; I just locked myself out. And then I started to drug me during the day at work (...) I was just getting depressed because I didn't*

> *know to do anything else; my education doesn't leave me where I asked*
> *for (...) Margaret was sick of being with the person I was. Just around the*
> *drugs, you know, the drugs; and she probably got sick of that <fading out,*
> *low tone>.*

Tony explains how his progressive disabling illness and increasing drug abuse affected his partnership. Mortified by the physical disability, and threatened in his position as a provider, he "started to feel bad" about himself. He stopped enjoying things and withdrew into his "shell". In spite of having lost his job, he enacted the masculine provider role, trying to make his wife happy by giving her things to restore the lost balance, but he failed to give her the affectionate response she demanded when he refused to get married. Tony made things even worse by turning himself into a difficult person to live with due to his aggressive behaviour and drug abuse, the latter which he highlighted as being the main factor causing the distancing from his partner as she felt "sick of that".

Tony's narrative, constructed around the catastrophic impact of his illness and drug abuse in the couple relationship, is similar to other persisters' married life accounts, not only in the focus on the progressive decline of the relationship as the main tension-building factor leading to the crisis, but in the way he positions himself in the deteriorating process. Persisters typically disregard the role of their behaviour in the decline of their partnership, by framing their behaviour as understandable reactions to unexpected negative circumstances given their psychological problems or needs. Elements out of their control, such as contextual changes and partners' actions, were privileged, instead, as the forces pushing the story towards the crisis.

4.3.3.4   *Partnership decline leading to identity crisis*

The developing crisis depicted in persisters' narratives of married life after children also represented a threat to a personal identity they assumed as consolidated and stable. Damian's account of his recent past serves to illustrate this process:

> *A lot of parts of my life was gone, because most of my life, almost all of*
> *my life, was around providing for my family, for my children and then,*
> *suddenly, they don't need me anymore, so I felt like I wasn't needed by*

them. Then I started to turn on me a bit, because (of) my resentments and my whingeing carrying on about my in-laws or whatever.

Talking one night at the soccer where my second son was playing I sat next to one of the fathers and I heard a man had an affair and another one had an affair. Affairs weren't anything in my head back then. And I said to him; how is it that, that man to have an affair? How can he get into an affair with another woman? I said I've never had an opportunity. He started laughing. He said; because you've never put yourself in that position'. (...) And I think it triggered something in my head. I thought; when anything going not right for my marriage, maybe I should put myself in that position to meet someone.

Damian orients us to a point in his life where he unexpectedly found himself without a clear role to play in his family, after spending "most of his life" playing the provider role. As he felt he "wasn't needed" anymore he became vulnerable to the influence of his "resentments", which made him "turn" to himself in the quest for a new sense of identity that could help meet his need to be valued. This need is portrayed as a vulnerability to justify his search for an affair, which he tries to validate morally by framing it within the context of a marriage that was already "going not right".

Damian's narrative shows how unexpected changes in men's lives are portrayed as a threat to the continuity of their identities that forced them to adapt under the restrictive influence of their psychological deficits or pressing needs, to restore the balance in their lives. These are the events functioning as the second inciting incident that get the protagonist into motion. Another example will help to further clarify this narrative function and the way these narratives contribute to the construction of persisters' identity, as in Sami's account:

Because for probably sixteen years she was at home looking after the kids, and then she got to this stage when the kids grew up and then went; what I've done with my life? Then she went and done massage therapy for two years of study and then she went starting working. But because of all my insecurity I said to her I'm not comfortable with you massaging men, straight out. That insecurity, which I have to deal with it myself, really is not her fault ... my fault, but still I got to tell her (...) She said I can do

Muslim women and I'll do women only massage; making me feel comfortable. Once she finished school she got a job somewhere and then she started doing men, and I said: It isn't to be men! Oh, you can't tell me what to do! (she said)

It sort of made me feel like; really? We've made an agreement, sort of. At least she could've respected it a little, I thought… Because of our culture and all of that, there's no way that any of my friends would allow their wives to be a massage therapist and massage men.

You know that we have the circle of violence here, it's the um, build-up; it's gonna blow, it's gonna blow! And then I said to her; I allowed you doing massage on men, but then I feel insecure in myself anyway. But then she would come and say; oh, there was a really nice guy I massaged today; and that doesn't help my insecurity. I know it's not her fault. Of course she knows (how I feel); she knows that I'm the jealous type and everything. Wouldn't she know after twenty-five years together? I told her from the start that I wasn't comfortable with massaging men.

Sami orients us to the stage when his wife's decision to study massage therapy destabilized the already fragile balance of his marriage. Sami could not adapt to this new development because of his psychological deficit. Although he rhetorically acknowledged that his "insecurities" were "not her fault", as he could not control them he felt compelled to request his wife to adjust her plan in order to meet his needs. She initially agreed, but then she unexpectedly disregarded the agreement, making the situation dramatically unsustainable, given Sami's identity as a Turkish man, which he represented with "the culture and all of that", and the relevance he gave to his male friends in the issue.

As Sami's attempt to restore the balance failed due to his wife opposition, his discomfort turned into irritation: "it's gonna blow" he said, mistakenly using the interpersonal notion of the cycle of violence to stress the normality of his feelings of rage towards his wife. Then, his wife increased the tension with provocations such as "oh, there was a really nice guy I massaged today", because, according to Sami, she knew the negative effect this could have on him: "Wouldn't she know after twenty-five years together?" He highlights this as a proof of her intention to cause him pain,

to construct her as his antagonist. Sami dramatized this difference by stressing his moral integrity as the actor who tried to prevent the situation from getting worse, reinforcing the attribution of the responsibility on his wife for the negative upcoming events.

Narratives of partnership decline as identity crisis helped persisters' to account for the second inciting incident of their life stories. The way in which they fashioned these narratives allowed them to claim a reduced responsibility for the unfolding events, and to construct the crisis as inevitable, since the forces affecting their lives were external to their agency and their actions were restrained by their psychological deficits and lack of support from their partners. Persisters' actions, in the context of a partnership decline, seem to honour the masculine mandate of independence and invulnerability, representing also manoeuvres to retain power as they proceed without negotiating their needs. Instead of asking for help or looking for collaboration, persisters resorted to traditional masculine ways of dealing with affective difficulties, such as isolating themselves from their partners and evading through substance abuse or extramarital relationships.

By constructing themselves as trying to do good but making wrong decisions due to the interference of their personal deficits and other characteristics, persisters appeared to be attempting to neutralize the negative moral implications of their actions and to construct themselves as psychologically vulnerable. Through this, they revealed both the continuity of their psychological problems and their taken-for-granted gender identity assumptions.

Narratives of married life before the crisis are central to persisters' life stories, because through these they were able to connect their formative past and their increasing relational difficulties during their adult life. After settling down with a partner they experienced a decline in their entertainment-centred life, which was initially compensated for by gratifications associated with their couple relationships. However, after the arrival of the children, their couple relationship declined, fading as a source of gratification, and giving way to a family lifestyle characterized by increasing obligations and responsibilities; which persisters addressed from a patriarchal approach, focusing on the fulfilment of the provider role to maintain the

balance in their lives. However, unexpected negative external events altered this balance, forcing persisters to react. Given their psychological problems, pressing needs, and non-collaborative responses from their partners, problems turned into relational conflicts.

These narratives reveal the continuity of persisters' personal identity throughout relevant adult life transitions, and their efforts to minimize their responsibility for their relationship decline. In addition, these narratives served the function for the men of increasing the narrative tension, anticipating forthcoming narrative turns as the protagonist ends up in a situation where he must react in order to restore the story balance.

4.3.4   The Incident

Persisters constructed narratives of their immediate past around the events that led them to attend a MBCP. They accounted for these events as a string of increasing relational conflicts with their partners and other characters involved in this conflict, leading to an incident that ended up with their referral to a MBCP as the life-story climax.

Persisters constructed the incident that led them to attend a MBCP as a single scene taking place in the context of a weakened and conflictual couple relationship affected by external difficulties. Unexpected actions from partners or other people associated with them provoked the protagonist's reactions; which, in turn, triggered the reactions of the people associated with their partners, precipitating the conflict scene. Damian's narrative excerpts following serve as an example of this sequencing of events:

> In the end I went away for the weekend with this lady, down to the beach. I told (my wife); she wasn't happy. I never told her you can't spend money, I never told her you can't go out. I was confused and no one told me this is wrong. And the lady friend brainwashed me saying you got the right to see me if you're not happy at home.
>
> And when I came back there was like chaos since I opened the door; my wife was there, my oldest son and my wife's parents, and my brother-in-law. My brother-in-law said to me; you need to get your clothes and leave

the house, remove yourself from the house. I could see he was emotionally distressed. I didn't get mad at him. I told him; you should leave the house. I put my hands in my pockets so he knew I wasn't going to get violent, because when I was young I did karate, I was taught when in a situation you pacified; and I said, you need to remove yourself. I was a little bit stressed because I was in a situation I didn't expect, I was a bit ashamed as to what I have done, in a sense.

(...) I tried to walk down the corridor to leave the house, and (my brother in law) stood in front of me and started pushing me back into the house. He said; you're not going anywhere and blah, blah, blah. I didn't push him because I didn't want the situation to get physical. I thought I've been restrained here, this is against the law.

(...) I said, I'm ringing the police, they gonna remove you from the house (...) The police came: there was a male and a female officer (...) The male officer stayed with me at the front and the female officer started talking to my wife. My wife has probably explained to her; my husband is living here but he's seeing another girl, he is not making his decision to remove himself. I think the female officer, who I felt was a bit biased maybe being female, maybe her experiences of what she was seeing out in the world, she decided to put a restraining order on me. The male officer said; don't be surprised if we end up taking you away from the house (...) In the end she came out and they said; you have to leave the house, so they put me in the back if the divvy van[2] and they took me to the police station.

Damian introduces us to the incident that led him to be evicted from his home and referred to MBCP. He highlights that his only fault was having an affair, which he did not know was wrong, blaming his lover for brainwashing him into mitigating his responsibility for the impact of his affair. Damian was shocked by the unexpected presence of his in-laws and brother-in-law in his home, when he returned from his weekend with his lover. His brother-in-law was constructed as the antagonist, opposing what Damian thought was his right, to stay in his home while he was

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[2] Victorian term used to refer to a general duties police vehicle with a prisoner cage on the back.

looking for his happiness; whereas his wife, his son and her parents were constructed as tertiary characters.

Damian draws attention to his non-violent reactions to the provocations of his brother-in-law, to underline his intention to prevent the use of physical violence and stress his condition as a victim of an illegal restraint. Using repetition, he emphasises his appropriate behaviour in calling the police instead of responding to his brother-in-law's aggression with violence. Damian's narrative seems to be structured so as to highlight to the listener that he did not use violence during the incident: that the incident was caused by the aggressive attitude of his brother-in-law who forced him to look for external help; and that the resolution was precipitated by the gender-biased police action. By fashioning the narrative in this way, Damian constructed himself as a heroic and vulnerable character: his psychological needs made him vulnerable to the influence of his lover; he struggled to prevent the escalation of violence; and he finally accepted the police decision despite his perception of their bias.

This theme, of being under the influence of forces out of their control while placed in a highly stressful, unexpected situation produced by other characters, is common to persisters' narratives of the incident. Tony's narrative also reflected this feature:

> *(The incident) happened when we went to Lorne; probably it just started at Christmas. They rented a house with her brother. It costed about eight hundred bucks a week. I pay for one week they pay for another week. And the head wouldn't allow big dogs in, so my step daughter, or ex-step daughter - I don't know how to call her - she respected that, she didn't bring the dog into the house, and it was all right, it was fine.*

> *(Before that) when I started to lose weight and having sweats at night the doctors said that it might be a sign of depression, so they started to give me antidepressants. A couple of months before Christmas I said (to them) I don't feel any difference with these tablets, I'm still sweating at night, I'm still losing weight. And she said, maybe it is the dosage, so she gave me double dose, and after that I was hyper all the time and a little bit more agro, more agro; not my same personality. When you smoke marijuana you are more relaxed, you don't want to do anything, but I was*

going to the gym more, I was jumping on the bike and going for rides and walking, I was just a completely different person.

Going back to the dog, she was happy to leave the dog outside. And then when we got back from Lorne, one night she came back from somewhere and she put the dog inside and she started washing the dog in the bathroom, in the shower, and I said to her mother; I don't mind to bring the dog inside, but being a dog, put it in the laundry, there is a basin in there, you can wash it there. I was telling to Margaret because she is Margaret's kid, and I've never really disciplined them because I thought I'm not their father and Margaret has always done the discipline with them.

And my stepdaughter came out and she said; oh if you have something to say, say it to me. She said; I actually have friends out. If you, if you are a guy, we would be able to work this out. She made it out like was she was going to ring up one of these guys (...) I made the assumption that she was going to call this guy. I said; call the guy, call him, I don't care, do whatever you want. Margaret left with the kids and she stayed at her mum's place.

That night I got upset and I stepped on the dog's house and I broke the dog's house. And the next morning they came back home and I was still hyper. I didn't sleep; and we started escalating about the situation and I pulled down the pool things.

(My daughter) called the police. I got taken away, I got pulled into the divvy van, handcuffed, and thrown in the back of the divvy van in a forty degree day, and they put the bloody heater on for me. Then they tried to drag me up, I told them off; I got a hip replacement!

Tony orients us to the situation where his stepdaughter showed her ability to respect other authorities. Then, he introduces relevant background information to highlight that, because of the medication, he was not himself but "a completely different person", characterized by an increased restlessness and aggressiveness.

After Christmas, his stepdaughter brought her dog into the house and washed it in the shower, in contrast to the respectful attitude she showed at the holiday place. Tony

reacted by complaining about this to his wife, looking for her to reprimand his stepdaughter. He is surprised by his stepdaughter's defiant and aggressive reaction, reacting confrontationally because he was more "agro" due to the medication. As a result, his wife "left with the kids" to stay out overnight, a scene lacking in interactional details, as these were omitted by Tony.

In this state of being "a completely different person" (due to the medication), during the night Tony "broke the dog house". When his wife and children came back the next day he was still "hyper". They "escalated the situation" and then he "pulled down the pool things". His stepdaughter called the police and he ended up being taken away "handcuffed", "thrown in the back" of a police vehicle.

Like other persisters, in his narrative of the incident Tony gives primacy to the actions of the antagonist in the unfolding of events, reducing his responsibility and assuming the victim's position. His stepdaughter plays the antagonist role, performing a defiant and irrational action that generates the incident, and making a phone call precipitating the negative resolution for the protagonist. Tony minimizes his responsibility by claiming to be under the influence of medication, which turned him into a "different person", and stresses his condition as victim of the aggressive behaviour of his step-daughter and of the police's maltreatment.

In their narratives of the incident, persisters justified and minimised their reactions by stressing the irrationality and lack of moral integrity of the antagonist. Tony accomplished this by contrasting his stepdaughter's willingness to obey the authority of other person (in the first paragraph) with her aggressive rejection of his complaint about her unreasonable action of putting the dog inside of the shower (in the third paragraph), and by sharpening her disrespectful and aggressive threat of calling her male friends, which he perceives as a challenge to his masculinity.

The minimizing of their use of violence stands out as one of the common features of persisters' narratives of the incident. As we have seen in Damian's narrative, he did not acknowledge the use of violence and made considerable efforts in constructing himself as an antiviolence character; whereas Tony, who acknowledged the use of violence, framed it as the result of medication and depicted it as aggression towards

objects only, omitting the description of his interpersonal behaviour, and minimising the conflict as a symmetrical escalation.

Persisters varied in their editing strategies used to minimize their violence. Robert accomplished this by flattening the description of the incident; whereas Veer omitted the incident almost entirely. Others, such as Damian, resorted to more sophisticated ways such as sharpening their efforts to prevent the use of physical violence.

Narratives of the incident helped persisters to construct this event as the latest turning point in their lives and the climax of their life story; allowing them to frame their current circumstances as part of the story denouement and as a step towards the resolution of their life crisis. The structuring of 'the incident' as the story climax reveals that attending MBCP was the point that persisters were trying to explain with their life stories, even though the question of the origin of their life crisis was never explicitly raised.

Persisters constructed their immediate past as a sequence of events leading to the exacerbation of their relational crisis, and the resolution of this as the climax of their life stories, giving place to their immediate present as the story denouement. Although narratives of the incident varied from rich descriptions to fragmented compositions, it was routinely constructed by persisters as the turning point leading to the life story resolution. Persisters constructed themselves as a protagonist dominated by internal and external forces out of their control, and struggling to cope with highly stressful, unexpected negative situations generated by other characters from their families. Through these narratives, persisters attempted to justify their violent behaviour as the result of these forces, and to minimize their violence by flattening its description and omitting its impact on others.

Except for Robert, who ended his narrative of the incident with a tone of hope and a sense of increased agency, persisters constructed the resolution of the incident as leading to the degradation of the protagonist, with a tone of hopelessness and sense of low agency. The incident was something that happened to them, not the result of their actions.

4.3.5 *The resolution of the crisis*

Although persisters were interviewed at different stages of their involvement in MBCPs, they all constructed their post-incident narratives as the resolution of their life stories, thematically linking these narratives to their introductory narratives about their current situation, as a lengthy flashback. These narratives clarified the persisters' evaluation of the resolution of the conflict, indicating for whom the plot changed for the better and for whom it changed for the worse. Central to these narratives was the discussing of their personal change:

4.3.5.1 *I have changed*

Damian and Tony claimed to have changed after the incident, although indicating different causes and processes for this. While Tony claimed a sudden change, circumscribed to stopping drug abuse as precipitated by the arrest and being served with a restriction order, Damian reported a gradual change derived from arrest and attendance to psychotherapy and MBCP, although not directly related to his abusive behaviour. The following excerpts from Damian's narrative illustrates his understanding of his change:

> *The psychologist helped me a bit to see that what really upsets me is not my wife; is all of the externals. Might be my parents, her parents, her brother (...) the psychologist said I've found rejection in my early childhood up until, I'd say my teens, I've experienced basically not being accepted by my father.*
>
> *(...) MBCP has helped me to see the big picture. How my actions affect other people. I was in a stage throughout my life when I was just thinking about myself. I wasn't getting anything from my parents, I wasn't getting care and love and understanding. So, I started developing resentment.*
>
> *(...) So now our relationship has improved because my wife realized that she's got to give me a little bit to make me feel good. And I want to give her my care feel as well. (...) But the children still question mark, because they became aware of what happened with me.*

Damian finished the program a few months before the interview. He accounted for the events after the incident, focusing on the modifications he introduced to his marriage and to his family relations as the result of intervention of the psychologist. According to Damian, the psychologist helped him to understand the origins and manifestations of the psychological deficits he claimed caused his resentments and unintentional violence towards his wife. The agentic overcoming of these psychological deficits and the saving of his marriage were the key points he tried to make with his life story. Nevertheless, Damian was unable to construct a consistent narrative for his change, because, while he claimed to have learned through the MBCP that he was self-centred and that his actions affected other people, he remained centred on his own needs. His change seems a rhetorical manoeuvre, since his deeds do not reflect an assumption of the responsibility for the impact of his past actions on others, as for example, seeing his children as being "still [a] question mark" but not doing anything about it. More importantly, he believes his wife should make him feel good in order to prevent his resentment from taking control of his behaviour again. Thus, the responsibility to prevent further abuse remains with her.

Persisters who asserted to have changed did not account consistently for a change in their gender positioning, assumption of responsibility for their abuse, or its effects on others. Tony claimed to have stopped drug abuse, and Damian to have ceased his infidelity, as proofs of their change; but both remained centred on the same personal needs they described prior to the crisis and attendance at MBCPs and other services. Indeed, Damian used the discourse of his psychologist to stress the continuity of his defining features: he continues expecting to be loved and accepted by his wife, in spite of having being unfaithful.

4.3.5.2   I want to change

Two persisters, both commencing their MBCP, positioned themselves as looking for personal change in their inner self and in their behaviour. Although Robert and Sami attributed their violent behaviour to their traumatic childhood and expressed therapeutic expectations regarding their involvement in MBCP, only Robert assumed responsibility for the impact of his violence. Sami focused instead on the difficulties

posed by his wife in his change process, overlooking the impact of his violence, and diverting responsibility for his change on his wife:

> *We went out couple of weeks ago, we went to a club but we thought to get a hamburger and a drink before, and she got angry because we couldn't actually talk, we didn't talk; probably me more than her, because women tend to talk anyway. She was unhappy because I didn't talk. So she said; is this really finished? We can't talk!*

> *Now I trouble to talk to her because in the men's behaviour group what I'm learning is to communicate anything, any of your problems. Now what I do say to her; I feel bad about you doing this (work), I feel uncomfortable.*

Sami highlights the demanding and unsupportive attitude of his wife; and through this he constructs her as an antagonist in his change, while he positions himself as a victim of her demands. He attributes to his masculinity his failure to talk, revealing the continuity of his identity in his use of a sexist framework to make sense of the interest of his wife in talking and her frustrations for the lack of communication. Furthermore, he continues asking her to change her job to make him feel comfortable.

Despite their differences in responsibility assumption, both Robert and Sami reveal the continuity of their personal identity in declaring their aspiration to achieve a personal change through MBCP, with a focus on their psychological issues; therefore, placing the issue of IPV in a secondary place.

4.3.5.3   *I don't need to change*

Veer was at the end of the MBCP process. His telling was remarkably different from other persisters in both structure and content. He saturated the interview with criticism towards MBCPs and Australia, and did not account for his two marriages. He focused instead on his difficult working life in Australia, which he structured as a regressive story dominated by hardships and setbacks, amongst which he placed his involvement in MBCP. He regarded MBCP as time and money wasting, and claimed

that he would prefer to divorce instead of attempting a personal change if he has problems with his wife again:

> *The good thing I have noticed, that now in the future, if we feel some*
> *problem we will go for a divorce.*

Veer also reported attending psychiatric services in parallel with MBCP, although it was unclear if he attended this service voluntarily. For him, the psychiatrist was the best help he was receiving because, in his view, his problem was a sleeping disorder produced by his stressful financial situation and the conflicting pressures from his wife and father, which led him to increase his alcohol consumption. IPV was not a problem, but merely a manifestation of his frustration in not achieving prosperity. Veer considered personal change as unnecessary, because what he saw as needing to change was his external situation to find stress relief and financial prosperity. However, he positioned himself as a passive agent regarding this change, since he reported expecting his family situation and working conditions to improve by themselves as a result of time. Thus, he claimed the continuity of his personal identity.

4.3.5.4   Evaluative statements on MBCPs

In their life-story denouements, persisters expressed diverse views about MBCP, which varied according to their position regarding their change. Men who affirmed having changed manifested positive but very brief opinions on MBCP. They regarded this as a source of complementary learnings, as they both attributed their change to sources outside of MBCP: while Damian referred to his psychologist as the facilitator for his change, Tony referred to the restraint order. Persisters wanting to change considered their initial experience of MBCP as good and as a potential contribution for personal change. Sami's statement exemplifies this:

> *I'm learning here, I'm saying and everything... If I don't deal with my*
> *iceberg, then there's no way I'm going to be able to deal with any other*
> *thing that I'm worried about.*

Sami considers MBCP as a learning experience, and stresses his therapeutic expectations about it. Using the metaphor of the "iceberg", he refers to the

psychological issues he believes he needs to "deal" with in order to be able to "deal with other things"; thus revealing his conviction that, by addressing his psychological issues, he will be able to better his affective life. Likewise, Robert expressed therapeutic expectations for his involvement in MBCP.

The persister who affirmed not needing to change considered MBCP as a bad experience, and regarded his psychiatrist as a better way to deal with his sleep problems. He also expressed concern for his views being passed to the program staff, revealing an adversarial approach in his relationship with them.

Persisters positioned themselves in various ways in the denouements of their life-stories. Two men claimed to have changed after the incident, but did not account for this process consistently as they did not accept full responsibility for their violent behaviour and its impact, remaining focused exclusively on their individual needs as before the incident. Two men claimed the continuity of their personal identity, but declared their need for a change, although differing in the responsibility they assumed for this process and its purpose. Both these men argued for the need to recover from their psychological problems, but only one acknowledged violence prevention as his main concern and accepted his responsibility in this. The other privileged the improvement of his marriage and attributed the responsibility to his wife. Despite their differences, both men positioned themselves as being at the beginning of a potential positive resolution in their life stories. Contrastingly, the persister who positioned as not needing a personal change discarded his responsibility for his abusive behaviour and its relevance in the context of his life.

4.3.6   The future

Once persisters finished their life-story telling, they were invited to speculate about their anticipated future. Although they talked about different potential changes in their lives, they all inadvertently portrayed the continuity of their personal identity in their future visions. Persisters who declared their need for change talked about their future without considering the development of new and comprehensive understandings of their violent behaviour and its future prevention. For example, even

though Robert expressed his interest in moving "towards some kind of resolution", his future was focused on his need to get a job and a house:

> *I need to do some training in something to get work. I'm kind of like, the future is short, medium and unseen, so if I can get some work and at the same time generate some other income then buy a house in Melbourne or the edge of Melbourne.*

Robert seems to embrace a traditional masculine understanding of a good family life as a potential resolution for his difficulties. However, by focusing only on structural factors, Robert bypasses his declared need for a personal change, and disregards the assumption of responsibility for his violence and its impact on his wife and children as part of his future. He sees no need for engaging in the prevention of his violence and improving of his affective relationships. Apparently, he perceives these aspects of his life as a by-product of fulfilling the provider role.

Persisters who claimed to have changed also revealed the continuity of their personal identity, since their future visions reflected the preservation of their sense of self and outlined the continuity of their past and current lifestyle and concerns. Tony's statement of his anticipated future exemplifies this:

> *Recovery…maybe travel, I've never been out of Australia. (A) different work. Sooner or later, even when I'm not ready at the moment, to meet someone, get a work and get back into sex.*

Tony constructs his future around the hope of recovering what he most values in life and that constitute central themes for his identity: work and sex. Preventing his violent behaviour and the recovery of his lost affective relationships are not part of his envisioned future. Likewise, in spite of having claimed a personal change regarding his self-centredness, Damian outlined the continuity of this defining feature of his identity:

> *I wanna be not just a good person; I wanna be a very, very good person. I want to be the person that the people look at me and say; oh, he's wonderful!*

Both men who asserted having changed failed to consider their responsibility for the impact of their violence on others and for preventing further violence in their imagined futures.

The persister who claimed to not need to change talked sarcastically about his future, stating that he will leave it to Nature. His statement confirms his discarding of his violent behaviour as a problem, and coheres with his frustration at the perceived lack of control over his life conditions as the dominant theme of his life story. He expects life to become attuned with his needs as a natural process:

> *This is like my gravity, what I think the world slowly, slowly gets under*
> *the track according to you; but you have to give some time to anyone.*

Persisters' visions of the future revealed an anticipated continuity for their personal identity. Even though some of them claimed to have changed, and others the need for change, their future visions lacked a purposeful avoidance of violent and abusive behaviours and commitment to enhance mutual respect in their couple and family relationships. The overlooking of responsibility for their violent behaviour and its impact on others, as well as the preservation of their most salient interests and concerns as individuals, were the common features of persisters' imagined future.

4.4   Summary findings from non-desisting men's narratives

Persisters structured their life stories as lengthy flashbacks emulating the chronological flow of real life. After positioning themselves synchronically by talking about their current situation, persisters went back in time to account for their life story by constructing narratives around disparate morals such as 'drugs are bad' or 'affection and care is needed to grow as a good person', but converging on a plot about the transition from a fairly good life to a complicated life.

The chronological sequencing of critical life events was crucial to the identities and meanings they constructed. Persisters accounted for the origin of their unique psychological characteristics as a result of early life events and socializing processes, and storied the trajectory of their partnerships as a progressive decline that ended up

with an acute crisis. The narrative point appeared to involve identifying themselves as vulnerable men not responsible for their use of violence.

Persisters converged in constructing their identity as men who have been victims of circumstances and forces beyond their control that prevented them from maintaining stable affective relationships, articulating an uncritical attachment to dominant cultural masculine traditions such as patriarchy, stoicism, independence, downgrading of women and detachment from emotions and affection.

Even though persisters constructed their recent life crisis as the climax of their stories, with some of them even claiming to having changed after the incident, the denouements of their life stories and narratives of their imagined futures revealed the continuity of key features of their personal identity. Persisters constructed themselves as a character still dominated by forces coming from both the inner and social self. Some of them claimed to have some control over the former; but all of them outlined futures constructed around the same needs, motives, values and concerns as they had before the incident, where the prevalent themes are their own needs and a lack of concern about the impact of their behaviour on their partners and children.

CHAPTER V:
FINDINGS ON MEN DESISTING FROM IPV

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter the analysis of the life stories of men desisting from IPV is presented. As in the previous chapter, although the term 'men desisting from IPV' better captures the dynamic nature of the desistance process depicted by the participants, for easy of they will be subsequently referred to as 'desisters'.

The analysis of the interviews is divided into two major sections. The first section corresponds to the men's accounts of their current circumstances, and is broken down according to the different themes that emerged from the analysis; and the second section is disaggregated according to the different life stages accounted for by the men, and the themes that emerged from the analysis of each life stage.

5.2   The immediate present

Desisters commenced the interview by talking about themselves and their current circumstances in non-narrative ways. As a way to establishing a synchronic connection between self and others, they informed of, commented on and explained their main activities, concrete life conditions and their reasons for participating in the study.

5.2.1 Working men

Desisters privileged talking about their jobs as an initial identity positioning. Employed desisters told about their jobs; whereas unemployed men stressed that their current occupation was looking after their children, and explained why they were unemployed and how they managed to provide for their children, either through government aid or through casual jobs. Neil's extract illustrates the framing of parenting as his main occupation:

My occupation is... well...<clearing throat> I care for my two children. I have my nine year old daughter in my care ninety percent of the time and my three years old son fifty percent of the time, so one week he is with his mother and one week with me; so my occupation, I must say, is looking after my children.

5.2.2 Family situation

Desisters then positioned themselves regarding their family situation, mixing into this account both their partnership and paternity. Other than Neil, who characterized his relationship with his ex-partners as distant, desisters considered themselves as having close and good relationships with their partners or ex partners, characterizing them as working women and good mothers affected by their past violent behaviour. Steve's excerpt illustrates this:

I think that with the experience that she had with me, and realising the problem that exists in society with mental illness and trying to get help, she's trying to do something about that, probably to better her own as well. (...) we get along really well. I see my daughter often as I can.

5.2.3 Cultural background

Migrant desisters positioned themselves by referring to their cultural background, while white Australians did not addressed this issue. Although migrant desisters, throughout their telling, accounted for events taking place in their countries of origin, their cultural background did not play a relevant role in their stories.

5.2.4 Involvement in MBCP

Harry, Daniel and Neil spontaneously explained how they got involved in MBCP, resorting to the narrative genre to highlight the agentic nature of this action. Harry's narrative exemplifies this:

I was getting frustrated and I didn't like the heat in my head, I just wanted some help; I knew that I could get some help so I made a phone call to the program where I had gone to a night chat for men. So I rang the program and I said "I want to re-enrol in something, I want some help". "No worries, but we are very busy". "Okay, can you put my name

on the list?" "Yeah, we'll do that but we are very busy". Then I rang
another place ... I rang back the first program. I got angry on the phone,
I probably swore and I got - "Okay, yes there is a program starting and
we will send you a letter to get enrolled". I was really disappointed that I
rang up and asked for help and rang up and asked for help, rang up and
got angry on the phone and I got help! I've got to get angry to get what I
want. I finally enrolled and finished the program seven months ago.

Desisters who accounted for their involvement in MBCP also showed interest in highlighting the difficulties they experienced in accessing the program, to manifest their criticism towards the Men's Referral System and to emphasise their personal agency in overcoming these obstacles. Desisters who omitted the story of their involvement in MBCP at this point accounted for this at a later stage of the interview.

5.2.5   Evaluation of MBCP

Desisters expressed a wholly positive opinion towards the program, emphasizing the positive impact that it has had on their lives (except for Neil, who, in addition to positive comments, towards the end of the interview expressed criticism about the judgemental attitude against men that some facilitators manifested), illustrated in the following comments by Neil:

> *After finishing that twelve week program I attended another twelve week*
> *program because I felt it was doing me some good, I was feeling a lot*
> *better, I wasn't as angry, I was dealing with my anxiousness in a much*
> *better way, and not just in the family environment.*

References to the positive impact of MBCP can be interpreted as statements that, in addition to their informative value on the usefulness of these programs, reflect the interest of desisters in stressing that they have experienced a positive change in their lives. For example, even though Neil expressed criticism against the facilitators' approach, he perceived the program outcome as positive.

5.2.6 Appraisal of current situation

Desisters ended their self-introduction with evaluative statements on their current life situation, which they regarded as better than their non-distant past, as expressed by Neil:

> *My children have two different mothers. I do see both of them when I pick up or drop off my children. I don't have a very good relationship with either of them. We don't communicate very well. But things are much better now than what they use to be, that's the truth.*

These positive evaluative statements can be understood both as an introduction to a forthcoming story of the transition from a bad life situation to a better one, and as the assertion that this change has already occurred.

5.2.7 Why desisters participated in the study

Desisters explained they were interested in sharing their stories as a way to help other men involved in IPV, as expressed by Mason:

> *I think you'll understand my mindset; it's in giving that you receive. I've found through my journey that by talking about these experiences it's like little gifts that I'm giving to others so that they can learn from my mistakes.*

Desisters explained their participation in the study as motivated by sharing their story for the sake of others; but at the same time, they saw in this an opportunity to reinforce the claiming of personal change through the telling of their life story. Later on, they explicitly acknowledged the value that they conferred to the telling of their story of their change as a way to preserve and enhance it. As Daniel commented:

> *(The interview) helped me to remind that I have to keep on learning, keep on trying.*

Through their self-introductions, desisters positioned themselves synchronically by differentiating from and associating themselves with others, along different axes of the personal identity they considered relevant to be taken into account before telling

their life stories. Desisters portrayed themselves as working/job-seeking men caring for their children and respectful of their partners/ex-partners, and as men who have changed as the result of their involvement in MBCP, who wanted to help other men to stop family violence.

5.3 Life stories

Desisters broke down their life stories into several chapters, addressing specific stages of their lives associated with particular themes. Chapters extending from childhood to emergent adulthood were constructed as the life-story background, where they accounted for the origin and evolution of their psychological features as a character, and for their social trajectories. Chapters extending from emergent adulthood up to present time described a chronological sequence of progressive and regressive stories articulating an overall plot, where the main complication represented a dramatic downfall from a previous progressive or stable stage into an interpersonal crisis whose resolution forced the men to begin a process of personal transformation, with the help of experts, in order to preserve their most valued affective relationships; leading to a new progressive moment with a transformed protagonist in a somewhat transformed relational context.

5.3.1 Childhood: constructing an inner self

When desisters' finished their self-introductions, they were invited to focus on the chapters they wrote and expand on their contents. They addressed this task by resorting to the narrative genre, going back in time to initiate a lengthy flashback from the first memories of their lives. Desisters begun by selecting events occurring before their birth, during their childhood, and in adolescence, to account for the origin of their inner, long-lasting, idiosyncratic characteristics. Sequences typically described a rapid decline, from positive into negative states they claimed as having negative and long lasting impact on their psyche. Desisters complemented these formative sequences with accounts of the acquisition of beliefs and practices associated with the use of violence and masculinity, which articulated an internalized worldview as a second layer that completed the configuring of their inner self before their emergent adulthood.

Desisters accounted for their early life by focusing on events where they were victimized or neglected as a child, resulting in the permanent harm of their psycho-affective functioning. Steve's narrative serves to illustrate this association:

> *Something very important happened. My dad died when I was six month old, so I didn't get that emotional support from my mum 'cos she was grieving. And I lost my sister when I was a year and a half, so my mum lost her husband and daughter within two years and she was grieving and had a breakdown. She had to get to the hospital at that stage when my dad died. That's why I was craving for attention. I'm pretty sure that that was when my anxiety and depression started.*

Steve orients us to an early life event he remarks as critical to understanding a distinctive feature of his self. He explains how his psychological problems stem from the tragic events that transformed his family life when he was an infant, and left him without the needed emotional support he required for a healthy psychological development. Through this account, Steve constructs himself as a disadvantaged man in terms of his capacity to deal with life, setting the conditions for explaining how his constitutive "anxiety and depression" has influenced his life.

However, most desisters accounted for a more agentic role for the adults in generating the traumatic experiences they claimed as the cause of their psychological problems. A common theme of these stories was the traumatic early exposure to their father's violence against their mother. Daniel's narrative exemplifies this:

> *I was in the bath with my brothers I and heard mum and dad fighting. Then mum came to pick us from the bath and had blood dripping from her nose into the water. That burned into my mind. That was quite a horrifying time in my life.*

Daniel takes us to his most early life memory to illustrate the experience of terror he claimed characterized his infancy. The gory scene he recalls helps him to demonstrate the shocking nature of the experiences he went through, to validate the profound and enduring impact this had on his psyche, which he underlines with the "burned into my

mind" metaphor. Through this, Daniel constructs himself as an emotionally injured man.

Desisters were not only affected by the violence of their fathers towards their mothers. Some of them were also subjected to child abuse by their fathers themselves, as Neil expressed:

> *I don't have many childhood memories. I know my father took me away from my mother when I was very young and gone to Sydney, I'm not sure, just stories that I´ve heard. (But) I remember my parents fighting, I remember often being hit by my father; he was very controlling. He used to do things like, for example, get very hammered during summer, and he would make me go buy his cigarettes, he used to give me the money and spit on the concrete and say: "you better be back before the spit dries".*

Desisters consistently accounted for their childhood as a rapid worsening in their life conditions in terms of security and affection. Cohering with the discourse stating that traumatic events have the power to change the person's sense of self and safety in the world, the notion of emotional trauma allowed desisters to understand their transition from a normal infant to a psychologically impaired child; and to narratively construct themselves as a protagonist who, due to the impact of early negative experiences, carries forward vulnerabilities that potentially make it more difficult for them to cope with the difficulties of life in general and with the complexities of affective relationships in particular; representing also the uncontrollability of a defective part of the self that requires healing with external help.

Desisters limited the constitution of their emotional core self to the stage from childhood to early adolescence. Sequences with constitutive value for the self after this period were described in terms of a learning process with an emphasis on behaviours and beliefs. In the context of desisters' life stories as a whole, the narratives of the constitution of the emotional core self functioned as orientation, constructing relevant inner characteristics of the protagonist, introducing and describing relevant characters, and situating them in a particular space-time frame. The focus of these narratives on the origin of the psychological deficits of the protagonist indicates that these features can be interpreted as the initial complication

in a story of a conflict between man and self, as well as clues set in place for a forthcoming major complication.

5.3.1.2 *Learning to be a man*

In addition to the traumatic impact of early exposure to family violence and experiences of child abuse, desisters accounted for a learning process through which they were assimilated into the traditions of masculine use of violence, manly ways of dealing with emotions, downgrading of women, and male privileges, by influential socializing agents and contexts; adding to an already emotionally wounded boy a traditional masculine worldview.

5.3.1.2.1 The Learning of masculine violence

Desisters' narratives of childhood consistently portrayed their fathers as the character perpetrating violence against their mothers and themselves. Most desisters explicitly identified their father – or older brother, in the case of Steven - as the violent model who transmitted to them the use of violence. Neil's narrative serves to exemplify this:

> *I think that my father was very angry. My grandfather was very angry. I've heard some stories of the violence that my grandfather used on my father, horrific violence; tied by the hands when he was a young boy behind his back and hang from a tree!*

> *The reason I put the birth of my father is to give some historical context. So we have this man here, who was born into his own violent environment, and who then had a child, which is me. So he hasn't received any support around and help around his own experiences, he is carrying stuff with him. And then he has a little boy so, what's he gonna give this guy, what he is gonna give the boy? (...) My experience of my father is that he was very angry, very violent man. I have a brother, I'm the oldest. I don't think he was violent with him as with me.*

Neil orients us to the origin of the intergenerational transmission of violence in his life. His father was an angry man because he was "carrying stuff with him" as the result of the abuse he received from Neil's grandfather. Adding the idea that his

father never received any help regarding the impact of the abuse he experienced, Neil asks a rhetoric question 'what is he gonna give the boy' to explain the origin of his own violence. Neil suggests in his narrative that, as he experienced violence from his father, he is carrying "stuff with him" too; therefore, he is also outlining a through line of his life story about the effect of that "stuff" in his life. Implicit in this narrative is the idea that child abuse produces both the learning of violence and emotional injuries that require help to prevent their transmission to the next generation.

Desisters also accounted for a more intentional process of transmission of violence from their fathers, by constructing them as a model, instilling violence as a problem-solving strategy, values about how men should manage their emotions, and practices of fatherhood. Daniel's narrative allows us to appreciate this learning process:

> *In the past I was taught to deal with disappointment with anger. When I was about three or four, I was on my tricycle going down the street when a boy older than me pushed me off my bike and took it. I ran home crying. My father was there drinking with his friends and told me; what's wrong with you sissy boy? Go and beat him on! So I ran back and hit him and came back with my bike. But then the boy's dad came and nearly had a fight with my dad. That's how I was taught to deal with things; if someone upsets you, you punch him out, and that costed me so much trouble in my life.*

Daniel explains how he learned from his father to supress sadness and turn it into anger and violence as part of his socialization as a man. In accounting for this process, he also portrays his father as a masculine model of non-nurturing fathering, sexism and alcohol consumption. Daniel stresses in his narrative that he was forced into violence and masculine ways of dealing with emotions; highlighting, however, with his final, evaluative clause that he has also learned that violence bring troubles.

Desisters accounted for their socialization in the masculine use of violence and manly ways of dealing with emotions as a process extending beyond their families during their adolescence. Mason's narrative exemplifies this process:

> *I was actually in year seven, and we had queues to go to for the tuck shop, and we have year seven to year ten in one side of the doorway, and at the*

other side were the years eleven and twelve, so they were bigger boys. A
year ten boy pushed in, and I said; what you're doing? And he said;
what're you gonna do about it? What I'm going to do about it? I broke
his nose. And the thing went around the school; don't fuck with Mason
because you're gonna cop it. I didn't know what I was doing at the time;
it's just the rage, pure rage that came out.

All the other kids in year seven said this guy was doing the wrong thing,
and he actually instigated it, so because he was an older boy I kind of got
away with it. But there were a couple of incidents where I actually put
two kids in hospital; broken sternum and a broken arm. My dad taught
me how to look after myself.

I was always that sort of person that protected the nerds. At school I was
very good at athletics, so I was almost like the captain of the school, so
other kids look after me. When they used to get into trouble with other
kids they came to speak to me. And then I go and enforce on their behalf;
and even the teachers used to say: "I know what you're trying to do, but
you can't do that, you know; yes, the kid is an idiot and yes they're blah-
blah-blah", so in a roundabout way I got away with my behaviour
because the teachers wanted to smack that kid, but they couldn't because
they could get in trouble, and because I was protecting another child from
a bully. I was a really popular person at the school for boys (...) It's
funny to look at. I got a kind of misguided understanding of justice. I'm
starting to appreciate, maybe with the age, the way in which I did go
about that in the wrong way.

Mason depicts how he "got away with" using extreme violence at school and reached a power position within his school community, where even teachers indirectly supported his violent behaviour. The violence he describes both as a sign of underlying psycho-emotional problems - since it was just "pure rage that came out" - and as a problem-solving strategy he learned from his father that helped him to become a "popular person at the school for boys", reflecting the extent to which that context supported and encouraged his use of violence.

Through this narrative, Mason explains how the social context reinforced his violent behaviour as a problem-solving strategy but overlooked its consideration as a sign of

psycho-emotional problems. In this way, Mason was able to account for the continuity of his emotional problems, and for the increase of his inclination to use violence both as a way to obtain power and to express negative emotions, as being a result of external forces, so as to make sense of his use of violence against his wife in his recent past. However, he ends his narrative with an evaluative clause to highlight that now he sees this stage of his life as going in the "wrong way", and thus to separate himself from that past self. These evaluative statements were a common coda in desisters' narratives of their past violence, and appeared to represent a discursive manoeuvre to claim a current transformed identity.

5.3.1.2.2 Downgrading of women

In their narratives from childhood to adolescence, desisters accounted for the learning of masculine downgrading of women as a result of recurrent exposure to scenes of violence from their father against their mother. The following extract from Mason's narrative of witnessing his father's violence against his mother serves as an example of this:

> I had more empathy for what my dad was going through than for what my mum was going through. I was programming myself to say, what is she doing is disrespectful, so therefore he is now responding, you deserved that; and all that stuff that we learned through the course.

Other than Mason, desisters also accounted for the learning of masculine downgrading of women as sexual objects, a process typically portrayed as fostered by masculine influential figures such as fathers and older brothers. Steve accounts illustrates this:

> It all started when I was 13 and discovered a book under my brother's bed, a pornographic book. I was eager, because of my past I was looking for some way to escape from my sadness. That was the start of my huge problems in my life. You tend to copy your siblings, you think; oh, Jack is looking at it; I'm going to copy (...) I think I bought magazines; that started when I was 15. And then the actual acting out, going out, and meeting women and one night stand and all that rubbish that started when I was 18.

In his narrative, Steve not only accounts for the process of his incorporation into the masculine downgrading of women as facilitated by his older brother, he also juxtaposes justifications for his behaviour with evaluative statements separating himself from it. Steve learned this sexist practice because he "was looking for some way to escape" from his "sadness", and people (represented in the universal "you") naturally "tend to copy" their siblings. But now he rejects that sexist behaviour because it "was the start of huge problems", suggesting that he stopped that behaviour after a reflexive process.

Desisters constructed their narratives of past abusive, criminal or sexist behaviour in a similar fashion: accounting in the first place for the acquisition of the behaviour, rationalising its acquisition as the result of internal or external forces out of their control; and then judging the behaviour as wrong from their current position. Through this plotting, desisters mitigated their responsibility in the learning process; but also separated themselves from those behaviours and the values they represent to claim a transformed identity.

5.3.1.2.3 Masculine privileges: the right to rule family life

Desisters also accounted for a more subtle form of learning associated with the gendered construction of their self. They storied how they were influenced by masculine figures holding positions of power in their lives, and by masculine traditions fostered in their social contexts. Among these learnings, masculine self-centeredness emerged as the most relevant theme. Most desisters portrayed their father, or older brothers - when they had no father - as selfish men who felt entitled to impose their interests on their families, as Daniel expressed:

> *Dad took us for hunting or fishing when he wasn't drunk. But it was always about what he wanted to do. He wasn't generous, he was very selfish. I was brought up to believe that a real man gets drunk and abusive. Now I know that is not like that.*

Self-centeredness was a common feature of male models in desisters' life-stories. These models' actions represented a pattern of unilateral decision making, excluding other family members' perspectives, the imposition of personal interests, and a lack

of interest in negotiating decisions affecting family life. The excerpt of Harry's narrative following, explaining how he stopped attending school due to the unilateral decision of his father, serves as an example of this:

> *Then I went to school. Dad came to see me, dad argued with school. He came and ripped me out from school.*

Self-centeredness proved to be a relevant theme for desisters' identity construction, because it helped them claim that part of their change consisting in becoming conscious of their selfishness and transforming themselves into more empathetic men, aware of the needs and emotions of their children and partners.

The learning to be a man was accounted for as a situated process, facilitated by emotional states and boosted by power relations: Mason was inclined to justify his father's violence due to his affective distancing from his mother; and Steve was "eager" to consume pornography because he was "looking for some way of escaping" from his sadness. Although the references to these elements could be interpreted as rhetorical manoeuvres to minimize their responsibility, their presence as intertwined forces throughout desisters' life stories makes plausible their consideration as critical biographical events, selected by desisters according to dominant social discourses, to make sense of both their deviation from and their return to socially acceptable behaviours.

Narratives of learning to be a man reflect how desisters resorted to notions of social learning to account for the internalization of gendered behaviours and beliefs. The ubiquity of this understanding in desisters' narratives indicates that this framework was critical in helping them make sense of their personal transitions from good to bad and bad to good. By accounting for the learning of violence and hegemonic masculinity at early stages of their life stories, they were able to set the possibility for a future transformation, since what has been learned can potentially be unlearned. These narratives represent the addition of the conflict, man versus society, as a second theme to their life stories.

Constructing an inner self from the symbolic resources offered by social discourses of the self prevalent in desisters' social contexts appeared to be the most significant theme facilitating the desisters' navigation of constancy and change throughout their life stories. This construction allowed them to account for individual characteristics that helped them understand both the origin of their violent behaviour and the process through which they were able to achieve a personal transformation to stop it. From this perspective, the damage they received during their infancy, and the masculine models they internalized during their childhood and adolescence, can be seen as the inciting incidents of their life story. This renders the mastering of the internal world, in terms of emotions and beliefs, as the challenge the protagonist must achieve in order to transform his social (interactional) self, to restore the equilibrium in their lives.

5.3.2 *Narratives of youth*

The period from adolescence to emerging adulthood was portrayed by desisters as a transition to independent life, characterized by the manifestation of latent psychological problems triggered by adverse contextual factors. By building sequences of events as associative chains, between previous emotional traumas, social learnings and lack of family support, and on the other hand the enacting of different problematic behaviours such as substance abuse, offending, violence towards their partners and interpersonal conflicts, desisters accounted for the continuity of their psychological vulnerabilities and the initial impact of these problematic behaviours on their life trajectories, in terms of employment, interpersonal relations, affective relations, and self-concept. In a more flattened manner, they also accounted for the continuity and consolidation of hegemonic masculine practices and beliefs, such as heterosexuality, dominance, independence, and work centrality.

5.3.2.1 *Continuity of the Inner Self*

After accounting for their childhood, desisters addressed the more relevant events of their youth with a focus on the difficulties they experienced, routinely framing this as expression of the psychological vulnerabilities they developed and social learning they received during their childhood in the context of adverse circumstances.

5.3.2.1.1   Initiation of IPV

Mason and Daniel accounted for the use of IPV as a problematic behaviour manifested in their adolescence, as evidenced in this account by Mason:

> *I did quite well at school. I actually got accepted into the architecture course; and then Jane felt pregnant and oh shit! I managed to get a job at Australia Post (...) It was quite a tough period for me. All of my dreams and aspirations almost went to a halt because Jane - we falling pregnant, and then going through the loss of the pregnancy as well, because we made all the changes. We got married because I felt it was the right thing to do. This is probably the time of my life where a lot of my initial violence came out into our marriage, after the miscarriage. We were trying to get out our lives back together again and to live the loss, and I think for me, not understanding what I understand today, being such a macho, school captain and all that sort of stuff, to end up losing a child ... it didn't make much sense. I was struggling with that internally, and then a lot of her stresses that she was currently going through. I didn't know how to respond to her needs. We only knew each other for a short period of time, and it was a massive combination of emotions and mixed messages and misunderstandings; a lot of things that terminated in us fighting quite a bit. Me reacting violently, using physical violence, to a point whereby she said enough, I can't deal with it. So when I was 20 I was divorced.*

Although Mason and Daniel placed their IPV at the centre of their life stories, they made considerable effort to separate themselves from who they were at the time, as shown in Mason's statement "not understanding what I understand today". In addition, IPV perpetration was routinely portrayed as a result of an internal struggle triggered by adverse unexpected circumstances, typically as a reaction, and framed as an expression of latent psychological vulnerabilities and the influence of violent models. Daniel's narratives following serve to illustrate the confluence of these two internal forces in a more synthetic fashion:

> *[At thirteen] I met a girl three years older than me, just before losing my eye. I don't know if it was for pity, but she became my first girlfriend. At*

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that time I also started consuming drugs and alcohol, possibly to cope with losing my eye; before I knew it I had problems with consumption. I was with that girl for four years, and I think after the second year I started to hit her and that became more frequent.

I grew up with the idea that women were to serve men; that was what my mum did, giving up her dreams to have a family with a helping husband. We never helped her. We didn't have good role models. In my relationships I've expected my partners to be like that; looking after my emotions and spiritual wellbeing. Now I know that I got to take care of myself, I wish I have known that from early age.

Daniel connects the losing of his eye with the initiation of drug consumption and the development of low self-esteem (attribution of pity), as the cause of his IPV. Then he adds the role played by his socialization in causing his IPV, by stating that he "didn't have good role models", completing in this way his explanation. Although he acknowledges his violence, he attenuates his responsibility by framing this as a manifestation of underlying psychological problems, substance abuse, and the influence of bad role models. His narrative also exhibits an immediate move to differentiate himself from who he was before in terms of knowledge, highlighting that he has changed: "Now I know that I got to take care of myself". This change reflects the assumption of responsibility for his "emotions and spiritual life"; although the overcoming of his psychological problems is absent.

Through the narratives of initiation of IPV, Mason and Daniel accounted for what they regarded as their most relevant challenge. This assisted them to represent the continuity of underlying psychological problems and deep-seating learnings in producing subsequent relapses in their adult lives. Contrastingly, the remaining desisters were less clear in accounting for the IPV they perpetrated throughout their lives. Neil blurred his use of IPV as symmetric escalations with his former partners; Daniel and Steve described it as exclusively verbal, contextualizing (and minimizing) their violence as relational problems that they attributed to their psychological problems; and Matt circumscribed his IPV to the episode with his wife, which he regarded as consequence of his alcoholism. Even though these four desisters displaced IPV to a secondary place in their narratives of youth - perhaps because they

actually perpetrated IPV only later in their lives - they also accounted for the continuity of their psychological problems and gendered social learnings through narratives of initiation into other problematic behaviours, around which they structured their narratives of youth.

5.3.2.1.2 Involvement in addictions

Other than Mason and Harry, desisters accounted for their adolescence as an initiation into addictive behaviours such as substance abuse and gambling, as Steve expressed:

> *The gambling was just very sly at the time. I won initially, which kept feeding my ego; maybe one day I'm going to be a big time gambler, a very important person, to be noticed; I wanted to be noticed 'cos I've low self-esteem. It's amazing how the devil causes you, to people that are vulnerable, that are susceptible to have a personality, addictive personality.*

Steve explained his involvement in gambling as being a result of his "low self-esteem" and "addictive personality"; likewise, desisters involved in drug addiction also resorted to psychological problems and lack of family support to understand their initiation into substance abuse. By accounting for their involvement in addiction, desisters were able to explain a series of growing complications that reflected a progressive worsening of their lives, structuring the rising-action stage of their life stories around this issue, and constructing their addictions as a major challenge they should confront to restore balance in their lives.

Narratives of involvement in addiction allowed these desisters to construct themselves as not responsible for its development, mitigating their responsibility for the impact their addictions had on their life trajectories in terms of relational and job instability. However, these narratives appear to play a more relevant function in assisting them to account for the continuity of their psychological problems throughout this stage of their lives, since they subsequently claimed a transformed identity regarding their addictions. Indeed, Steve and Matt displaced IPV to a secondary level, and gave pre-eminence to stopping their addictions in claiming a transformed identity.

5.3.2.1.3   Involvement in offending

Matt and Neil, two desisters with stories of heavy substance abuse, accounted also for their involvement in criminal activity as a complication derived from negative contextual forces. The extract following, from Neil's narrative of his running away from his family home, serves as an example:

> *I think I was very reserved and very quiet as the children that live in violent houses. But I think getting into a teenager (...) I started leaving home and running away from home. I was living on the streets for a long time and I hitchhiked and went to Queensland for some time (...) So as a teenager I started doing a bit of crime. I was robbing places with friends and alone. I was caught by the police; no big deal, I didn't go to jail or anything like that, but I did get to court a couple of times.*

Narratives of involvement in offending (which owing to space constriction cannot be quoted in full) articulated sequences of events accounting for the worsening of family violence and the lack of family support as the causes of the protagonist's alienation from their families and involvement with peers with whom they began to commit crimes. Through this sequencing, these desisters were able to minimize their responsibility for this behaviour, preserving their moral integrity by portraying their offending as an expression of the intersection of personal vulnerabilities with the lack of family support and a disadvantaged social context, as in this account by Matt:

> *I was mixing with the wrong people, I was living with a drug dealer that got raided every second day, and then I left.*

These narratives also assisted them in accounting for their working trajectory, to make sense of their current social position; and more importantly, to dramatize the moral change associated with the abandoning of the offending lifestyle, that helped them to stress their personal agency in solving this challenge.

5.3.2.2   *Continuity and consolidation of traditional masculinity*

In addition to the storying of the life challenges constructed as expression of the inner self, desisters also addressed, in their narratives of youth, relevant developments in

their lives that contributed historically to producing the social position they described at the time of the interview.

5.3.2.2.1 Easy access to work

Desisters demonstrated a significant attachment to work as a through line for structuring their life stories. They seemed interested in explicating their current social position by recounting their working trajectories, in which they inadvertently revealed assumed ways of the world and taken-for-granted masculine privileges. For example, desisters portrayed their easy access to work as a taken-for-granted masculine privilege, as evidenced in Steve's account:

> *I left school, just got any sort of job and started the potato manufacturing,*
> *the hardest job in my life unloading heavy sacks of potatoes.*

Desisters constructed their entrance into the workforce as an effortless transition from school, where they assumed unskilled jobs as being good enough, revealing both their gendered motivation to quickly access the benefits of a paid job, such as independence, and their social class expectations about what counts as a good job. Only Mason, who changed his tertiary education plans due to the unexpected pregnancy of his girlfriend, considered this type of work as downgrading and accounted for a subsequent agentic improvement in this area of his life; which, however, eventually had a downside regarding his family life.

5.3.2.2.2 Work as a gender issue

Most desisters portrayed their involvement in the workforce as a necessary step to fulfilling gendered social expectations that they assumed as natural, as Harry expressed:

> *[Y]ou guys have been a kid, you guys have been a teenager and then you*
> *becqame somebody that's supposed to work and provide, so you go and*
> *do this jobs that you can do, provide and being manly.*

This excerpt, taken from the orientation part of Harry's working trajectory narrative, reflects the extent to which getting a job was a matter of masculine identity. However, as most desisters were single with no children at that time, this transition seemed to represent an interest in achieving the status of independent man rather than that of provider; an interpretation supported by the description they made regarding how they spent their first salary on vehicles, partying and substance use.

Narratives of the entrance into the workforce can be considered as the necessary background for understanding the social positions men had at the time of the interview, particularly around whether or not they had a paid job, revealing the centrality of this issue in the construction of their identity. However, it is important to note that these narratives were linked to stories of educational trajectories hindered by learning disorders, mood disorders, family violence, and in some cases poverty; thus, these narratives should be understood as reflecting not only a gendered social reality, but as the intersection of individual and social conditions.

5.3.2.2.3 Dating women

Desisters accounted for their youth as the stage in their lives in which they commenced the trajectory of a heterosexual man, which they assumed as an expression of their biological nature. Heterosexuality was a relevant theme for desisters' identity because, through these narratives, they constructed themselves as men sexually interested in women only, and represented heterosexual desire as a motivation for certain relevant steps they took in their lives; as, for example, in the orientation part of Neil's story of his return to Australia:

> *I came back to Australia just for holidays because I met this girl and she was living here, and she came to Greece before.*

Narratives of dating women were crucial for desisters' establishing of the continuity of their masculine heterosexual identity, and the construction of heterosexual desire as a natural consequence of their sex and as the drive to look for women as intimate partners.

5.3.2.2.4   Early attempts to tackling problematic behaviours

Daniel and Matt accounted for their attempts to stop their substance abuse and violence as early developments in their lives. In these narratives, they portrayed themselves as gaining awareness of their problems by themselves, and purposefully initiating actions to stop them. Daniel's narrative exemplifies this:

> *I remember one night started arguing with the lady and I punched in her face, causing her a serious cut underneath her eye. It happened so quickly that I hardly knew that I've done it. She was very forgiving, she was religious. I also remember one night after attacking her I cowered under the table and started to cry because I was sick of my behaviour, saying help me God. She came, put her hand on my shoulder and said: if you really want it, he will help you. It was a revelation for me. I retrieved the bible that my grandmother gave me for my thirteenth birthday and read it from cover to cover. That (...) got me started in trying to change my life, to make it better.*

Through these narratives, these desisters represented the difficulty involved in stopping problematic behaviours, and stressed the aim they had to better their lives from an early age. The description of repetitive attempts to address their problems assisted them to account for the continuity of their vulnerabilities, while constructing themselves as agentic heroes who have gone through a long journey to confront these problems and restore the balance in their lives. Contrastingly, the other desisters accounted for the continuity of their vulnerabilities as latent forces waiting to reappear.

Desisters focused their narratives of youth on the development of problematic behaviours that they framed as manifestations of psychological underlying problems and socially learned behaviours and beliefs. Addictions, offending and IPV were portrayed as reactions triggered and fostered by contextual forces that added new features to their personal identity. Desisters also accounted for the initiation of their working trajectories, independent life, and heterosexual paths. Through both types of narrative, desisters enriched the story background and raised the narrative tension of their life stories by depicting themselves as getting involved in growing

complications, while accounting for the continuity of their psychological problems and internalized masculine world views. The depicting of a series of difficulties also contributed to accentuating the dramatic nature of their life stories, and paved the way for the subsequent sharpening of the agentic surmounting of these obstacles in the heroic quest for achieving a better life.

5.3.3 Narratives of adulthood

Desisters accounted for their entrance into adulthood as a transition from single life to stable partnership and fatherhood. This represented an improvement of their lives, which was followed by a period of stability. However, this was interrupted by unexpected adverse circumstances, generating a relational crisis that ended up with them perpetrating IPV. Through the sequencing of these narratives, desisters constructed a tragic plot for this life stage in which their character flaws and internalized masculine models turned, ultimately, into their apparent undoing.

5.3.3.1 Working and partying

The period from early adulthood to settling with a partner was described by desisters either as a regular or a bad time in their lives. Neil, Matt, Daniel and Steve regarded this stage as bad, characterized by heavy drinking, drug consumption, gambling (only Steve), and offending (Matt and Neil). Neil's narrative illustrates this negative description:

> *I was living on my own (...) I came here to do some robberies and take*
> *the money and go on holidays there [Europe]. (...) I did that for five or*
> *six years. I was consuming ecstasy, partying. I was doing a lot. I can't say*
> *it was a good moment of my life, it doesn't work that way unfortunately. If*
> *you have a conscience you know that it's not right. Your conscience*
> *doesn't let you enjoy in the way that you could. I felt really alone.*

Neil characterized his single life as revolving around a hedonistic lifestyle of crime and drug abuse that he knew was wrong and did not make him happy. The remaining desisters involved in addictions structured their narratives with a similar sequence: describing their involvement in addiction, and then taking a critical stance towards it,

characterizing this stage as a regressive moment. In this way, they were able to accentuate the dramatic character of their life stories and stress the contrast with the subsequent stage of their lives when they withdrew from addiction.

Mason and Harry differed from the previous desisters, as they structured this stage of their lives both as a stable moment revolving around work and social life, and as a preface for even better times.

5.3.3.2   IPV against temporary partners

Daniel, Neil, Steve and Harry accounted for using IPV during this stage of their lives, although differing in types, frequency and clarity of description. Daniel reported the perpetrating of physical IPV against two different partners as caused by his anger; the last resulting in him being arrested, fined and referred to an anger management program and Alcoholics Anonymous A. Neil reported mutual IPV with the mother of his first of two children, with whom he had a brief relationship. Steve and Harry were less specific: they reported being 'disrespectful' with some of their temporary partners, although claiming to not be aware of that until they attended MBCP, as for example, Harry:

> *I had a disrespectful relationship with a girl. I didn't know they were disrespectful until I did this course. I objectified them.*

Narratives of IPV perpetration against temporary partners assisted these men to account for the continuity of their personal identity in terms of their inner self. Through these narratives they were able to frame their subsequent IPV as an expression of this inner self, and to represent a contrast with the changed current identity that they claimed in the interview. Daniel was also able to construct the bettering of himself as a through line of his life story.

5.3.3.3 Settling with partners

Desisters exhibited contrasting descriptions of how they met their partner, and the meaning they attributed to this event. Mason stood out from the remaining desisters,

as he devoted an extensive part of his telling to describing how he met his wife, detailing her positive attributes and those of her family, and accounting for an immediate positive change in his life. Steve, Matt and Harry also depicted the meeting of their partners as a relevant progressive event, highlighting the positive impact their partners brought into their lives. The following excerpt from Steve's narrative of how he met his wife exemplifies this:

> *Maria (was) a good influence; didn't smoke, drink or gamble. I was at the end of it, probably at the worst when I met her. She was suddenly saying: you don't want to lose all your money; can you please not go to the ATM again? You don't want to give all your money to these (people), make these people rich. And she even knew. I told her my past; how I'd been with a lot of women. I wanted to be straight up front.*

These four desisters converged in constructing their partners as positive characters who improved their lives, and the initiation of the relationship as an agentic development guided by the purpose of establishing a stable and enduring relationship, as shown for example in Steve's statement, "I wanted to be straight up front".

Contrastingly, Daniel and Neil made a laconic reference to the meeting of their partners, and portrayed the initiation of the relationship as an event involving low agency on their part; and demonstrated interest in characterizing their partners as having a bad influence on their addictions. Daniel's account serves as an example:

> *We started a relationship and she was heavily into drugs, so we supported each other's bad habits. We were together for seven years in a very bad relationship with lots of drugs, alcohol and violence.*

Through their narratives, Neil and Daniel attenuated their responsibility for continuing substance abuse, and blurred their agency in their use of IPV; however, as they admitted having done both, they reported the continuity of their personal identity.

Through the narratives of meeting partners, desisters introduced relevant characters of their life stories. Most accounted for this meeting as a positive turning point that represented their potential ability to abstain from problematic behaviours through

supportive relationships; while two men accounted for the continuity of their substance abuse and IPV, as they did not find those supportive conditions. These narratives assisted all desisters in constructing themselves as sensitive to contextual factors for changing.

5.3.3.4   Becoming father

Desisters accounted for the birth of their children as a positive turning point in their identities leading to an improvement of their lives, followed by a positive plateau with varied time lengths. Steve, Mason, Matt, Harry and Steve described this period as extending for a number of years before experiencing new downturns. Steve's narrative following serves to illustrate the positive impact of the birth of children:

> *Just holding a beautiful baby, the joy of feeling close with Maria, bringing this through God as well, bringing this beautiful child into the world. The closeness with the fatherhood obviously and the closeness you feel with your wife; just loving unconditionally the baby when she came, and then my son.*

These five desisters portrayed themselves as initiating a family life focused on parenting and couple relationship at the same time, describing a subsequent period of stability briefly depicted as generally good with no manifestations of problematic behaviours. Through this depiction, these desisters attested for the centrality of fatherhood in redefining their identities by setting new life purposes, accounting also for their ability to abstain from problematic behaviours under favourable relational conditions, and constructing the story background to contrast with a tragic forthcoming downturn.

Neil and Daniel also accounted for the birth of their children as a positive identity-changing event, with a focus on fatherhood only, as Daniel expressed:

> *For someone who was always so selfish and self-absorbed, I think that was my first ever eye opener experience, an awakening, finding out that the world didn't revolve around me.*

However, these changes did not last more than months, as Daniel and Neil soon experienced relapses with drug abuse and commenced to use IPV against the mother of their children, as evident in Daniel's account:

> *After we had the baby my selfish side came up and I started worrying about not having sex. I was smoking lots of pot and that affected my moods. My partner ended up leaving. I never felt so alone in my life. It really made me think a lot. I was happy being a father, even when I didn't have a good model. I realized that I had screwed up and lost an opportunity. That made me tried to straighten a bit. My partner ended up coming back.*

Both men reported that breaking up with the mother of their children led them to re-evaluate themselves and where their lives were going, portraying the risk of losing contact with their children as promoting critical self-reflection and boosting their motivation to change.

Desisters accounted for the birth of their children as a positive turning point leading to an identity change, and their paternity as a motivation to improve their lives through abstention from addictions and IPV. However, abstention from IPV was constructed as highly dependent on the nature of the relationship with their partners, representing the continuity of their inner self and the stability of their lives as fragile.

5.3.4   *The relational crisis and the perpetration of IPV*

Desisters accounted for the period prior to attending MBCP as a stage characterized by the emergence of external difficulties that negatively impacted their couple relationship, triggering the manifestation of personal vulnerabilities (deficient emotional functioning and internalized patriarchal models), which ultimately led them to use IPV. However, in spite of this common pattern, desisters varied in the relevance they attributed to the factors causing the difficulties and in the ways they assumed accountability for their use of IPV.

5.3.4.1   IPV due to interacting external and internal forces

Mason and Harry accounted for their violence through narratives focused on the role played by the conjunction of their negative emotional reactions with their gendered beliefs, in the shaping of their responses to adverse contextual circumstances. For example, Mason explained how his life turned difficult after the birth of his second son, Darren, who was diagnosed with severe autism at the age of five. Before the diagnosis, his relationship deteriorated due to his distancing caused by the lack of understanding of Darren's condition, and increased financial stress he addressed by working every day in two jobs. After the diagnosis, Darren became more difficult to handle, so his wife required collaboration, but Mason responded with criticism, saying he was doing enough by providing. The following excerpt from Masons' narrative illustrates how he accounted for his increasing use of violence after this point:

> *I think I fell into a similar type phase of what I fell into when I lost my first child, a sense of loss, a sense of self-pity, because I felt like I was losing another child again when all of this stuff was happening with Darren. And the macho thing: why did I have a kid that's got issues? (…) I started blaming her and becoming very judgemental. This started to build and build and build. It got to a point during this time I started then showing aggression, verbally, not physical, towards her but physical towards objects and things like that. I was giving me permission to react in this way. Milton [his other son] would've been five years old (when) I became that aggressive that he would even cower in the corner and start to cry. I remember that vividly. I started to become a big monster.*

> *(…) I reacted against Darren, I went to hit him and Francesca saw me. She jumped in front of me and… "What are you doing? Get out of the way!" And I punched her in a rib cage and I punched her in an ear… And Milton was "Dad what are you doing?" And I stopped. And my hands were shaking. She looked at me and her ear was all blood red. She just looked at me and said: "I can't do this anymore". And when she said those words it was like what Jane had said to me all those years ago. It fell apart. I just spiralled to a point that two days later I tried to commit suicide.*

Mason structured a sequence where an external stressor originated his distancing from his wife, and adherence to the masculine notion of the provider associated with his compassionless response to his wife. Then, he focused on his subjective experience, describing a mixture of negative emotions, such as "sense of loss and a sense of self-pity", and gendered beliefs, such as "the macho thing" he portrayed as fuelling his increasing use of violence; which he framed, however, as a result of giving himself "permission" to enact.

Mason's narrative depicts a gradual process of violence intensification, where the account for the subjective experience of juxtaposed emotional experiences and gendered beliefs, on the one hand, and the responsibility for enacting violence and the acknowledging of its impact on his family, on the other hand, appeared central to explaining (and understanding) how this happened. This theme, reflected in all desisters' narratives of IPV perpetration except for Matt, seemed to represent the effort of these men to balance personal vulnerability and accountability in the construction of their personal identity. They recognize themselves as agents of the violence; but at the same time as restricted by their vulnerabilities. In this sense, it is important to note that desisters converged in ending these narratives by stressing the still-influential power of their emotions in their reactions at that time. For example, Mason highlighted the shame he experienced before attempting to commit suicide.

5.3.4.2   IPV due to internal factors and partners' behaviour

Steve, Daniel and Neil slightly differed from previous men, as they attributed a more agentic role to their partners in generating the relational tension. They privileged their emotional reactions over their gendered beliefs, to understand their behaviour; although accounting also for the tension between vulnerability and responsibility. Steve account's serves as an example:

> I've picked up [the violence] after six years. I just didn't like the way
> Maria was bringing up the children and I started to have my say (...) so
> she obviously didn't like a lot of my comments (...) so that caused friction
> which accentuated - sort of repeated stuff that I really didn't want to do.

Steve describes how the disagreement with his wife on how to raise their children produced the relational tension that lead him to "repeat" the violence he witnessed in his family of origin, which he "didn't want to do". Although he shared the responsibility for the relational tension with his wife, he assumed that he "picked up" the behaviour that he "really didn't want to do", constructing himself as emotionally vulnerable to the relational stress, while accepting responsibility for his behaviour at the same time.

5.3.4.3   IPV due to internal factors

Matt contrasted with the other desisters, since he portrayed his IPV as an alcohol-fuelled episode. He described how, prior to abusing his wife, during a period of abstinence from alcohol he warned her about his alcoholism, telling her "you would hate me when I was on the beer". Then, he accounted for a subsequent relapse by positioning himself as a passive victim of his addiction:

> *Before I knew it, in a matter of weeks, I was going from nightly after work,*
> *to daily, standing there 9 o'clock, 8:30, waiting there for the bottle shop*
> *to open. She still stood by me because she knew me, she knew how I was*
> *(...) And about half way through the day I wanted more alcohol, and she*
> *wouldn't get it for me, so that's when I pushed her over.*

Through this narrative, Matt constructed himself as having a 'real me' and a 'drunk me', and attributed his IPV to the latter, which he framed as out of his control. In this way, he avoided assuming responsibility for his IPV, and constructed abstention from alcohol as the mechanism for preventing further IPV, overlooking his responsibility for the impact of IPV on his wife and her children.

Other than Matt, desisters accounted for the last episode of IPV with a focus on their personal vulnerability and personal accountability. In their narratives, they claimed to be both the victims of the past experiences that made them vulnerable to relational stress and prone to use violence, and perpetrators of traumatizing behaviours that they considered unacceptable. Through this, they accounted for the continuity of their vulnerabilities (psychological issues and internalized negative models) and accepted responsibility for letting their vulnerabilities be expressed as violent behaviour. The

balancing of vulnerabilities and responsibility emerged as the main theme of this tragic stage of their lives; suggesting, however, that they had the ability to change under the appropriate circumstances. By contrast, Matt accounted only for his vulnerability, while avoided responsibility. As he constructed alcoholism as the cause of his violence, he saw in abstinence from alcohol the only way to recover his partner, disregarding the issue of IPV and its consequences in others.

5.3.5 *The change process*

Desisters accounted for their change process as a result of their active involvement in MBCP and other interventions, which assisted them through a process of learning and self-reflection to gradually develop a new understanding of themselves and their responsibility in their affective relationships; enabling them to commit to changing their responses to external stressors and subjective states, in order to abstain from violence and enhance their affective relationships. Through the narratives of a change process, desisters constructed themselves as protagonist of a transformative process involving their own agency and the contribution of a number of other agents and external forces, in facilitating their transition to a new identity.

5.3.5.1 *Developing the motivation to change*

Desisters accounted for their involvement in the change process by self ascribing different levels of agency. Mason and Steve depicted the initiation of their change process as a consequence of the police and court intervention, which they experienced as an unexpected and confronting event, as shown in Mason's extracts from his narrative on this theme:

> *As soon as I walk out from hospital two police officers where there, waiting for me. This is the first time that I was made accountable for my actions. [T]he police (...) served me with an intervention order saying that I couldn't get near Francesca or the kids (...) I was stripped of all humanity, all dignity. The intervention order was lifted on the provisory that I did this eight-week course.*

These men reported being shaken by the perceived risk of losing their families, describing this experience as a strong initial motivation to attend the services to which they were referred. In contrast, Harry, Daniel and Neil accounted for their involvement in the change process as a voluntary action, highlighting their personal agency and reflective abilities. Neil's narrative serves as an example:

> *It was around the time that I went to the family court for having access to my daughter. I was getting very anxious, very angry, I was just up and down. My emotions were all over the place. I made a phone call, or reading something in the paper somewhere (...) my first contact was with Men's Referral Service; calling and just feeling: oh my God! [expressing discomfort]. So I didn't call them again and I went to the program (...) and I started the group therapy.*

These desisters converged in accounting for a gradual emergence of self-awareness of the cyclic nature of the link between their subjective negative emotional states and their past use of violence and its harmful effects, as the precursor for help seeking. It is important to note, however, that Harry, Neil and Daniel reported having attended similar programs in the past, and that only Harry attended previous programs on a voluntary basis. These three desisters portrayed their previous experiences with similar programs as relevant in helping them realize the cyclic nature of their violence. They also converged in framing the information on available services that they got through the media as the trigger of their movement towards that direction. However, as shown in Neil's expression of discomfort regarding access to services, they also highlighted the barriers they found in accessing these, revealing external difficulties in this trajectory while stressing their own agency.

Matt differed from other desisters: he described his involvement in MBCP as an unexpected consequence of his agentic help seeking to prevent alcohol relapse; not accounting for the problematisation of his IPV and concomitant change process.

Despite the difference between court/police referred and self-referred desisters in their initial movement towards the change, they coincided in highlighting the importance of finding a space where they were treated in a respectful way to start

talking about their lives, as the hook engaging them in the change process, as Mason expressed:

I was getting a really good assistance because I was talking for the first time.

Narratives of developing the motivation to change are relevant for understanding the forces mobilizing desisters towards the initiation of their change process and their commitment with this process. Although desisters varied in their trajectories to intervention, after their program intake they all eventually positioned themselves as resolving to attend intervention to prevent future negative events. The initial stage of the intervention appeared significant in the negotiation of the meaning of the intervention, where the positive quality of the relationship that facilitators established with them played a crucial role. This was typically framed as the initiation of their change process; constructing this motivation as the most relevant catalyst for initiating change, and external aid as central to change, and portraying change as an outcome that cannot be achieved passively and autonomously.

5.3.5.2   Assistance to change

Desisters highlighted that the change process required receiving assistance from experts. Although sometimes generally referred as the 'program' or 'group', facilitators and mental health professionals were consistently portrayed as the source of new understandings and challenges to their taken-for-granted beliefs and practices. Daniel's account exemplifies this:

> *It hasn't been pleasant, but has been a big turning point; everything I've*
> *learned from the group and trying to change myself.*

The need for assistance to change appeared as a salient cross-cutting theme in desisters' narratives of the change process; without eclipsing, however, the role they attributed to their own agency in the attainment of change, as is evident in Daniel's self-attribution of agency to change himself.

5.3.5.3   MBCP as source of learnings and skills development

Desisters constructed MBCP the most relevant assistance for their change. In their narratives, they identified a number of knowledges and abilities acquired and developed through their active involvement in MBCPs, which constituted the building blocks of their change process. For them, change would not have been possible without MBCPs.

<u>Talking about oneself</u>. In addition to the relevance of talking about oneself for engaging the men in the change process, desisters also portrayed this as a factor facilitating change and as an outcome of the change process itself, as Daniel expressed:

> *I can't imagine my life without getting help from others, talking about*
> *your problems.*

While Daniel's statement exemplifies the construction of talking about oneself as a facilitator for the change process, Harry's comment portrays this as an outcome:

> *[D]ue to the men's behavioural program, like, I've learned to talk.*

<u>IPV as gendered</u>. Desisters described the MBCP as a course with therapeutic characteristics, where they began to learn about family violence and gender as a new framework for looking at themselves and their violent behaviour. Daniel's account illustrates this:

> *It wasn't like a light came on but I started thinking "this is really good!"*
> *And started learning more about violence and how the whole thing*
> *operates. How violence is, how men are, how man can be violent in*
> *relationships and the different types of violence.*

Desisters portrayed the acquisition of this new framework as a learning process different from being taught, reflecting the agency they claimed for the outcome of the learning process. This framework provided them with alternatives with which to identify their violent and abusive behaviours, to understand their origin as related to

learning processes, and to discern ways to stop their violence: men were encouraged to replace the patriarchal beliefs dominating their lives and identities.

Responsibility. Addressing personal responsibility for past abuse and its impact on their family members was another crucial learning identified by desisters. This helped them to understand IPV as a choice, as Mason expressed:

> *I have (...) a child that can't speak, a child that can't express love or emotion. And here I am, a grown up men who has the ability to control how that happens, but I chose to do it in a manner that hurts the people that I said I love and I have chosen that.*

Some men even reported having generalized this learning to other areas of their lives, as for example Neil:

> *Midway through the group I was reading all the stuff and my own stuff as well at home, and I had this epiphany (...) if I take responsibility for my life I'm empowered, gives me power, if a blame others it disempowers me!*

Desisters constructed the awareness of their responsibility for their behaviour as a major achievement gained through MBCP. The agentic enacting of this assumption constituted for them a relevant step towards the transformation of their self, from a man who blamed others for their actions to a man who sees his actions and their consequences as a choice; and therefore, their relational lives as being tied to their decisions on how to behave.

Masculinity awareness. The learning of masculinity as a socio-historical construction was also reported by desisters as a powerful learning that changed the way they perceive themselves and other men. Harry's comment illustrates this:

> *It's hard for people to change those habits and long term beliefs. I don't believe many men out there are aware of why they are saying what they say, or why they grew the way they grew up.*

The learning of gender as a social construction helped desisters to reinterpret their own and other men's behaviours in their life stories, as expressions of traditional

notions of masculinity they previously assumed as being natural ways of being man. This learning also enabled them to identify and challenge gendered "habits and long term beliefs"; which, in turn, allowed them to position themselves as different from who they were before as men, and from other men not aware of masculinity as a construction.

Empathy. Understanding the impact of their violence on their partner and children was portrayed as the step that allowed desisters to realize the existence of subjectivity of others and to appraise the extent to which they were neglecting this in their affective relationships, as in this account by Harry:

> *I didn't know the effect I had on my partner, I only learned it here. I*
> *didn't know about empathy, I didn't know, I didn't look, I didn't step in*
> *on her shoes, nor I knew what was going on for her mate, nothing! I was*
> *selfish.*

Harry reported that learning about the subjective impact of his violence on his partner and developing the ability to understand her point of view were transformative for his self, allowing him to leave behind the old "selfish me". Desisters routinely described the development of empathy as a key factor in changing their previous self-centred identity.

Emotional self-awareness. The acquisition of a framework to understand and being able to talk about their emotional life was constructed as an important factor for desisters' change process. For example, Neil described how a practical exercise carried out in his group helped him to understand the relevance of differentiating emotional experiences in relational conflicts:

> *(...) but at the end of it the exercise was, in that example, are you angry*
> *or are you disappointed? So what I'm trying to say is that I've found that*
> *within myself.*

Through a concrete practice, Neil became able to understand that he was not fully aware of his emotions and not able to name them properly, so that he needed to focus in developing these skills. Desisters highlighted the relevance of becoming aware of

their emotional lives to promoting their change. This enabled them to understand the patterns linking their emotional experiences, beliefs and actions. Developing this skill provided them with more alternatives to choose amongst, and enhanced their understanding of other's people's minds.

Emotional self-regulation. The MBCP's focus on personal responsibility appeared as crucial for not allowing men to blame their emotions for their violent behaviour, and for fostering emotional regulation as a necessary step to prevent further violence. Desisters were encouraged to take responsibility for self-regulating their negative emotions and their behavioural expression. As Mason commented:

> [U]nderstanding the recognition of signals that are triggering certain chemical changes within my body to understand how, through mental choice, I can influence that response. I learned this through both psychotherapy and the program.

Desisters regarded the awareness of emotional life and the ability to regulate emotions and their behavioural expressions as crucial differences from the person they were before going through the change process. Their agency seemed to have grown through these learnings.

Changing communication styles. The challenge posed by the need for assuming responsibility for their emotional regulation and enacting empathy led desisters to change their communication practices. They needed to be aware of how their verbal and non-verbal expression were understood by others, as reflected for example in Harry's account:

> I was a bad communicator, I wasn't clear. Living with Emma's mum I wasn't a good communicator again. I'd get frustrated, I wouldn't know what it was; I'd get verbally derogative or verbally short.

> Although desisters did not describe how this issue was addressed within MBCP, they converged in portraying the improvement of their expressive and receptive communication skills as a significant step in their change process, and as a practice they have implemented in their lives even beyond the family sphere, as shown in Daniel's comment:

Now I know that if you want to have a good relationship with anybody,
whether it's personal or professional, you need to be able to talk and it
has to be two ways. You got to be able to understand and listen.

5.3.5.4 Other external factors facilitating change

Desisters reported having received a variety of supplementary aids to MBCP. While some reported they needed more 'dosage' of MBCP to achieve change, other referred to factors different from MBCP to support their change, such as drug and alcohol programs, mental health treatments, and changes in structural life conditions.

Repetition. Harry, Daniel and Neil accounted for having attended similar programs prior to the last MBCP they attended, reporting that these experiences were relevant steps in their journey towards change; stressing through this both the gradual nature of the process, the relevance of addressing emotional issues, and their agentic commitment to change. Neil's excerpt exemplifies this:

After finishing that twelve week program I attended another twelve week
program because I felt it was doing me some good, I was feeling a lot
better, I wasn't as angry, I was dealing with my anxiety in a much better
way, and not just in the family environment.

Mental health interventions. Steve and Mason accounted for receiving mental health interventions in parallel to MBCP. They reported these interventions as relevant for their change, as these provided them with new interpretative frameworks to understand their emotional experiences and behaviour. While Steve came to understand the need for adhering to his medical treatment to manage his bipolar condition, Mason understood his emotional problems as a result of attachment problems, as shown in his following account:

The thing about my mum was part of those stages that I was working
through with my psychologist; this anger is coming from somewhere, it's
manifested from something and you need to start forgiving yourself for
some of the things that you've done and start repairing some of those
hurts.

Mason's narrative reflects the relevance of making sense of the origin of his emotional functioning for his change process. Here it is important to note that some men raised criticisms of the ways in which program facilitators prevented them from negotiating their understandings of the role played by their remote past in their emotional responses and IPV. In their view of the facilitators, within group work, these attempts were often judged as making excuses for their violence.

In spite of the criticisms, whether the reinterpretation occurred as a result of the intervention or as a collateral outcome produced by the interaction of the in-program experiences with pervasive psychological discourses, desisters consistently reported the exploration and reinterpretation of their past as a relevant therapeutic component of their change process, as Harry expressed:

> *[A] whole heap of shit has to be unpacked to be where I'm at the moment.*

Stopping addictive behaviours. Except for Mason and Harry, all desisters accounted for having attended programs to stop their additive behaviours, prior to their involvement in MBCP, as a necessary step towards change, portraying this as a crucial turning point in their lives and identities. Steve's extract from his narrative of stopping gambling serves as an example:

> *I went to the GA meeting and just gave up through being healed by God*
> *or Jesus. I've never been tempted to since, never for sex, gambling,*
> *smoking or drinking, so I believe in the total healing.*

Structural modifications. Desisters also described a number of structural modifications as facilitators for their change process. Separation from partner, change in working conditions, untying from family of origin, and change in housing conditions were portrayed as assisting change. Daniel's account exemplifies the benefits perceived as resulting from the separation from partner:

> *Since then I've been without a partner. I think for the first time in my life*
> *I've felt comfortable being by my own. I'd always thought that I'd have to*
> *be in a relationship. I'm trying to do something about me now, making*
> *myself better.*

The extract from Daniel's narrative of his last partnership shows how he benefited from separating from his partner, since this enabled him to focus on his change process and arrive at a new positive identity conclusion. Although structural modifications appeared as relevant for facilitating change, these varied according to the particular case. For example, for Mason, preserving their partnership and making changes in his working conditions were crucial for his change:

> [W]ith the assistance of one of the psychologists that I did work with through my work, we approached my work and said: "he can't, it's driven this guy to this point it's heavily impacting on their family, you need to change it".

Desisters accounted for their change process as a gradual learning of new frameworks to understand themselves and their relations. These learnings allowed them to develop, in the context of supportive relationships with experts in human behaviour, the self-reflexive skills needed to expand their options to respond to external stressors. Central to these expanded options was the development of an enhanced capability for self-monitoring mental states and behaviours, and increased sensibility to other's mental states.

Through the narratives of change process, desisters constructed themselves as active agents who, with appropriate assistance, managed to break free from the past to transform their self from an irresponsible, selfish and ignorant man, into a responsible, empathetic and mindful man; articulating a rebirth plot constructed around the notion of rehabilitation.

5.3.6 Doing secondary desistance

Desistance has been defined as abstention from offending in behavioural terms; whereas secondary desistance has been defined as a related subjective identity shift that secures sustained changes (Maruna and Farrall 2004). From this perspective, it is possible to appreciate that the narratives of change processes previously analysed describe the journey towards the second type of desistance. However, despite having accounted for their identity change in the denouement of their life stories where present and future became intertwined, most desisters positioned themselves as agents

striving to preserve and expand the changes they have made; suggesting that constructed themselves more as changing men than as changed men.

Desisters stressed that desisting from violence is not a state that, once achieved, can be kept passively. In the denouement of their life stories, they accounted for a number of key factors helping them to sustain change, and a series of challenges that they think they still need to address in order to consolidate these changes, constructing themselves as purposefully continuing their desisting from IPV.

5.3.6.1 *Accepting responsibility*

In their final reflections on their life stories, desisters consistently referred to the assumption of responsibility as an essential factor for both their change and its maintenance, as Daniel commented:

> *I've caused most of my own failures, there hasn't been anything external that I could say this happened and I'd learn this. It's been my own foolishness.*

Constructing themselves as responsible for their violence seemed crucial for allowing desisters to understand themselves as a key agent of both their tragedies and recovery. This enabled them to actively move away from beliefs and practices associated with past violence, while constructing themselves as self-reflexive men engaged in transforming their lives.

5.3.6.2 *Embracing goals: bettering affective relationships*

Desisters stressed that, by preventing violence, they are not simply avoiding further problems, but pursuing life goals revolving around the bettering of their affective life, both in the partnership and parenting territories of the self.

To Be a Better Father. Desisters constructed fatherhood as a significant aspect of their identity. The realization of the risk of losing access to their children, the awareness of the impact of their violence on their children, and the linking of their own experiences of family violence as a child with their children's experiences, helped desisters to

revaluate themselves as fathers and in committing to improve, as reflected, for example, in Harry's account:

> *I'm sure my kid knows more about me than I want her to know; I don't want her to know that shit about me, I want her to know better stuff, that I want to become better.*

Most desisters expressed shame and remorse for the impact of their violence on their children, and commented on the changes they are implementing to repair the damage caused and turn themselves into a positive model, as Mason expressed:

> *That's my mission with the kids; is to exemplify through my actions, words and deeds what it is to be a respectful man, a respectful father, a respectful person.*

To Be a Better Partner. Desisters also referred to their purpose of improving as partners as the motivation guiding their efforts to preserve and enhance their changes. Harry's account serves to exemplify this:

> *There is a switch recently; of trying to hold relationships (...) that's probably the biggest turning point, that's the biggest desire to hold, to not throw it away, to not get so frustrated, to not get so angry, to not fuck it up.*

While for Harry, valuing his couple relationship and trying not to ruin it has been a new development in his life, for Mason, going through the change process represented the rediscovery of the importance of his partner in his life:

> *I forgot about the person that I fell in love with. I've learnt through this course that is that individual that you need to find again, that you fell in love with, because that is the individual that makes you feel better within yourself.*

Even desisters with no partner regarded partnership as a central life project guiding their actions, as Daniel commented:

> *I'm trying to do something about me now, making myself better so the next relationship I'll have is going to be a good one.*

The theme of bettering affective relationships assisted desisters in constructing themselves as agentic characters that are pursuing relevant life goals, portraying parenting and partnership as the most relevant purposes for their journeys. This theme is particularly relevant in the context of their life stories as a whole, since they appeared not only to be looking for differentiation from who they were before as parent and partners, but to differentiate themselves from their own fathers. Thus, this theme appears as central for claiming identity change and for constructing affective relationships as the centrepiece of their life projects; reflecting an estrangement from hegemonic masculinity.

5.3.6.3   *Actively desisting*

Desisters complemented the claiming of the motivation to improve their lives and the lives of their loved ones with a number of vignettes representing concrete ways through which they actively sustain and enhance their change.

5.3.6.2.1   Persist with the inner struggle

Desisters stressed that changing has not being easy, constructing their inner struggle as the most difficult challenge they have confronted to preserve their changes. Daniel's account illustrates this:

> *One of the biggest challenges in my life has been trying to accept and live with the changes I've put into my life and try to move away from my old habits and ways of being, my thought processes. It's been very challenging moving away from that and not falling back but to keep walking in the right direction, and thinking the right thoughts and just heading in the way that I want to go, which is to be a better person.*

"Thought processes" and "ways of being" were metaphors commonly used to represent the inner tension between the 'old self' and the 'new self'. Through this, desisters constructed themselves as changing men striving to consolidate their changes, portraying the change as a matter of self-reflexivity and self-control.

5.3.6.2.2   Enabling themselves to making better choices

Desisters accounted for the maintenance of their changes as a result of deliberate choices of how to best relate with their partners and children, as shown in Mason's account:

> *I feel really good about who I am as a person, I feel empowered as to how I am. I've found that I'm not reacting anymore. I feel that I need to be another person that is attentive, caring, listening, that I get more joy out of doing that than taking that other path. It's a choice.*

Desisters systematically alluded to notions of "not reacting", "listening" and "being caring" to describe the preferred choices they have been making to relate with their partners and children. Through this they stressed their agentic position in making the change, and constructed themselves as different from the 'reacting' and 'neglectful' men they were before. Implicit in making better choices is the ability to self-monitor behaviour and internal states, and to discern behavioural alternatives.

As a way to confront the challenges posed by making this transition, desisters resorted to a number of strategies that they learned through MBCP or complementary sources, to increase their ability to make better choices.

Emotional self-regulation. Desisters constructed negative emotions as a relevant force causing their violence, and the self-monitoring of their emotional states as a relevant component of their change process. Consistently, they described the practicing of emotional self-regulatory strategies as a key contribution to sustaining changes and preventing relapse. Neil's account serves to illustrate this:

> *[F]or a long time I'd been getting out of bed angry, waking up angry. I started thinking: what I'm grateful for in my life? I was trying to think what I'm grateful for and all that I could say was: I'm grateful for my kids. (...) I've noticed when I did that give good at the light of the day, I had a great day! All my interactions that day were great! It's kind of funny, 'cos people can read your face and I noticed that.*

While Neil described how he has benefited from using cognitive strategies (reappraisal) for regulating his negative motions, others depicted mindfulness and bodily strategies to self-regulate negative emotions. Harry's comment illustrates the latter:

> *I'm accepting that people get frustrated. I just got to remember it and*
> *practice it. I've got lots of little tips, whether is breathing <inhales>*

Communicating. Desisters also accounted for more social strategies to deal with their "thought processes" and negative emotions. They portrayed the sharing of their subjectivity as an achievement that boosted their change process, and that has remained as a key tool for helping them sustain and enhance their changes. For example, Harry commented how he benefited from continued attendance at MBCP to talk about himself:

> *I get stuff out, I talk, I work it out. Now I'm allowed to work it out in here.*

For most desisters, the simple fact of talking about their lives with others represented a relevant transformation of their masculine self.

Transforming communication styles. Change in communication patterns was also described as an important element for sustaining change. Desisters converged in considering the change in their communication styles within their families as critical for sustaining and enhancing change:

> *It's more for me building on the experience that we've learnt and having*
> *an open communication. I've found that by talking about how we feel it's*
> *a release, it doesn't allow for any build-up, it doesn't allow for*
> *misunderstandings.*

Even though all desisters regarded communication as central for sustaining changes, Harry and Steve reported needing to improve this, and suggested that their partners also need to improve, but that they have not received any support in this.

Permission to be vulnerable. Although not always explicitly named as being vulnerable, desisters expressed in their denouements that performing non-hegemonic

ways of masculinity, encompassing attributes traditionally regarded as feminine, was also relevant for the consolidation of their change, as shown in Mason's comment:

> *I think that that vulnerability, although people say he must be a big sissy boy, but that vulnerability is a very important element of being a man. I feel that I'm in more control of who I am as a person because I'm able to be vulnerable, able to be compassionate, able to be nurturing in a situation, and yet still be a man.*

Separating from stoicism and giving themselves permission to enact emotional vulnerability and empathy were constructed by desisters as a major transformation of their self enabling sustained change.

Generalizing changes. Desisters reported transferring their changes beyond the affective relationships sphere. For example, Daniel comments on the benefits of using what he has learned on communication and empathy in his business relationships:

> *I'm starting to work on that. Like from my business I have many good relationships where you have to talk and negotiate, I love it. I never used to do that before.*

These reports show how men benefit from practicing their new learned skills beyond their affective relationships, increasing the sense of self-efficacy. These comments also assisted them to claim an identity change.

Supporting anti-domestic violence. Desisters accounted for their active support of the anti- domestic violence cause through challenging violence-supporting practices and discourses among their relatives and communities, by referring people to IPV services, and through an ongoing involvement with MBCPs. Daniel's account serves to illustrate this interest in helping others:

> *I've got very interested in helping other people, that's the main reason I still came to the group because I find I'm now in a stage where I can give a bit back to the other people that come here.*

However, for most, the ongoing involvement in MBCPs also entailed seeking a benefit for themselves:

> *My help on this is coming to the group, especially when a new guy comes and I see that person walking with all the denial and blaming other people and I say, shit that's what I was.*

Sustaining hope. Most desisters reported having experienced situations they perceived as setbacks in their desisting trajectories, such as raising their tone of voice or feeling overwhelmed by frustration in their affective relationships. In confronting these situations, they stressed the significance of maintaining hope that the change will eventually consolidate as long as they persist pursuing the bettering of their relations and inner stability, as shown for example in Neil's comment about his expectations to overcome his emotional reactivity:

> *So maybe (my next life chapter) is just strength; is not to stress. It does nothing but make things more difficult ... It's that negative self-talk, man.*

Through expressions such as this, desisters constructed themselves as optimistic agents motivated by the improvement of their affective relationships and their emotional stability, claiming through this an identity change from selfish to caring and from stoic to vulnerable; suggesting, however, that as they continue to experience emotional dysregulation, they have not completed yet their change as they expect, therefore positioning themselves as changing men.

5.3.6.4   Ongoing challenges

In talking about their future, most desisters revealed themselves as still confronting different challenges in order to sustain and expand their changes. Most reported continuing difficulties in self-regulating negative emotional responses to relational stress as their main ongoing challenge, as for example Harry expressed:

> *If I can get out of that anxiety and fear, I could solve the things that worry me and I'd be more at home.*

Others, like Neil, expressed their concern for more structural issues such as financial problems:

> *I struggle at times with my financial stuff, so I want to work harder, hopefully to have my own home, provide for my children; having a bit more security and stability.*

Harry and Steve manifested concerns for what they considered a lack of support from their partners in changing interactional patterns. For example, Steve reported feeling alone in his efforts to change communication patterns in his relationship:

> *It's really hard for us guys to admit that we are the ones that got to change because at the same time we know that if the wife pushes, pushes for change as well, things are going to be a little bit easier on us to change.*

By accounting for ongoing challenges, desisters were able to identify potential risks they need to address in order to secure their change and prevent relapse. Through these narratives, they constructed themselves as agents aware of their need to improve certain areas of their lives, to consolidate the changes that would ensure the fulfilling of their goals; therefore, positioning themselves as changing men. In this regard, expectations are constructed as central for guiding men's efforts and assessing their advance; while emotional stability is depicted as the most challenging issue in balancing vulnerability and responsibility.

Narratives of doing desistance portrayed desistance from IPV as an active process of change preservation and change expansion, requiring: the men's construction of themselves as agents of their change; the men's setting of significant relational goals in areas of partnership and fatherhood to motivate and guide their actions in seeking to accomplish those goals; the men's internalization of a number of skills and knowledges enabling them to perform appropriate actions (good choices) to ensure the maintenance of the direction of the consolidation process; and the men's assessing of their advances, setbacks and pending challenges. Narratives of doing desistance highlight the centrality of establishing personal purposes for boosting men's intrinsic autonomous motivation to sustain changes, which appeared critical for helping men to persist with their inner struggle, since they systematically referred

to negative emotions and emotional dysregulation as their most challenging task and most common setback. This theme reflects the importance desisters attributed to their emotional stability in assessing the degree of consolidation of their change; which, from their perspective, seemed to be associated with a perceived significant decrease of emotional dysregulation and the experience of increased harmony in their affective relations.

Narratives of doing desistance also show desisters' perspectives on their future as revolving around the purposeful preventing of violence and committing to enhancing mutual respect in their relationships; representing a significant change from who they were before attending MBCPs (and other interventions).

5.4   Summary Findings from Desisters' Narratives

Desisters commenced constructing their self by positioning synchronically along different axes of social identity such as employment, family situation and cultural background. Subsequently, they accounted for their life stories as a flashback following a chronological sequence. They constructed their childhood as a negative period of their lives and as the most influential stage in the configuration of their idiosyncratic self; which they articulated as an inner self composed by an emotional core affected by traumatic experiences and a psychosocial layer moulded by social learnings. Desisters used this inner self to diachronically navigate their life stories and to understand the origin and end of their violent behaviour; constructing traumatic experiences as the inciting incident of their life stories and the mastering of their inner world as the challenge to accomplish in order to restore the story balance.

The profuse use of notions of emotional trauma and social learning reflect their relevance as symbolic resources available in desisters' cultural context to make sense of the transition of their self from good to bad and bad to good; enabling the appeal to rehabilitative discourses as a critical component of their life story plot, since one can potentially recover from trauma and unlearn problematic behaviours. Although the transition from a normal infant to an emotionally injured and violence inclined young person may imply the claiming of the existence of a true core self, to which men could eventually return after removing the layers of social learnings and recovering from traumatic experiences, the way in which desisters constructed themselves in the

present time and imagined future indicated that they regarded these emotional traumas as not fully reversible, requiring ongoing self-regulation and external support. Thus, they discarded the feasibility of returning to a true original self.

It is also relevant to note that fathers and older brothers are overwhelmingly represented in narratives of childhood to adolescence as negative influential models; whereas female characters do not, but are confined to tertiary roles. Although this can be understood as a sign of masculine identification (Parsons, 1964), or interpreted as an expression of a still influential belief in the binary distinction between men and women where only men can be recognized as influential figures for men, what desisters' narratives of childhood to adolescence show is a complete lack of positive influential masculine figures with whom desisters could potentially construct a biographic positive connection for constructing non-hegemonic masculinities.

Desisters then accounted for their youth as a period of manifestation of underlying psychological problems as problematic behaviours, triggered by adverse circumstances and facilitated by a lack of support, leading them to get involved in growing complications. Through this, they constructed the continuity of their inner self and accentuated the dramatic character of their life journeys.

Adulthood was storied as an initially positive life stage initiated with stable partnership and fatherhood, leading to a period of stability interrupted by adverse unexpected circumstances. These external situations triggered a relational crisis, where the protagonist allowed their vulnerabilities (defective emotional functioning and internalized patriarchal beliefs) to manifest as violence against their loved ones, increasing the relational crisis and threatening the continuity of their affective relationships. Through these narratives, desisters structured a dramatic plot around the theme of balancing responsibility and vulnerability.

As a consequence of the relational crisis produced by their violent behaviour, desisters looked for assistance or were referred by the justice system to MBCPs. After negotiating the meaning of this intervention, they actively engaged in a change process where, through the assistance of experts, they were able to learn new frameworks for understanding their behaviour, and to develop self-reflexive skills to

change their responses to internal negative states and external stressors in order to prevent further violence. Through these narratives of a change process, desisters constructed themselves as men who have changed from being irresponsible, selfish and ignorant, to being responsible, empathetic and mindful men, articulating a rebirth plot around the notion of rehabilitation.

Desisters accounted for their post-intervention as a period characterized by their autonomous active commitment to preserving and expanding the changes they achieved through a series of actions; including the acceptance of their responsibility for their behaviour, the setting of relational goals, and the practice of self-reflexivity to select the appropriate behaviours to ensure the fulfilling of their relational goals. They stressed the challenge posed by this task, particularly regarding self-regulating negative emotions; and accounted for a number of strategies they have implemented in this regard, ranging from autonomous to ongoing attendance to MBCP, revealing the centrality of emotional stability for desisters' appraisal of the completeness and solidity of their change. Through these narratives, desisters constructed desistance as the process of putting in practice new understandings about the self, others and affective relationships, to prevent violence and enhance these relationships as a way to better their life. In this way, they constructed themselves as changing men; that is to say, as men who have changed significantly from who they were before MBCP, but who still need to keep on changing to feel secure of their changes.

The analysis demonstrates that desisters converged in constructing a narrative identity as men who, both in spite of being and because they were victims of family violence, have transformed themselves, with the help of experts, from being irresponsible, selfish and ignorant men into a responsible, empathetic and conscious men actively committed to balancing their vulnerability and responsibility, in order prevent their own violence against their families so as to improve their affective relationships and better themselves as persons.

However, desisters were not a homogeneous group. The reader might have noticed the disappearance of Matt from the first part of the analysis of the change process onwards. This was because he did not account for a change process regarding his IPV. He constructed this as a single event caused by his alcoholism, and focused his

narrative on the prevention of alcohol relapse through structural changes, discarding IPV as a relevant issue. While Matt differed considerably from the other men in this group, they also slightly differed between themselves in terms of the perceived stability of their changes. On the one hand, Mason accounted for a stable change and provided sufficient narrative evidence to support this (see appendix B section B.3.2.4.5); whereas Harry and Steve, on the other hand, accounted for a fragile and relatively incomplete change, claiming the need for ongoing external support.

Given the differences in the length of their desisting trajectories (time from program completion to the interview), it is possible that these differences might reflect different moments within a common general desistance trajectory. Alternatively, this can be interpreted as the manifestation of the existence of multiple trajectories of desistance; where, due to individual and contextual characteristics, some men require more external support than others to sustain their changes.

CHAPTER VI:
COMPARING LIFE STORIES OF MEN DESISTING FROM IPV AND MEN NON-DESISTING FROM IPV

6.1   Introduction

According to Maruna (1999), "in order to isolate what aspects of self-concept are *directly* related to desistance, research needs to compare desisters with a sample of offenders who do not desist from crime" (p. 10) [italics in original]. Following this methodological suggestion, the present study produced and analysed life narratives of men who desist and men who do not desist from IPV. While chapters IV and V addressed the within-group comparison, the present chapter presents the results of the cross-group comparison of life narratives, including the contrast of both self-introduction narratives and life-story narratives.

Whilst comparing self introductions resulted in a straightforward task, comparing life narratives represented a complex endeavour, given their extended length and richness. In order to expedite the comparison and analysis of life narratives, the narratives identified within the life story of each participant were grouped into beginning, middle, and end, as overarching sections according to the chronological order in which they were constructed by their authors. As a result of the comparison between these life-story overarching sections, differences and similarities between persisters' and desisters' life stories were identified. The analysis of these differences and similitudes, with a focus on how men construct their personal identity, are presented in this chapter. Finally, the chapter ends by presenting a prototypical portrait of the process of desisting from IPV that emerged from the comparison of the two groups, and a prototypical portrait of the personal identities constructed by desisters and persisters.

6.2   Participant's self-introductions

Self-introductions functioned for both groups as the first step in the claiming of a personal identity, which they subsequently storied. Through these identity claims, they highlighted aspects of their identity to be taken into account in understanding

who they were as a person at the time of the interview. In doing this, they also set an ending point for their life stories, which they structured as a lengthy flashback.

Desisters and persisters converged in positioning themselves synchronically, by resorting to social identity categories to associate and differentiate themselves from others. Participants highlighted their condition as father, if they had a partner or not, and specific cultural background when they were not white Australian-born. They all demonstrated a remarkable interest in portraying themselves as working men, or as men worried about getting a job when they were unemployed; suggesting that, synchronically, employment was a key component of their identity.

However, the two groups diverged in their positioning on issues pertaining to their relation with others. Desisters highlighted the meaningfulness of their affective relations, reporting that they were taking care of their children and were concerned about the wellbeing of their children, partners, and former partners where they were separated. Persisters, on the other hand, focused on their personal situation in terms of own subjective wellbeing and external difficulties such as unemployment, working conditions and conflicts with families of origin.

Groups also diverged in the expressed motives for participating in the study. Desisters reported that they attended the interview with the aim of helping other men who used IPV by sharing their stories. Through this they positioned themselves as ex-perpetrators of IPV and framed their telling as a testimony. In contrast, persisters reported attending the interview for their own sake - as for example Tony, who thought the interview could benefit him in gaining some lessons - and positioned themselves in different ways, ranging from wanting to change to not needing to change.

6.3   Participant's life stories

All participants structured their life stories according to specific life stages, following a chronological sequence extending from childhood to adulthood at the present time. They constructed the beginning of their life stories with a focus on the origin of the personal characteristics that made them unique or similar to others. Subsequently,

they structured a middle section addressing the transit from adolescence to independent life, initiation of stable partnerships - with considerable variability in this aspect - and fatherhood. The focus of this section was a negative turning point, where external negative situations triggered the men's reactions, leading to a relational crisis. Participants ended their life stories with a section focused on the resolution of the relational crisis. This section allowed them to explain their current circumstances and outline their expected futures.

Although life stories between birth and adulthood appeared similar between the group of desisters and persisters in terms of plots and themes, the positioning they exhibited regarding the events described from adolescence onwards, and the themes and plots shaping the resolution of their relational crisis, made their narratives differ significantly in how they constructed their personal identity in terms of gender awareness and self-ascribed agency.

6.3.1   Birth to adolescence: The development of the inner self

The origin of the personal identity emerged as the overarching theme running across all participants' narratives from birth to adolescence. These narratives revealed what sort of events they considered as formative for their identity, and the sequencing of the events assisted them to narratively explain the origin of enduring idiosyncratic characteristics. Narratives focused mainly on negative events involving family relations, social relations and sociocultural contexts, which gave shape to long-lasting idiosyncratic characteristics such as, for example, a particular emotional functioning. These characteristics were constructed by participants as two separated but interrelated parts of an inner self placed at the centre of their identity, a core psychological self and a psychosocial self, which they utilized to navigate constancy and change throughout their life stories.

6.3.1.1   *The core psychological self*

Men focused their early life narratives on explaining the most salient and enduring characteristics that made them unique and similar to others. In doing this, participants articulated two different understandings of the self. The most common understanding

was constructed around the assumption of an originally normal self, which rapidly became permanently damaged by traumatic experiences within their families. An alternative understanding, held by two persisters, was constructed around the assumption of innate traits and needs moulded by contextual forces.

6.3.1.1.1 The emotionally traumatized psychological core self

Most participants across both groups constructed their first years of their lives as a negative stage, where they experienced a rapid decline in their life conditions in terms of perceived security and stability. They accounted for sequences of negative events revolving around family violence and neglect, which they constructed as leaving a long-lasting negative impact on their psychological functioning at the emotional level.

Violence against women. The most common negative events were episodes of family violence, where men reported having witnessed physical violence from their fathers against their mothers, recalling memories of feeling terrorized, unprotected and powerless.

Child abuse. Most participants also reported having being subjected to physical and emotional violence themselves, mainly by masculine figures such as their fathers. Feelings of fear and powerless usually accompanied these accounts.

Neglect. These participants also referred to their experiences as children of important needs being not appropriately met or completely ignored, as for example the need for support, affection and stability.

The negative long-lasting impact of these events was routinely constructed through the inclusion of causal clauses such as Steve's comment "*I'm pretty sure that that was when my anxiety and depression started*". Expressions like this, together with the profuse reference to the notion of emotional trauma and paired with the description of intense negative emotions, revealed the centrality, for the majority of participants, of the theme of emotional functioning in the construction of the enduring characteristics of the personal identity. Through this, these participants differentiated themselves

from emotionally normal people and positioned themselves amongst the emotionally harmed people.

6.3.1.1.2 The innate psychological core self

Two persisters differed from the remaining participants in the construction of the enduring characteristics of the self. Veer and Tony accounted for an initially positive childhood, followed by a deviation from the norm around mid-childhood as the result of the expression and reinforcement of their innate personality traits or the blockage of innate basic needs.

<u>Personality traits</u>. Tony assumed an originally defective self, which made him prone to rule breaking and self-gratification, which manifested at mid-childhood due to peer influence. As his parents were unable to control this behaviour, he eventually got involved in drug abuse and left school.

<u>Unmet innate basic needs</u>. Veer constructed his psychological core self around the assumption of an innate need for entertainment and relief from work, the satisfaction of which was blocked by his demanding father and his culture. As he was prevented from having relaxation and entertainment throughout his life as student, he developed alcoholism at emergent adulthood when this blockage ceased.

Innate determinants were used by these participants to understand their psychological core self and to explain their subsequent abuse of drugs and alcohol; which, in turn, they utilized to explain their IPV.

6.3.1.1.3 Psychological core self as an entity beyond complete men's control

Despite their differences, all participants resorted to psychological notions in order to construct a core self, reflecting the preponderance of psychological discourses as symbolic resources for understanding their selves in their cultural contexts. These understandings helped them to construct their psychological core self as an entity that they used to make sense of the continuities and discontinuities in the way they reacted to events and have taken decisions throughout their lives.

Importantly, participants of both groups also converged in depicting their psychological core self as beyond their complete control. This enabled them to explain their use of violence as reflecting a defective self; which, in turn, allowed them to protect their self-worth, since being defective - or sick - seems more socially acceptable than being evil, when talking about own wrongdoings (Shepperd, Malone, & Sweeny, 2008).

The examination of the life narratives as a whole reveals an association of the theme of an emotionally traumatized self with the theme of personal change regarding men's use of violence. Men who constructed an emotionally traumatized self considered change as desirable and achievable with the appropriate expert assistance. This revealed their problematisation of IPV, their adherence to rehabilitative discourses, an assumption of the existence of an ideal self, and the influence of the culturally salient plot of men versus self in the construction of their life stories.

The construction of an emotionally traumatized psychological core self was particularly relevant for desisters' understanding of their change process and current challenges to maintaining change. They constructed these later stages of their life stories as revolving around their efforts to control this part of their self. In addition, the theme of the emotionally negative effects of family violence also enabled them to construct their IPV as harmful for their children, helping them to sustain their efforts in controlling, and eventually healing, the damaged part of their self. In contrast, men who resorted to innate dispositions to understand their psychological core self did not consider personal change as necessary. They disregarded IPV as a problem that they needed to overcome, and focused the end of their life stories on expected contextual changes, which they perceived as beyond their agency.

6.3.1.2   The psychosocial self

As participants progressed with their life stories, the narratives of family violence gradually broadened their focus. These transited from an emphasis on the protagonist's feelings of fear to the description of violent and dominant behaviour of their father, and their introduction into masculine traditions by influential masculine figures from within and outside their families. These narratives, which revolved

around themes of learning violence, learning to downgrade women, and learning masculine privileges, allowed the men to account for the formation of a complementary part of their inner self as composed of a series of deeply ingrained taken-for-granted beliefs and practices.

6.3.1.2.1   Learning of masculine violence

All interviewees who accounted for a 'bad' childhood reported having witnessed ongoing violence from their father against their mother and other persons. They also recalled memories of being instigated to use violence to solve interpersonal problems with peers, and of not being sanctioned for using violence at school.

6.3.1.2.2   Downgrading of women

In addition to the violence of their father against their mother reported by most participants, they accounted for having being inculcated, through modelling by fathers, older brothers and peers, into other forms of downgrading of women, such as through sexist beliefs and practices, as for example seeing women as sexual objects.

6.3.1.2.3   Masculine privileges

Participants also portrayed in their stories the modelling of traditional masculine ways of being, such as the entitlement to favour own needs and preferences over the rest of the family or to the right to rest at home after work without sharing housework and parenting duties.

6.3.1.3   Similar events different meanings

Both groups accounted for these events as formative for the self, except for Veer and Tony, who did not account for the learning of violence. Where desisters and persisters differed remarkably was in their positioning regarding the meaning of these events. Persisters framed these events (i.e. father's violence against their mother, father's abusive behaviour and entitlement to privileges, and the social reinforcement of violence and disrespect towards women) as biographical negative facts that happened

to them, taking a neutral position regarding the values expressed in these. In contrast, desisters demonstrated a self-reflexive critical position about these events. They routinely accompanied their narratives with evaluative clauses expressing their criticism of the behaviours and values represented in these events. They rejected and separated themselves from violence against women, sexism and masculine privileges. Although they accounted for a learning process, they stressed at the same time their condition as changed men regarding these beliefs and practices. Desisters also differed from persisters in accounting for the impact of these learnings on their emotional life. They reported having being encouraged to deal with negative emotions in masculine ways by suppressing the expression of emotions denoting vulnerability, or by resorting to violence to express emotional distress.

Narratives of the psychosocial self revealed the extent to which participants resorted to notions of social learning to account for the internalization of masculine beliefs and practices. Notions of vicarious learning and reinforcing social contexts appeared crucial to understanding the formation of the masculine worldview, which constituted the second layer of the inner self that they placed at the centre of their identity.

In the context of desisters' life stories, social learning ideas were critical in helping them to make sense of their transition from good to bad and bad to good, through the construction of this transition as a learning process. Likewise, for persisters who considered their violence as a problem and were pursuing personal change, it was critical for allowing them to envision personal change as feasible.

The framing of internalized traditional masculine beliefs and practices as the result of social influences also assisted desisters and persisters wanting to change to set a second challenge for their life journeys: in order to change, they should separate themselves from these dominant social traditions. The structuring of this challenge as central in the stories of desisters and persisters looking for a change revealed the influence of the culturally widespread plot of 'men versus society' in the shaping of the narratives of personal change.

Persisters and desisters converged in assigning a key role in the formation of their personal identity to the life stage between the birth and adolescence. Through the

construction of an inner self as deeply moulded by external forces, most men, apart from Tony and Veer, were able to make sense of their transition from a 'normal' infant to an emotionally injured and traditionally masculine young man prone to using violence. This, therefore, allowed them to understand how their adult violent behaviour emerged from within.

Although not in the same sequence, referring to external forces also helped men who did not account for emotional damage during childhood to understand their transition from normal children to troubled young men. In their narratives, external forces blocked the meeting of innate needs or, less often, facilitated the expression of innate traits (Tony and Veer), and guided them in a socializing process that normalized masculine privileges and violent behaviour.

6.3.1.4   *The centrality of a theory of the self*

The convergence observed between participants, in addressing their first life stages with a focus on the formation of an inner self, revealed the centrality of this understanding to enabling the men's navigation of constancy and change throughout their lives. The significance of this theory of the self became even more apparent when participants accounted for later stages of their lives, where continuity and discontinuity of personal identity were directly addressed.

The men's profuse use of notions of emotional trauma, innate predispositions, and social learning, exposed the salience of these ideas, as cultural symbolic resources available in their social contexts, for making sense of identity transitions in early life. However, the examination of these notions in the context of the life stories as a whole showed that only emotional trauma and learning processes were associated with the construction of positive personal change as feasible and desirable; whereas innate notions of the self were not so associated, as shown, for example, in the contrasting views held by Veer and Mason regarding their change.

Importantly, men's narratives from birth to adolescence portrayed masculine characters as the most influential figures in the development of the inner self. They were commonly depicted as power figures impacting negatively on men's

developmental trajectories; whereas feminine figures appeared as less influential and unable to compensate for the negative impact of masculine figures due to power imbalance or neglect (see for example Neil's story "Dad's violence against mum" in Appendix B section B.4.2.2.1). In addition, participants' narratives also showed that men are not taught and encouraged to reflect on and talk about their emotional experience and relational life during their formative years; and that they were unable to identify positive masculine figures at this stage of their lives.

From the perspective of the participant's life stories as a whole, the negative impact of early-life traumatic experiences and negative masculine influences can be understood as the inciting incident of the life stories of desisters and persisters who want to change. This construction of the inciting incident renders the mastering of the internal world as the challenge that the protagonist must confront in order to restore balance in their lives. In addition, the depicting of the negative impact of these experiences as having unfair consequences for the protagonist adds a heroic quality to their struggle.

6.4   Emergent adulthood to adult life with children

The period extending from emerging adulthood to adult life with children was constructed by participants as revolving around independent life and family formation, where the overarching theme was the deterioration of their couple relations. For most participants, independent life began with their entry into the work force. Here they started a period of single life where they had temporary partners and experienced 'ups and downs' in their relational lives and working trajectories. These were described by men as the result of the influence of their inner personal characteristics and adverse external circumstances. Participants eventually settled down with a partner and had children, giving rise to a more stable period structured around family life. Subsequently, they experienced a gradual deterioration of their relationships, characterized by increasing conflicts with partners, usually associated with the conjunction of external problems and the manifestation of men's underlying psychological problems. Participants' failed attempts to solve external problems and relational conflicts led to an acute relational crisis, culminating in them using IPV,

some of them against their children also; which ultimately precipitated their voluntary or compulsory attendance at MBCPs.

6.4.1 Agency, responsibility and critical self-reflexion

Although all participants described similar trajectories throughout this life stage, persisters and desisters diverged in the way they accounted for the themes addressed in these narratives, and in how they constructed their identity through these themes. The constant comparison of persisters' and desisters' narratives around the common themes expressed in the narratives of this life stage helps to clarify their similarities and divergences.

6.4.1.1 Partying and working

Men typically depicted their entrance into independent life as characterized by a lifestyle structured around partying with peers, and work. Most men abandoned school and got jobs, which allowed them to finance the entertainment that they portrayed as their primary interest at this stage, describing frequent changes between unskilled jobs. Entertainment was typically described as consisting in going out with friends to clubs and pubs, consuming alcohol and drugs, and 'chasing' girls. Men who completed secondary school made efforts to develop a working career, but also described entertainment as central to their lives at this stage.

6.4.1.2 Involvement in problematic behaviours

Although all men concurred in constructing this life stage as initially revolving around entertainment and work, persisters and desisters diverged in the evaluation of this part of their lives. Most persisters - except for Robert - considered their lives during emergent adulthood and early adulthood as normal for their social contexts. They focused on describing the 'good times' they had at that time and the progress they made in their working trajectories. Sexist attitudes, and drug and alcohol abuse, were portrayed as normal.

Desisters - and Robert, a persister - focused their narratives on the description of problematic behaviours such as violence, addictions, and offences, and the negative impact of these in their lives in terms of relational and employment stability and self-concept. They framed problematic behaviours as the manifestation of ongoing psychological problems and lack of appropriate support; thus, as not normal. However, only desisters constructed IPV and sexist behaviours as negative events framed as manifestations of both psychological problems and learned traditional masculine beliefs and practices. They also reported making efforts to tackle problematic behaviours, including help-seeking.

6.4.1.3   Settling down with a partner

After a period of single life with 'ups and downs', participants eventually met a partner with whom they settled down. Most of them described this transition as good, with few, such as Veer and Neil, seeing this as not particularly significant. Interviewees' narratives of this life stage focused on the rapid decline of their entertainment-centred life, and gradual cessation of problematic behaviours, constructing their stable partnerships as initially bringing stability and joy into their lives; although with great variability in terms of its length.

6.4.1.4   Becoming a father

Subsequently, participants accounted for the birth of their children, which most of them –except for Veer - vividly described as a positive turning point in their life. Desisters depicted this as the end of their self-centred lifestyle. Desisters with addictions specifically reported having stopped consuming substances and seeking help to recover around this time. All participants described having commenced a stable period, organized around the family life and being devoted to work and providing for their family.

6.4.1.5   Partnership deterioration

Although, for most participants, fatherhood was a positive turning point, they reported experiencing a gradual deterioration of their couple relationships; with the

period of this decline ranging from months to some years. Partnership deterioration was constructed by all interviewees as caused by a conjunction of external and internal forces, giving rise to a growing relational conflict. However, desisters and persisters differed remarkably in their positioning regarding their agency for the generation of the relational conflict. Persisters focused on the role played by their partners and external problems in the triggering of their psychological deficits, which manifested as increasing aggressiveness, possessiveness, and substance abuse. They positioned themselves as passive agents controlled by these external and internal forces. Desisters, in contrast, focused on the role played by their own decisions in allowing their psychological deficits and traditional masculine beliefs to dominate their actions, positioning themselves as active agents in the deteriorating process of their relations.

6.4.1.6 Relational crisis

The depicting of increasing relational conflicts was a common feature in the narratives of the time preceding the event of violence that led the men to attend their most recent MBCP. However, despite this similitude, desisters' and persisters' accounts of this phase significantly diverged. Desisters depicted this time as a period of growing use of IPV against their partners, and some also against their children. They stressed the role played by their abusive behaviour in the worsening of the conflict with their partners and in generating the relational crisis; but at the same time they portrayed their violent behaviour as fuelled by the combination of traditional masculine beliefs and psychological deficits. In accounting for these events, desisters took a critical stance towards these behaviours and beliefs, openly expressing their disapproval and acknowledging their negative impact on their partners and children. Through these expressions, desisters differentiated themselves from the person they were at that time, and through this they stressed their condition as changed men.

In contrast, persisters accounted for their relational conflict and subsequent crisis as a process out of their control. They stressed the influence of external problems, including their partners and other characters allied with them, such as members of their family of origin or their own children, who were frequently constructed as antagonists. Persisters emphasized their lack of control over their own psychological

problems or internal states, and minimized the impact of their behaviour on others, portraying these events as something that happened to them and not as something that they did.

6.4.1.7   Perpetration of IPV

Although all men converged in constructing their last episode of violence against their partners as the climax of their life stories, desisters and persisters differed in the description and in the positioning of themselves in these events. Persisters focused on their psychological problems to explain their use of violence, stressing the lack of control over themselves to minimize their responsibility for their actions. They portrayed themselves as impaired and unable to exert control over themselves, and tended to share responsibility for the use of violence with their partners and their allies, by portraying the episode as a symmetrical escalation. Persisters obscured the description of the violence they exerted, and directed attention to the effects of the violent episode on themselves; and most positioned themselves as victims of unfair circumstances that happened to them. Matt, a desister, appeared aligned with persisters in his positioning regarding IPV use, since he attributed this to his alcoholism, and also obscured the description of the scene. Nevertheless, he did not see himself as victim of unfair circumstances but of his alcoholism.

Desisters, by contrast, accounted for their IPV use as the result of their internalized traditional masculine beliefs and their psychological deficits. They stressed their responsibility for allowing these to take control of their behaviour, seeking to establish a balance between vulnerabilities and responsibility in accounting for the event. In contrast to the persisters, most of them specified the type of violence they used, and acknowledged its impact on their partners and children, positioning themselves as active agents.

6.4.2   Participant's constructed identities prior to their involvement in MBCP

Narratives of emergent adulthood to adult life with children showed a progressive differentiation between persisters' and desisters' positioning regarding the events they

reported, and thus, in the constructing of their personal identity. The following sections summarize these differences.

6.4.2.1   Identity constructed by desisters

In accounting for the events of this life stage, desisters stressed their condition as changed men. They evaluated their past violent behaviour and traditional masculine beliefs as harmful and wrong; and contrasted these with their current knowledge, believes and behaviours, to demonstrate that they have changed. In addition, they provided clear descriptions of exercised violence, and acknowledged its negative impact on their partners and children, demonstrating assumption of responsibility and acknowledging their agency.

Importantly, although desisters accounted for the continuity of their inner self during this life stage by referring to the influence of emotional problems and traditional masculine beliefs on their increasing use of violence, at the same time they stressed that they were letting these forces control their behaviour and were choosing to use IPV. Although seemingly contradictory, through these efforts desisters revealed their interest in demonstrating the differences between the 'old me' and the 'new me', while trying to establish a biographical balance between their vulnerability and responsibility.

6.4.2.2   Identity constructed by persisters

Persisters assumed the continuity of their inner self during this life stage and between this life stage and the present time. They accounted for this life stage as initially good, until external problems and the behaviour of their partners triggered their psychological vulnerabilities, causing their use of violence against their partners, which was regularly portrayed as unintentional. Through this, they distributed the responsibility for the relational crisis among different actors and forces beyond their control.

Persisters' narratives of this life stage were characterized by their efforts to minimize and justify the violence they exercised. Poor to omitted descriptions of own violent

behaviour, the overlooking of its consequences on others, the placing of violence use in the context of symmetric escalation, the blaming of partners' unreasonable behaviour, and the claiming of being under the influence of substances and emotional states impairing their self-control, were the means commonly deployed to accomplish this minimization and justification of IPV. In narrating their transit throughout this life stage, persisters accounted for the continuity of their inner self and constructed their identity as non-changed men, since they did not differentiate themselves from the identity portrayed in these narratives. Persisters positioned themselves as passive victims of circumstances and psychological shortcomings out of their control, non-responsible for the deterioration of their relations and for the violence they exerted. Here it is important to clarify that Matt, a desister, impressed as aligned with the group of persisters, since he did not see himself as changed in terms of violent behaviour but only in terms of abstaining from alcohol. In his life narrative, his IPV against his wife was not a relevant issue.

6.5 Life story resolution

Participants' perpetration of IPV was constructed as the climax of their life stories. After this event, most men reported having being arrested and court ordered to attend MBCPs; whereas the minority considered looking for help for some time before getting in contact with MBCPs. Narratives of the aftermath of IPV perpetration configured men's change as the overarching theme of their life-story denouements, where the differences between desisters and persisters became accentuated.

6.5.1 The change process

All men, except for one – Veer - accounted for having gone through a positive transformative process as a consequence of the events precipitated by their use of IPV. Most participants portrayed their involvement in MBCP as the main source for this transformation; while some also referred to mental health practitioners and the impact of arrest and restriction orders as facilitators of change.

6.5.1.1 Involvement in MBCPs

Both desisters and persisters constructed their initial contact with MBCPs as the initiation of the resolution of their life stories. However, despite this convergence, participants' accounts differed in terms of self-ascribed agency in moving towards MBCPs. Attending the program voluntarily or involuntarily did not make a difference between desisters and persisters.

Voluntary involvement. Three desisters (Daniel, Harry and Neil) and one persister (Robert) accounted for their initial involvement in MBCPs as being the result of their autonomous help seeking to stop their violence. They described this as primarily motivated by a perceived risk of harming their children and partners, and secondarily by the potential risk of losing these relationships due to court intervention. Through these accounts, they highlighted their problem awareness and agentic move towards a solution, and constructed MBCPs as an opportunity to change.

Involuntary involvement. Three desisters (Steve, Mason and Matt) and four persisters (Veer, Tony, Sami and Damian) accounted for their involvement as the result of a court order. They positioned themselves as passive agents regarding help seeking, and as unaware of their violence as a problem prior to their referral to MBCPs. Although most initially perceived MBCP as punishment, they rapidly changed their perception of MBCPs to that of 'help', except for Veer, who preserved the perception of them as punishment. Only desisters, however, provided a richer description of this transition from negative to positive perception of MBCPs.

Involvement in other services. Across both groups of men, Mason, Steve, Matt, Damian and Veer reported having received additional support to tackle their problems, although not all of them regarded IPV as the problem they were looking to address through this:

- Mason and Steve, both desisters, described having received mental health support to address their violent behaviour. Mason was referred by his employer, and Steve self-referred.

- Matt, a desister, was court-referred to an alcohol rehabilitation program as a consequence of his IPV, prior to commencing an MBCP.
- Persister Damian reported having attended psychotherapy to address his psychological problems and indecisiveness between his lover and his wife, prior to and during his attendance at the MBCP.
- Veer, a persister, attended psychiatric services to address his alcohol abuse and sleep problems in parallel to the MBCP. It was not, however, clear if he attended voluntarily.

Importantly, desisters who accounted for problematic behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse and gambling reported having attended services that helped them to stop these behaviours, before initiating MBCPs.

6.5.1.2 Comparison of desisters' and persisters' change process

Despite the general similitude in their trajectories towards MBCPs, desisters' and persisters' narratives of the change process differed significantly. While desisters placed the issue of IPV at the centre of their change process, and detailed the learnings and skills involved in achieving change, persisters, and Matt from the group of desisters, focused on other issues, such as substance abuse and psychological problems, overlooking IPV and providing poor descriptions of their change process.

6.5.1.2.1   Persisters' change process

Although persisters and Matt (a desister) converged in constructing their change process around issues different from IPV, their accounts varied significantly in terms of process description and the identity claimed through this.

I have already changed. At the time of the interview Tony, Damian and Matt (a desister) claimed to have already changed, although in very distinct manners:

- Sudden change. Tony (persister) and Matt (desister) claimed to have changed immediately as a result of being arrested and served with a protection order that prevented them from having contact with partners and children. This

situation made them realize they had done wrong, and consider stopping substance abuse. Yet, they did not see IPV as their problem, and overlooked its consequences for their families and partners. The change they claimed was in relation to their substance abuse only. Their personal identity was preserved after their involvement in the MBCP, as they remained focused on their own needs and did not assume responsibility for their use of IPV and its consequences. Matt notably differed from the group of desisters, and appeared aligned with persisters in terms of change. Importantly, he claimed having used IPV just once. The program that recruited him for the study was contacted after this analysis was finished, but they were unable to confirm the presence of a pattern of IPV prior to his intake in the MBCP. Therefore, he might be considered neither as a persister nor a desister.

- Gradual change. Damian finished the MBCP before the interview, and accounted for attending couples therapy in parallel to this. He attributed a greater influence on his change process to his psychologist, who helped him to understand the origin and the centrality of his needs for acceptance and love in his inner functioning. Based on this understanding, he realized the futility of expecting his in-laws and his parents to meet his needs. He decided to distance himself from them, to focus on promoting his wife to meet his needs for love and a satisfactory sex life. Through this, Damian claimed both his change and the ownership of it. Nevertheless, his exclusive focus on his affective and sexual needs, and the overlooking of the effects of his violence on his partner and children, revealed the continuity of his identity.

No need to change. Veer reported attending the MBCP and psychiatric services in parallel. He did not see IPV as his problem, and focused on his stressful situation, which he perceived as associated with external circumstances not related to his behaviour. He criticized the MBCP, and regarded his psychiatrist as a better source of help. Veer constructed personal change as not necessary, because he claimed to need to change his external situation to relieve his stress; accounting in this way for the continuity of his identity.

<u>Initiating change</u>. Robert declared no change beyond the realization of having done wrong after hitting his partner; although he stressed his will to change. Sami accounted for having learned about the cycle of violence at the MBCP, and claimed to have started to change; however, he focused on his criticism against his partner for hampering his efforts to change. In accounting for their involvement in MBCPs, both men showed the continuity of their personal identity.

Despite the differences observed in persisters' positioning regarding their change and in the description of the change process, persisters, and Matt (a desister), inadvertently accounted for the continuity of their personal identity in terms of not accepting full responsibility for their violent behaviour and its impact, and in preserving an exclusive focus on their individual needs, which did not change after getting involved in MBCPs.

6.5.1.2.2 Desisters' change process

Desisters - except for Matt - accounted for their change process in a more elaborated way than persisters did. They described change as the result of a self-reflective process, assisted by MBCP's facilitators and motivated by their interest in stopping their use of violence, bettering themselves as persons, and improving their most significant affective relations. Although desisters differed in self-ascribed agency in their initial involvement in MBCPs, they converged in constructing a rapid engagement in the change process. They described this as consisting of four interrelated phases, also involving contributing factors external to MBCPs. A conceptualised representation of the change process described by desisters is offered in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Desisters' change process
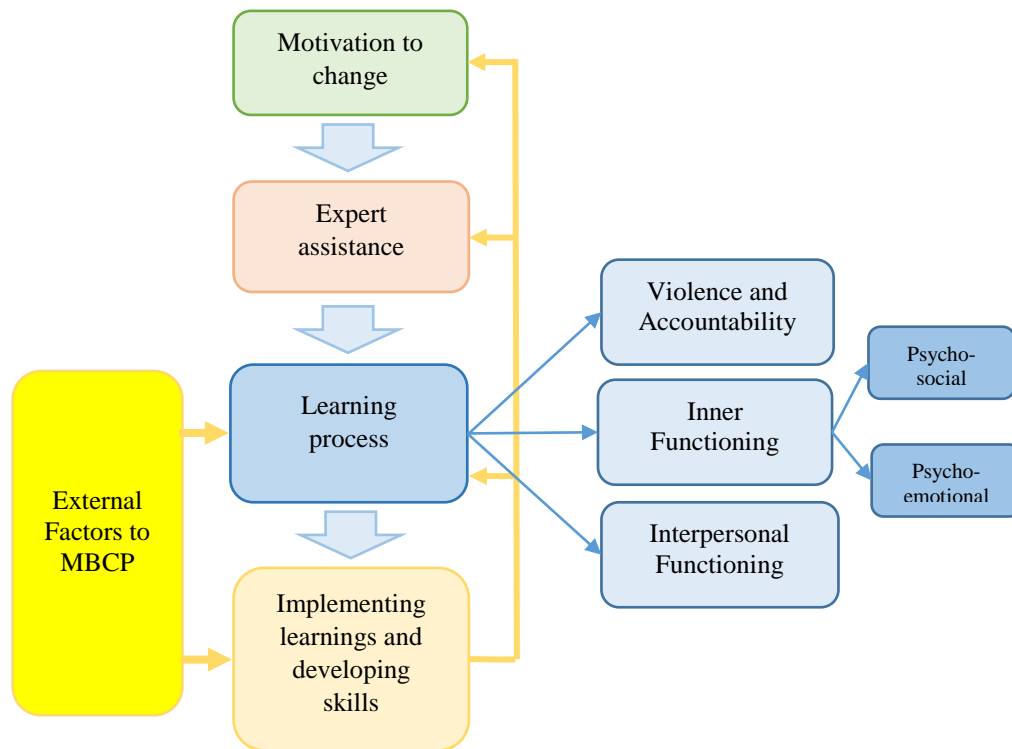
<u>Motivation to change</u>. Desisters referred to the perceived risk of losing significant affective relations and/or risk of harming children and partner due to their violent behaviour as motivating them to look for help or to accept attendance at MBCPs. They also mentioned having the purpose of becoming a better father or partner as motivating the initiation of their change process.

<u>Expert assistance</u>. Desisters explained that their engagement with MBCP was facilitated by the respectful attitude of the facilitators towards them, which helped them to start talking about themselves and their lives. The perception of facilitators as sensitive and knowledgeable on issues of men's violence increased their willingness to participate, generating an alliance between the men and the facilitators.

<u>Learning process</u>. Desisters reported that MBCP assisted them to gain a novel understanding of themselves and their relations, through a reflective process facilitated by the provision of a number of new frameworks that can be grouped as follows:

A. Violence and accountability

- Learning about different forms of IPV.
- Learning responsibility for their exerted violence and its effects: as the result of being respectfully challenged when minimizing or justifying violence.

B. Inner functioning

- Psychosocial
  o Learning that IPV is a gendered issue.
  o Learning that gender/masculinity is socially constructed and diverse.
- Psycho-emotional
  o Learning emotional awareness, developing the skill to identify own emotions.
  o Learning strategies of emotional self-regulation, developing the skill to self-regulate negative emotions.

C. Interpersonal functioning

- Learning empathy, developing the skill to recognize internal and intentional states in others, and to see themselves from the position of the other.
- Learning alternative communication styles, developing the skills to listen and express own ideas and feelings respectfully to enable negotiation. Gaining awareness of non-verbal communication.

<u>Implementing acquired learnings and developing skills</u>. Desisters portrayed themselves as actively transferring learning from MBCPs into their lives, and looking for feedback from MBCP facilitators about their reported experiences in doing this. This process was depicted as crucial in developing the necessary skills to enact and expand their change, involving the following practices:

- Reminding themselves of their responsibility for their behaviour and its impact on others.
- Practising awareness of internal and intentional states of others (empathy).
- Practising self-awareness of negative emotional states.
- Practising self-regulation strategies of negative emotional states.
- Practising respectful communication styles.

Desisters also described a dynamic relation between the four phases involved in the change process. The implementation of learnings generated experiences and reflections that men discussed at MBCPs. The social recognition of these actions as proof of men's efforts to change boosted their motivation to change, and reinforced their perception of MBCPs as helpful. This strengthened their alliance with MBCP facilitators, and increased men's self-perception as being capable of acting differently: being responsible for their own behaviour and not resorting to violence. The increased motivation to change, combined with the positive perception of MBCPs and the sense of self-efficacy, strengthened men's self-reflexive process. This process was necessary for the internalization of the new frameworks; which, in turn,

encouraged the ongoing implementation of changes. It is important to note, however, that the categories within each phase do not represent a linear process, but synthetically reflect the themes desisters accounted for in their narratives of the change process.

Contextual factors contributing to change. Desisters also described factors external to MBCP as facilitating their change, in terms of contributing to their learning process and the implementation of the acquired learnings and developed skills:

- Mental *health intervention.* Mason reported having attended psychotherapy, and Steve received psychiatric intervention in parallel to the MBCP. Both referred to this as a contribution to enhancing their self-understanding and accessing the means to regulate themselves (psychological techniques and medicines, respectively)

- Previous *MBCP and similar interventions*. Harry, Daniel and Neil reported having attended MBCPs or similar types of intervention prior to the last program they completed. They conceived of this as 'repetition' that helped them to strengthen their changes, and the perception of the utility of resorting to this service when they felt their changes were weakening.

- *Structural changes*. Mason informed of having improved dramatically his working conditions, relieving him from stress and enabling him to implement the learnings and skills acquired through the MBCP. Others, such as Harry and Nick, referred to the perceived need for improving their working conditions, as they perceived these to be hampering their change process.

6.5.2 *Post-intervention: Doing desistance from IPV*

In addition to the dissimilarities in their accounts of the change process, desisters' and persisters' denouements also contrasted in what they reported happened after completing the MBCPs, and what they anticipated as their future.

6.5.2.1   *Persisters' accounts of post-intervention: more of the same*

Damian, the only persister who completed the program, accounted for a number of activities he implemented after completing MBCP that allowed him to begin what he

called a "new life with my wife". This consisted in distancing himself and his wife from their families of origin, taking his wife to entertainment venues of his preference, and encouraging her to become sexier in order to meet his sexual needs. He outlined an expected future where he saw himself as being admired by others for being such a good person. Damian constructed his change around stopping infidelity, stopping waiting for his needs to be met by his parents and in-laws, and turning towards his wife to encourage her to meet his affective and sexual needs. However, he remained centred on his own needs, and continued exerting coercive control over his wife - as it is highly likely that she might feel compelled to conform to his requirements due to the risk of further infidelities - imposing his needs and overlooking her needs and their children's needs. His change was, therefore, not related to his abusive behaviour and its impact on his wife and children. Moreover, he demonstrated unconcern for preventing this from happening again.

6.5.2.2   *Desisters' accounts of post-intervention: actively desisting*

Contrasting with persisters' accounts, desisters stressed, in their narratives of post-intervention, that stopping violence is an active endeavour involving an agentic ongoing engagement in preserving and expanding the changes they made through MBCPs. As Daniel expressed it: "*for some reason I thought there was a cure for violence. Now I understand that is something you have to maintain*".

Figure 6.2 Active desistance
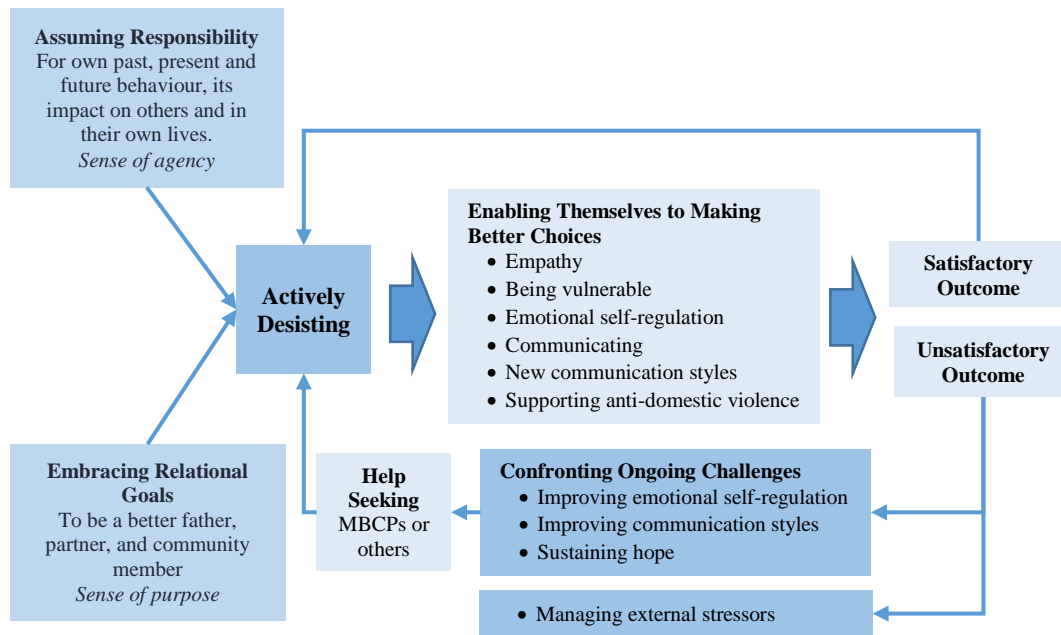
Desisters described this active engagement as based on the repositioning of themselves regarding their influence on the course of their relational life, and based on the commitment to identity goals associated with their relations. According to their narratives, these two converging forces, which emerged from their change process, helped them to sustain their active process of desisting from violence, as represented in Figure 6.2.

responsibility. Desisters' narratives of post-intervention show the centrality of assuming responsibility for the impact of their past, present and future behaviour on others, and in their own lives to provide them with a sense of agency.

Embracing relational goals. Desisters also stressed the significance of their committing to relational goals pertaining to their identity as fathers, partners and community members, to provide them with a sense of direction and purpose in life.

Actively desisting. Desisters' narratives portrayed the assumption of responsibility and the embracing of relational goals as two forces converging to sustain their efforts to maintain their active desistance. Actively desisting from IPV was described as consisting in an ongoing process of change maintenance and change expansion, involving:

- Enabling themselves to making good choices through a series of strategies organized around the themes of self-reflexivity, self-control, empathy, and communication;
- Evaluating the outcomes of these strategies through self-assessment conducted by the men, sometimes incorporating children's and partner's opinions;
- Confronting ongoing challenges by persevering despite not having optimal results in specific key areas;
- Managing external stressors when perceived factors are beyond the scope of MBCPs, such as working conditions, financial and housing; men mobilizing to address this issues.

The results of enabling themselves to making good choices provided desisters with the necessary feedback to maintain and guide their active desistance. When desisters experienced satisfactory outcomes in terms of self-regulation, communication and empathy, they felt reinforced to keep on actively desisting through making good choices.

MBCPs or other sources of assistance. When desisters experienced unsatisfactory outcomes in enabling themselves to making good choices, they resorted to MBCPs to look for further assistance, or to other sources such as self-help literature. In these situations, MBCPs also provided desisters with a social environment where they felt recognized as desisting from IPV – or as changed men in the context of other men attending MBCPs - which, in turn, reinforced their adherence to actively desisting.

Desisting from IPV was portrayed by desisters as an ongoing life project rather than a concrete and discrete behavioural change. They described this ongoing project as consisting in actively differentiating themselves, through their "actions, words and deeds" - as Mason put it - from who they were before and from the negative masculine figures of their lives. In this ongoing struggle, emotional stability emerged as the most common challenge that desisters confront in order to achieve harmony in their affective relationships and keep themselves free from violence. The nature of this struggle and its tension with men's relational purposes revealed the centrality of balancing vulnerability and responsibility in desisters' construction of their personal identity.

6.6   Personal identity constructed by participants through their life stories

The constant comparison of participant's life stories permits an appreciation of how men made sense of the continuity of their identity across time, their uniqueness as individuals vis-à-vis others, how they positioned themselves in terms of agency, and how desisters and persisters converged and diverged in terms of these dimensions.

All interviewed men addressed the challenge of accounting for the continuity and discontinuity of their identity across time by constructing themselves as having an inner self composed of two dimensions: a psychological core self, and a psychosocial self. Most participants understood their psychological core self as being moulded by early life negative experiences impacting their emotional functioning, and a few as determined by traits and drives subsequently shaped by the context. Therefore, early life emotional trauma emerged as the most common event classified as formative for the self. The psycho-social self was depicted as being moulded by experiences of vicarious learning and social reinforcement around issues of masculinity. Thus, relations with influential males such as fathers, older brothers, and peers, were classified as formative for the self. Most participants also referred to social institutions such as school as reinforcing traditional masculinities, and therefore as also formative for the self.

Although both desisters and persisters constructed an inner self to diachronically navigate the sense of self, the way in which they accounted for the continuities and discontinuities of their inner self throughout their life stories, particularly at the end of these, indicates significant differences in how they constructed their current personal identity in terms of uniqueness in relation to others and agency.

6.6.1   Identity constructed by desisters

As the result of the within-case and cross-case comparisons, a general portrayal of the identity constructed by men who desist from IPV emerges. Desisters converged in constructing a narrative identity as men who, in spite of having experienced violence and neglect during their childhood, and because they experienced this, have transformed themselves with the help of experts and other people. Desisters claimed to have transitioned from being irresponsible, selfish and ignorant men, to being

responsible, empathetic and conscious men who reject violence, and are actively committed to balancing their vulnerability and responsibility. This balance enables them to act ethically, with the purposes of improving their most significant affective relationships, preventing further violence against their families, and bettering themselves as persons.

For them, their suffering as children, the places where they have lived, the relations they have had, and the advances and setbacks they have experienced as young men and as adults, remain as important parts of their individuality. However, what makes desisters unique is their ability to change their story: the capacity to accept their mistakes and transform themselves to ensure they will not commit those mistakes again.

6.6.1.1   Desisters' constructed agency

Agency self-ascription was a significant aspect of the differentiation that desisters drew between their 'old me' and their 'new me'. They constructed themselves as agents giving direction to their behaviour and their affective life according to a life purpose. Their life stories described a transition, from being a men who saw themselves as externally determined by the world - in terms of an emotionally defective functioning, a set of taken for granted gender beliefs, and adverse circumstances - to men who, in spite of their psychological deficits, are now making agentic efforts and taking ethical decisions to provide a better life for their children, their partners, and themselves, in terms of safety, respect and emotional stability.

It is worth noting that the issue of the ongoing psychological deficits emerged as a significant aspect in desisters' current negotiation of their personal identity in terms of agency. Although their narratives showed that they felt they have been unable to change their psychological core self in order to reach a stable emotional functioning, they reported having internalized the need to assume responsibility for their emotions and to look for help if necessary. Therefore, they saw themselves as capable of change and improvement if they commit to this responsibility.

6.6.1.2   Desisters' constructed masculinity

A key transformation of the personal identity that desisters claimed revolved around their gender positioning. They constructed themselves as heterosexual men, fathers and workers who became aware of the socially-constructed and varied nature of masculinity, due to a learning process. Desisters saw themselves as men who have invested in separating themselves from the traditional patriarchal masculinities into which they were recruited at early stages of their lives. They accounted for a transition from being selfish and stoic to being caring and vulnerable in the context of their affective relations; and advocated in their narratives for masculinities characterized by self-reflexivity, sensitivity, and responsibility.

Desisters used this identity development not only to differentiate themselves from who they were before, but also to differentiate themselves from other men in terms of gender awareness, self-reflexivity, responsibility for own behaviour, centrality of affective relationships, and other-centeredness. In addition, they differentiated themselves from other men through seeing themselves as being committed to the social cause of transforming the culture of gender inequality, by helping other men to cease IPV and referring victims of IPV to appropriate services.

Desisters accounted for the continuity of the psychological core self in terms of emotional functioning and the discontinuity of their psychosocial self. This allowed them to understand their current difficulties in self-regulating negative emotions and the ongoing difficulties in changing their communication styles as a consequence of a defective psychological core self; and their commitment to improve in these areas as a consequence of a new identity as men (transformed psychosocial self). As they reported being aware that their change was not yet complete and stable, they kept on trying to change because they had internalized that it is their responsibility to take care of their emotions and behaviours to prevent further violence.

6.6.2   Identity constructed by persisters

In contrast to desisters, persisters converged in constructing their identity as men who have been and still are victims of circumstances and forces beyond their control,

which have prevented them from maintaining stable and satisfactory affective relationships. Persisters constructed themselves as a character deeply concerned about their unmet needs, whose vulnerabilities dominate their will and impose on the people around them. Therefore, they depicted a personal identity characterized by an imbalance between vulnerability and responsibility. Even though persisters constructed their recent life crisis as the climax of their stories, and some of them even claimed to have changed after the incident, the denouements of their life stories and narratives of an imagined future reveal the continuity of both the psychological core self and the psychosocial self that they constructed throughout their life stories.

6.6.2.1 *Persisters' constructed agency*

Persisters constructed themselves as a character dominated by forces coming from both the inner and psychosocial self, whose effects they do not consider a matter of their own responsibility or they perceive to be beyond their control. Thus, they did not see themselves as capable of changing or regulating their inner self. These perspectives were reflected in persisters' outlined futures, where the prevalent themes were their own needs and lack of concern about the impact of their behaviour on their partners and children.

However, persisters did not present a unitary portrayal of agency. Men who wanted to change believed that they could achieve a transformation of their psychological core self; although they limited their agency to looking for help, and were expecting some kind of cure coming from outside. They did not see themselves as the agent for producing this change.

Persisters who asserted having changed claimed agency for this change. However, in the case of Damian, his agency was at the service of his own needs only; and for Tony, his agency was limited to remaining free from drugs. On the other hand, Veer, who claimed to not need to change, explicitly asserted that he was expecting the world to change by itself to meet his needs.

6.6.2.2   Persisters' constructed masculinity

Like desisters, persisters also positioned themselves in terms of gender as heterosexual men, fathers and workers. But unlike desisters, they constructed themselves as men focused on their own needs who remained uncritically attached to dominant masculine traditions such as patriarchy, stoicism, independence, downgrading of women, and detachment from emotions and affection. Even when Robert and Sami acknowledged their need to change, their notions of change revolved around psychological issues, without mention of gender issues.

6.7   Summary comparing life stories of desisters and persisters

The comparison between the life narratives of desisters and persisters allowed the observation of a number of similitudes and differences between these two groups, which helps understand desisters' change process more clearly. Self-introduction narratives showed that both groups stressed the significance of employment for positioning themselves synchronically; but self-introduction narratives also revealed that, while desisters emphasised the significance of their affective relations with children and partners, persisters focused on their own personal problems.

Both groups addressed the beginning of their life stories with a focus on the conformation of their self, to account for the origin of the characteristics that made them unique or similar to others. Most participants constructed an inner self as articulated by a psychological core placed at the centre of their identity, which they conceived as moulded by early life traumatic events. The psychological core self was subsequently wrapped in layers of gendered social learnings, which configured men's gender identity. This composed self was used by participants to navigate constancy and change throughout their life story. Although two persisters differed, constructing a psychological core self as either innate personality traits or psychological needs, they also used this theory of the self to navigate their lives diachronically.

The psychological core self was commonly conceived as being beyond voluntary control, and the psychosocial self as being imperceptible during early life stages but visible from the perspective of the present time, for desisters and, to a lesser extent,

for persisters wanting to change. While the notion of a traumatized psychological core self was clearly associated with change as possible or desirable, innate understandings of the psychological core self were not so associated. Participants who accounted for a traumatic childhood established these events as the inciting incident of their life stories, which they structured according the popular plot of 'men vs self', which opened the space for rehabilitative discourses. However, only desisters and persisters wanting to change established the learning of traditional masculine worldviews as a complementary inciting incident in their life stories, as in 'men vs society' plot, broadening the space for rehabilitative discourses. Narratives of the beginning-of-life stories revealed the centrality of discourses of trauma and social learning in men's understandings of the origin of their self, and the relevance of these for opening a space for culturally-sound alternatives for personal change.

Participants structured a middle section of their life stories with a focus on negative turning points produced by external situations, leading to relational crisis and men's use of IPV. Although both desisters and persisters accounted for the role of their personal vulnerabilities in the worsening of the relational crisis, they differed remarkably in terms of their accountability for their past violent behaviour and its impact on others. While desisters distanced themselves from their violent behaviour, stressing the patriarchal nature of this, and took a critical stance towards this mindset, persisters only accounted for their vulnerabilities, portraying themselves as passive agents, and minimizing and justifying their use of IPV. Only desisters attempted to construct a biographical balance between their vulnerabilities and their responsibilities.

Participants of both groups constructed the episodes of violence that led to referral to or voluntarily enrolment in MCBPs as the story climax, connecting to the resolution of their relation crisis as the ending section of their life stories. However, only desisters assumed responsibility for their violent behaviour and acknowledged its impact on others. Although the discussion of personal change was the main theme of all participants' life story denouements, desisters' and persisters' narratives of the change process and post-intervention differed notably. Only desisters accounted for an identity change by identifying the different aspects involved in this change as a process unfolded over time, which they portrayed as depending on both their agency

and external assistance. Major changes were constructed around issues of awareness of their violence and its impact on others, consciousness of other people's minds and needs, awareness of own internal states, distancing from patriarchal values, strengthening of self-monitoring abilities, and enhanced ability to control the psychological core self. More importantly, desisters constructed their change as an ongoing process.

Although life stories between birth and adulthood appeared to be similar between the groups of desisters and persisters in terms of plots and themes, the positioning they exhibited regarding the events described from adolescence onwards, and the themes and plots shaping the resolution of their relational crisis, made their narratives differ significantly in how they constructed their personal identity in terms of gender awareness and self-ascribed agency. The positioning of the men concerning the balance between responsibility and vulnerability emerged as an overarching theme that brought together the group of desisters and at the same time differentiated them from the group of persisters.

The analysis also shown the extent to which men from both groups resorted to psychological discourses to navigate identity continuity and discontinuity throughout their lives, and exposed the centrality of addressing issues of agency and masculinity in assisting men who use IPV to change. However, and particularly in the post-intervention narratives, the analysis also revealed that the current design of MBCPs in the local context appear not to address men's issues of emotional dysregulation in a satisfactory manner.

CHAPTER VII:
DISCUSSION

"...a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it" (Sartre, 1938, p. 64)

7.1   Introduction

The purpose of this study has been to explore the personal identity of men who desist from IPV, by contrasting their self-narratives with those of men who do not desist from IPV. The study seeks to contribute to knowledge concerning the processes through which these men negotiate their personal identity in their journey to leave IPV behind. A primary focus in this study has been to seek an understanding of how these men construct a sense of self, and of how they manage to stay free from violence since attending an intervention program. The discussion that follows interrogates the findings of the study presented in Chapters IV to VI, in terms of their meaning in the context of the research on the change process of men who use IPV and desistance from offending and IPV.

7.2   Summary of main findings

The findings show that men who desist from IPV made significant changes in their sense of self. They constructed themselves as men who have developed a new balance between their vulnerability and responsibility, in the context of significant affective relationships, that has enabled them to abstain from using violence against their partner and children. Desisters resorted to a series of cultural discourses and narrative forms to negotiate the coherence and credibility of the new identity they claimed. They located the change of their sense of self among the most recent developments of their lives, and constructed this as a consequence of a series of biographical events they sequenced as a lengthy flashback according to a rebirth plot.

Firstly, men storied the origin and development of their idiosyncratic characteristics, which they conceived as a set of psychological vulnerabilities and gender beliefs placed at the centre of their identity, resulting from formative experiences outside of their control that had occurred during their childhood and adolescence. Subsequently, desisters explained how these characteristics interacted with external situations to produce a pattern of irresponsible, abusive and violent behaviour, which generated a series of increasing problems throughout their lives from late adolescence to adulthood. This pattern of behaviour ultimately led them to cause a relational crisis that ended up threatening the preservation of their most valued affective relationships. Confronted by this situation, men resolved to embark on a change journey in order to preserve and enhance these significant relationships.

The change journey consisted in a self-reflexive learning endeavour assisted by experts, mainly from MBCPs. In this journey men were challenged to assume responsibility for their behaviour and its impact on others, and were taught about the different forms of IPV. They gradually learned about the limitations of their empathetic abilities, and worked to improve in this area by learning and practicing new ways of communicating with their loved ones. Men also acquired new frameworks to understand their inner functioning in terms of gender beliefs and emotional states, which allowed them to distance themselves from their internalized patriarchal world view and improve their awareness and regulation of their emotional reactions.

In parallel to the assisted change process, men were implementing the acquired learnings and developed skills in their relationships and in other contexts. However, at the end of the assisted change journey, few men managed to stabilize their transformed communication styles and emotional self-regulation. The majority of men, without the supplementary aid external to the MBCP, after a period of time subsequent to finishing the assisted change process, experienced continuing difficulties in self-regulating emotions and in stabilizing new communication styles. As they felt these difficulties could lead them to relapse, they occasionally resorted to MBCP in order to reinforce their learnings and discuss their difficulties with MBCPs' facilitators. In the program they found support to improve their self-control,

opportunities to help others with their experiences, and the social recognition that contributed to strengthen their self-perception as changed but still changing men.

7.3   Desistance from IPV as a story

A desisters' change process is not an isolated event in their lives. On the contrary, it is the most important part of the resolution of a life story, whose climax is articulated around the men's violence against their loved ones that almost made them lose these significant relationships. Thus, the change process depicted by desisters can be understood as an externally-assisted self-reflexive process, portrayed by rebirth stories where the protagonist transforms positively after a period of living in the darkness, as for example in Charles Dicken's *Christmas Carol (Dickens, 1990).* However, unlike in Dicken's classic, in desisters' stories the protagonist does not receive the visit of different ghosts during the night and wake up transformed into a good-hearted man. Although they received the assistance of experts who played the role of Dicken's ghosts, desisters had to play a more agentic role than Ebenezer Scrooge in the transformation of themselves and in the consolidation of these changes.

As in the rebirth plot, desisters' life stories commenced with them falling under the shadow of a dark power constituted by the impact of early-life emotional trauma and patriarchal beliefs. Then, they experienced ups and downs in their lives until they found stability, so that the threat of the dark power seemed to have receded. However, then these forces reappeared, imprisoning the protagonist in a state of living death. The dark power seems to have triumphed when the protagonist increases his violence against his loved ones and puts at risk the continuity of his relationship with them. Finally, however, comes the redemption; but not as the result of a magical or miraculous intervention as in most rebirth stories. Desisting narratives portray the men's redemption as a modern type of salvation, one with the form of rehabilitation where the skills and knowledge of the experts played a role as important as the protagonist's agency. Nevertheless, as in the classic rebirth stories, the power of the story of desisting from IPV lies on the contrast between the former state of the man when the dark power is dominant - causing the protagonist's decay, sickness, isolation and lack of love - and the state of a man transformed in terms of awakening, growth, hope and love.

Importantly, desisters' telling was intended for the sake of other men who use IPV; thus, the interviewer was not the only audience. These desisters accounted for their biographical continuity, and used the rhetoric of rehabilitation, articulated as a rebirth plot, to make sense of the discontinuity of their identity, which they claimed as being a result of a change process and as a condition for abstaining from IPV. They considered their story to carry wisdom which potentially would help other men.

The findings thus reveal that desisters relied on culturally available story plots to organize their stories and account for their identity changes. In addition, the analysis of their narratives reveals a number of constitutive elements of this transformative process that assisted them to make sense of their identity change in the context of their lives, which will be discussed below.

7.4   Desisting from IPV is a gradual process.

Desisters did not change from one day to the next as did Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dicken's story. Indeed, some men required attendance at more than one MBCP or similar intervention before achieving a stable change. The "repetitions" - as Daniel put it - helped them to gradually reinterpret their lives in light of the frameworks they received from others assisting them during the change journey, and to gain competence in the use of the strategies that they learned to prevent conflict escalation. Thus, desisting from IPV was depicted in participants' narratives as a process unfolded over time and as a still-evolving process. This description corresponds with previous research on desistance, converging in understanding desistance as a process extended in time (Giordano et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2015), and as an ongoing work in progress (Maruna, 2001; Morran, 2013b).

It is worth noting that desisters in the present study highlighted that desisting from IPV is not only a process unfolded over time but a still-evolving endeavour extending well beyond the finishing of the program. This contrasts with the description provided by Walker et al. (2015), where men seem to achieve a stable change after accomplishing a "new way of being" (p. 2742); and with the description of Giordano et al. (2015), where individuals reach sustained desistance as a consequence of both attitudinal and behavioural changes due to a lengthy relational-based learning process.

Similar to the present study, Kelly and Westmarland (2015) report that men who successfully abstained from IPV framed their change as an "ongoing project" (p. 14).

The portraying of desistance from IPV as a lengthy process can be interpreted as a discursive strategy, and/or as reflecting the individual's lived experience. Maruna (2001) reminds us that an offender needs to provide a good explanation to convince others when they claim to have transformed their lives. Similarly, one might consider that an IPV perpetrator should provide a convincing explanation to sustain the claim that he has changed his ways. However, Maruna (2001) also highlights that the desisters need a good story not only to convince others but to convince themselves that this life transformation has occurred. He argues that, for desisting from crime, the individual needs a believable story about who they are that makes crime incompatible with their identity and desistance a logical outcome of the story. Likewise, according to the present research, to desist from IPV, men appear to need a believable story about how their identity became incompatible with IPV and family violence.

Changes in self-narrative has been described and documented as a complex process, involving incremental, internally-consistent changes rather than a radical break from a previous self-story (McAdams et al., 2001). Moreover, people carefully select events from their life story in order to maintain a coherent self, according to their cultural contexts (McAdams, 2006). In order to maintain this narrative coherence, people need to sort out the dilemma of claiming a new identity while, at the same time, accounting for being the same person (Bamberg, 2011). Desisters, in the present study, accomplished this by selecting events from their past that they associated with their present in a manner that allowed them to explain both the origin and cessation of IPV. Moreover, these explanations seemed to cohere with contemporary Western cultural assumptions about the human possibilities for personal change, and were also attuned with narrative logic (Bruner, 2004).

 If we suspend the disbelief with which the stories of men who have perpetrated violence are often heard (O'Connor, 1995), perhaps we could appreciate that their stories depict the complexity involved in separating oneself from beliefs and practices deeply ingrained in the personal identity, and the time required in assimilating new ways of viewing oneself and others and acting accordingly. This last element was

what most desisters in this study highlighted as particularly hard to achieve. They reported having changed their perspective about themselves and others, but demonstrated concern for continuing problems in performing the new self in terms of emotional self-regulation and new communication styles. Therefore, although they claimed a transformed self, at the same time they accounted for the continuity of certain aspects of their former self that they felt they needed to keep working on to prevent relapse. Interestingly, in revealing these apprehensions, they added credibility for the existence of the identity change they claimed, because now they are men concerned about preventing their own violence, implying also, a sense of responsibility for themselves.

7.5   Desisting from IPV requires motivation

There is widespread agreement that stories are about the vicissitudes of human intention" (Bruner 1987, p. 697); that stories are composed by an agent, an action, a goal, a setting, an instrument, and trouble; and that trouble is what drives the drama (Burke, 1962). However, for the trouble to be solved it is necessary that there be an agent capable of initiating action (Bruner, 1990). Desisters initiated their movement towards change when they got involved in MBCPs, and realized that they have hurt significant affective figures and felt that the connection with these figures was at serious risk due to the intervention of the justice system. They considered their children to be the most valued of these figures; and partnered men also considered their partner as equally significant. Men, however, did not realize autonomously the seriousness of their violent behaviour. They needed to be held accountable by the justice system or the police, and to be referred to an MBCP or similar at some point in their history. This forced initiation of the desisters' movement towards change reflects Fagan's (1989) observation that spontaneous desistance from IPV is uncommon and that men need to be threatened by an authority to initiate change. In the same vein, research on stake in conformity has proven the relevance of having something to lose for prompting men towards change (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005).

However, initiating a change process does not guarantee persistence in this effort. The motivational process depicted by desisters in the present study seemed more complex and dynamic than the initial movement resulting from extrinsic motivation portrayed

by Giordano et al. (2015) and Fagan (1989). These desisters described a transit from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, which allowed them to claim agency for their change. Similarly, Walker et al. (2015) conclude that desisting from IPV needs the intrinsic motivation of the individual. The desisters understood this as the result of the internalization of accumulated external triggers, such as the impact of violence on their families and the criminal justice involvement; although not clarifying how the motivation from extrinsic avoidance resulting from threats evolved into intrinsic motivation and continued to mobilize the individual beyond the program completion.

7.5.1 Dynamic motivation

Desisters in the present study depicted fluctuations and changes in their motivation during their change journey, differentiating between: the motivation to commence MBCP; the motivation to change during the intervention; and the motivation to preserve and enhance their changes after the intervention. The initial movement towards change came from outside, linked to justice-system responses; and the external triggers were subsequently internalized by the men, as described by Walker et al. (2015). Desisters complemented this thin description with the depicting of the internalization process. When their violent behaviour was submitted to the "sieve of the norm" (Ricœur, 1992, p. 170), they could appreciate the contradiction between the "good life" (Ricœur, 1992, p. 172) that they expected to give to their significant ones and what they had really done by subjecting them to such suffering. The transformation of the external triggers into intrinsic motivation, therefore, was mediated by a sense of shame derived from a realization of the contradiction between what they expected to be for their significant ones and what they were really being. As Giddens (1991) put it, they failed "to live up to the expectations built into ego-ideal" (p. 68), which led them to experience the sort of shame about the whole self described both by Giddens and Braithwaite (1989).

7.5.2 External assistance

But the internalization of the external triggers did not occur autonomously. As in most rebirth stories, desisters portrayed themselves as being in a state of living death before commencing their change journey. In the initial phase of the MBCP, they were confronted with an interpretative framework that challenged their sense of being

victims of external and internal forces out of control. They were thus prompted to frame their behaviour as violence, and to assume responsibility for this and its impact on others, and in their own lives. This enabled them to recognize themselves as imputable for the acts of violence against their significant ones; and thus, as an agent in their dramatic story.

Desisters stressed the centrality of feeling respected, and of perceiving facilitators as competent, to facilitate their acknowledging of the responsibility for their violence and its effects. These two elements helped them to negotiate the meaning of the intervention, separating this from the punitive ethos of the justice system, and to engage in a reflexive process. The positive qualities of the relationship that facilitators established with the desisters, in terms of respect and trust, helped desisters to perceive the intervention as potential help. This respectful context encouraged them to reflect on their behaviour, to appreciate the magnitude of the injustice and harm they committed, to realize that they were acting like the negative masculine figures of their early lives, and also that they were at high risk of losing their connection with their loved ones. This is in line with Morran's (2011) suggestion that programs need to balance the holding to account with the motivation of men through their acknowledgement as individuals with particular circumstances and a life history; stressing that it is necessary to hear their voices.

7.5.3 *Setting relational goals*

The negotiation of the meaning of the intervention as non-threatening allowed desisters to become intrinsically motivated by their interest in preventing further violence. After this initial phase, the setting of goals of relational and personal improvement was depicted as a crucial step for intrinsically motivating them to open up to new perspectives of life, and in guiding their efforts throughout the intervention process. The positive feedback and encouragement received from facilitators and group members were also significant for motivating them to persist with the self-reflexive practices and to confront their setbacks. The relational and personal goals, articulated as purposes of bettering themselves as a father, partner, and person, paired with the conviction that the means to achieve this was the acquisition of new knowledges of themselves and human behaviour in general, accompanied desisters

beyond the program completion. In this latter phase, desisters also emphasised the role of the extrinsic motivation associated with perceived good relational outcomes of their changes, the positive feedback from others, and the experience of enhanced self-reflexive ability to sustain their changes and to persevere in their efforts in bettering themselves. Indeed, these new and renewed motivations made them feel that they were different men from the ones who perpetrated violence.

This portrait of the motivational process underlying desistance from IPV fits well with clinical psychology research that proves that intrinsic motivation is as a key factor for change of problematic behaviours (CSAT, 1999). Such research also has shown that motivation is modifiable, dynamic, and influenced by social relations (Miller, Benefield, & Tonigan, 1993); and is, more importantly, highly sensitive to the practitioner style (Najavits & Weiss, 1994). Giordano et al. (2015) observed in people who desist from IPV a similar motivational process associated with the setting of relational purposes, reporting that "successful desisters articulated relationship goals" (p. 345). They interpreted this as depending on external hooks influencing the individual due to the power of sociocultural expectations, such as parenthood, as stated by social control theory of desistance (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Desisters in the present study offered a slightly different perspective on this, as their relational goals were not only influenced by cultural expectations but by their reflexive reinterpretation of their lives. The threat of losing significant affective relationships was a moving experience because all of the desisters had had painful experiences of loss throughout their lives, and the recognition of being violent and abusive towards their partner and children made them realize that they were becoming the negative masculine figures of their childhood. This also connects with the motivation of bettering themselves as persons, which can be understood as resulting from the experience of shame depicted in the initial phase of the intervention, given that "shame bears directly on self-identity because it is essentially anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography" (Giddens, 1991, p. 65).

Consequently, the reinterpretation of their own biographies appeared central in helping desisters identify what they needed to change in order to rescue their affective relations. Men's experiences of victimization during childhood became central in

boosting their commitment to preventing their causing the same harm on their children and their mother; hence, their violent behaviour and its causes became the main target for the change process. In addition, as men also realized they were tuning into the negative masculine figures of their lives, they became interested not only in preventing further harm, but they wanted to provide their children with the nurturance they did not receive and their partners with the respect and affection their mother had never been given. Therefore, the meanings they attributed to both proximal and distal biographical events triggered and gave direction to their agency.

Although the men's awareness of becoming their abusive fathers has been previously documented as a significant subjective turning point for change (Sheehan et al., 2012), this has not being interrogated in terms of its ethical and relational implications. Stopping violence and differentiating themselves from their abusive fathers are actions imputable to the men as a freely-chosen deed; therefore, these actions can be considered in terms of their ethical determination (Ricœur, 1992). Desisters' efforts to change were not only directed towards avoiding specific negative surroundings of the use of violence and the conduct increasing relational conflict, as stated by Giordano et al. (2015): desisters' purposes exceeded the mere rationalistic "calibrations of costs and benefits" applied to local, relationally-based issues (Giordano et al., 2015, p. 354) because they were aiming at setting up a "'good life' with and for others in just institutions" (Ricœur, 1992, p. 262). Desisters claimed to have embraced the prospect of a new lifestyle organized around the preservation of significant relations and contribution to the life of their loved ones as a life plan. These life plans can be understood as "the substantial content of the reflexively organized trajectory of the self. [The] means of preparing course of future actions mobilised in terms of the self's biography" (Giddens, 1991, p. 85). They believed they were capable of doing better, and accepted that they were the agent responsible for initiating and achieving this change.

The relevance of personal agency to successfully desisting has been previously stated by Maruna (2001). He stressed the role that the individual's sense of control over their present and future has for the desistance process. Likewise, Walker points out that desistance "cannot be achieved passively" (p. 2739). As mentioned earlier, desisters in the present study also emphasised their active role in achieving desistance

from IPV. In contrast, Giordano et al. (2015) suggest not placing too much emphasis on subjective components of desistance, and warn of the limits of agency for understanding desistance. However, their understanding of agency as cognitive calculations seems too simplistic to encompass agency as a sense of being capable of acting according to ethical life purposes (Ricoeur & Blamey, 1995). The key role of personal agency in stories of desistance is not surprising, since stories tell about actions that need to be attributed to an agent (Burke, 1962). What is important in this is that the recognition of oneself as an agent capable of initiating actions implies the acceptance of imputability for its effects, which acceptance opens the way for considerations of the ethical and moral determinations of these actions (Ricœur, 1992).

Desisters' motivations, as depicted in the present study, appear as multidimensional, dynamic, ethically guided, and closely linked to the reinterpretation of their lives throughout the intervention process and afterwards. Perhaps this could help understand why the motivational interview, which is based on static understandings of motivation and is typically delivered at the onset of the intervention, with a primary focus on resolving ambivalence towards behavioural change, has proven helpful in increasing program completion only, but not in reducing recidivism (Crane & Eckhardt, 2013). Seeing motivation as a static trait within the individual places the responsibility for engaging in the change process on the men alone, and runs the risk of believing that by hardening the threats of punishment men's motivation to change will be increased. This understanding of motivation diverts attention from the relevance of constructing an alliance with men in order to engage them in the change process, not only at the onset but throughout the intervention. The key role of alliance in treatment outcomes has been largely supported by empirical research in psychotherapy (Lambert & Ogles, 2004). In addition to the conditions for constructing this alliance, it seems also significant to encourage men to reflect on their life project. In the present research, it was through the elaboration of a life plan, focused on affective relationships and based on their life story, that desisters found the motivation to change and persevere with this change after the intervention. It was this kind of reflexive engagement that helped them to strategically adopt a life-style option to enhance the connection with their significant ones and minimize the risk of harming them again.

7.6   Desisting requires from expert assistance

Wanting or needing to change is not enough to desist from IPV. Having a relational purpose does not guarantee its achievement. The protagonist needs additional knowledge and a method; like the classical heroes needed the wise counsel provided by the oracle or the wise old man to resolve their challenges. Desisters in the present study stressed the relevance of the external assistance they received to achieve and sustain specific changes. However, unlike Maruna's desisters (2001), they did not find at the MBCP someone who rescued them. IPV desisters found practitioners and institutions who believed that men should stop violence and must be held accountable for it, not for the wellbeing of the men themselves, but for the safety of women and their children (NTV, 2006). IPV desisters felt challenged but not rescued by the MBCPs' practitioners. However, they stressed that this worked for them because they were challenged in a respectful and constructive way, as opposed to the judgemental ways depicted by persisters.

Desisters' narratives portrayed the external assistance for their change as always involving experts in human behaviour, either MBCP practitioners, psychologists or psychiatrists. Such experts played a key role in their life stories as the wise persons who transmitted to them the needed knowledge and inspiration to change. These figures fit well with culturally-available plots for understanding personal transformation, in times of late modernity, as associated with therapeutic interventions or rehabilitation (Giddens, 1991). A salient feature of these modern therapeutic relationships is the power imbalance between the individual and the assisting, 'expert' person (Foucault, 1982).

Previous research has pointed out the importance of the intervention process for facilitating men's cessation of IPV by encouraging them to recognize what abuse is, and in challenging them to move away from denial and blaming others for their violence (Gondolf & Hanneken, 1987; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Walker et al. (2015) highlight the significance of the group experience for providing the men with positive feedback and a sense of not being alone in the journey away from violence. However, qualitative research to date has tended to focus on identifying factors facilitating change within program interventions, while overlooking the meanings that

men attach to these factors, and to the distal and proximal external factors contributing to change, which could help understand how the assistance worked for the men.

Desisters in the present study dedicated a considerable part of their telling to providing details of their transformation process, stressing that it was guided by experts, and fuelled by the desisters' motivation, perhaps as a way to ensure the credibility of their stories. In providing such detail, they accounted for the ways in which program facilitators and other experts contributed to their change by mobilizing meaning-making processes in areas of personal responsibility, gender identity, emotional functioning, and communication styles, through the provision of novel frameworks for understanding human behaviour.

As stated reported in previous research (Walker et al., 2015), desisters stressed the significance of being held accountable for their violent behaviour at the MBCP for allowing them to get free from denial and blame. This enabled them to reflect on their inalienable agentic role in their lives, and to accept responsibility for their behaviour and its impact on others and themselves. This was a process described as initially discomforting, but that eventually became empowering by boosting self-reflexive processes in the individual beyond the duration of the group session and the intervention program.

IPV desisters also highlighted the importance of learning that gender was not the result of biology but a socially-constructed and historically-situated cultural tradition. This allowed them to identify patriarchal practices and beliefs in their lives, assess their impact on their lives and in the lives of their children and partners, and ultimately to distance themselves from them. Men also remarked on the centrality of having learned about the importance of being aware of other people minds to enable respect, and being aware and in control of their own mental and emotional processes in order to prevent conflict escalation. Likewise, they stressed the importance of having learned new ways of communicating with others.

Desisters emphasized that they did not have these knowledges before commencing their change journey. Following the traditional mistrust with which the stories of IPV

perpetrators are usually heard, one could think of this as making excuses for their violent behaviour. However, this would be what Bruner (1991) called a 'banalization', to refer to the automatic interpretation of the stories based on already-made templates. As Morran (2013a) has argued, if we dismiss men's accounts of their lives as misleading, "we may miss valuable opportunities to understand how they endeavour to 'make sense' to themselves and to others of why they have behaved as they have in the past, but also how they think, feel, act and engage with others in the present" (p. 76). For desisters, in the context of their lives, the "course" was an "eye opener", as Daniel put it. This allowed them to become conscious of their self and the impact of their behaviour on the lives of their significant others. Like Ebenezer Scrooge, they revisited their past, scrutinized their present, and considered possible futures, through the supplied frameworks, as a reflexive initiative, in order to identify what to change in themselves.

A significant characteristic of the desistance process from IPV that emerged from the analysis is that desisting men have transformed their identity in such a way that they now consider external assistance as a key factor in continuing their improvement of their behaviour after program completion. Before the MBCP they were independent men who never spoke about their issues; while after the MBCP they have become responsible men who look for assistance when they feel they are at risk of going back into their old ways. As we will see below, this change involved a significant distancing from patriarchal masculine ways of being.

7.7 The enlightenment: desistance requires biographical reinterpretation

Like the classic heroes, desisters also needed to interpret the wise counsel received from the 'oracle' or the 'wise old man'. As explained above, desisters managed to construct a credible story of their personal change, by selecting events from their past that they associated with their present in a way that allowed them to explain the origin and cessation of IPV. According to the findings, this way of connecting past and present was mediated by interpretative frameworks on human behaviour, which they internalized during the intervention process, complemented by additional compatible frameworks available in their culture. These frameworks were the wise counsel that assisted them in successfully navigating the dilemma of presenting themselves "as the

same person they use to be, but at the same time as different and new" (Bamberg, 2011). They resolved this dilemma by framing change as the result of an agentic, self-reflexive and externally-assisted change process, unfolding over time. Thus, desisting from IPV was portrayed as the result of and constituted by self-reflexive, interpretative processes.

Bruner (1990) argues that the past is continuously interpreted and reinterpreted. Therefore, desisters' life stories must be understood as reinterpretations of their biographies rather than as objective chronicles. The frameworks that they learned shaped the interpretation they made of their past, in a way that assisted them to transform their sense of self and to outline an expected future according to this shaping. This reinterpretation of the personal identity is considered as the core of therapeutic change in psychotherapy (Angus & McLeod, 2004; White & Epston, 1990). However, this change must cohere with culturally-sound alternatives for personal change. As life narratives are constructed from and dependent on cultural conventions, they "reflect the prevailing theories about possible lives that are part of one's culture" (Bruner, 2004, p. 694). Desisters' narratives portrayed these 'possible lives' as the lives they had before their change and the lives they are pursuing after this, reflecting how it is culturally possible to transit from one possible life to another by means of expert-assisted self-reflection. Key features of this transit were the reinterpretation of their lives through the frameworks of gender as diverse and socially constructed, and of the psychological discourses of emotional trauma; which together rendered identity change as culturally intelligible.

7.7.1 *The centrality of the theory of the self*

The construction of an inner self placed at the centre of the identity was a prominent feature of the IPV desisters' life stories. Maruna (2001) observed a similar phenomenon in his study. He described how ex-offenders were able to desist from crime because they freed their true, good core self from the layers of negative social influences accumulated throughout their lives, after changing their social life. IPV desisters, however, offered a different picture of this process. Instead of resorting to the dichotomy of the 'good and bad' within the self, they constructed an emotionally-damaged self, based on the dichotomy of the 'wounded and healthy' self, through

narratives of emotional trauma in early childhood. Subsequently, they described how their core self became wrapped in layers of belief and practice internalized via social learning, in a similar fashion to Maruna's desisters (2001). However, unlike those, IPV desisters could not go back to the original good self to enable desistance, because the original self was permanently damaged. Instead, they went forward to an evolved better self, which could manage the manifestations of the emotional trauma.

Despite this difference, the placing of an inner self at the centre of the personal identity appears to reflect a cultural convention of how to conceive human beings; which, according to Giddens (1991), in times of late modernity "has to be reflexively made" (p. 23). Desisters did not talk about their soul but about their psyche, perhaps reflecting the influence of expert discourses for understanding the subject, as argued by Foucault (Foucault, 1995). Indeed, IPV desisters were particularly sophisticated in distinguishing two different aspects of their inner self: a core emotional self; and a psychosocial self; which they both described as the result of developmental contingencies, and utilized to navigate constancy and change throughout their life stories.

Constructing a psychological theory of the self appeared central for allowing desisters to construct culturally-sound identity transitions. This is not surprising, since psychological discourses are creatively assimilated by people into common sense through literature, media, movies, and oral circulation of stories (Moscovici, Duveen, & Macey, 2008). This psychological common sense conforms to what Bruner (1990) termed 'folk psychology', which he argues people regularly use to make sense of own and other people's self. What was striking in the present research, however, was that IPV desisters managed to mix both gender-based and psychological understandings of the self and violent behaviour, to produce a convincing, culturally-sound story of their identity, when the discourses of trauma are often discouraged at local MBCPs (NTV, 2006).

7.8   Heart, mind and body

A substantive difference between the narratives of desisters and persisters was the conclusion they reached about what they needed to change in their lives in the initial

phase of their involvement in MBCP. While persisters considered that they needed to change the externals, desisters identified the need for changing their heart, mind and the way they use their bodies, to restore the equilibrium in their life stories. The core emotional self, placed at the centre of their identity, was regarded by desisters as the source of their emotional reactions, particularly in the context of affective relations. They depicted this core as permanently damaged by early life traumatic experiences of child abuse, neglect and family violence. The social self was conceived by desisters as a second component of their inner self; which they depicted as developed from childhood to adolescence, and described as layers of patriarchal masculine beliefs and practices superimposed over the emotional self as the result of social learning within and outside their families. This notion of the self assisted them to understand the impact of a series of negative events in their early lives as formative of their identity; and, at the same time, provided them with culturally-sound alternatives to conceive their positive change according to rehabilitative discourses.

Desistance studies have shown that desisters make sense of their change by reflexively looking at their self (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Morran, 2013b). Recent research on desistance from IPV has confirmed that, for desisting, "men look to the self (i.e., internally) and then attribute to themselves characteristics, behaviours, and beliefs that are aligned with individuals who are non-violent" (Walker et al., 2015, p. 2741). IPV desisters in the present study supported and complemented these findings by describing the process through which they became able to attribute to themselves characteristics and beliefs that are not compatible with the use of violence. This allowed them to understand the reflexive process through which they resorted to psychological and social understandings of personal identity, so as to negotiate a new non-violent identity as men.

Events pertaining to the formation of the inner self were central in desisters' life story plots. Early life traumatic experiences, and the influence of negative masculine figures, functioned as the inciting incidents of their life stories. The impact of these events were internalized in the inner self and became the dark power hovering over the men during their lives before their change, causing them just "pain and agony", as Mason expressed it. In order to restore balance in their lives, they needed to face the impact of these experiences.

7.8.1 The core emotional self: the heart

The salience of emotional themes was an unexpected finding, because the addressing of men's emotions and traumatic experiences is commonly overlooked by gender-based MBCP (Pence & Paymar, 1993), and even discouraged (NTV, 2006). Formally, such experiences are not part of the curriculum of local MBCPs. Moreover, emotions have been noticeably absent in research on change in IPV, which has focused primarily on cognitive processes (Acker, 2013; Giordano et al., 2015; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006); with the issues of attachment-related emotions (Dutton & White, 2012b) and the discovery of feelings (Morran, 2013b) being perhaps the only exemptions to the dominant cognitive trend in understanding change in men who use IPV.

As discussed earlier, constructing an emotionally-damaged core self can be seen as a way to undergo a process of shame management (Braithwaite, 1989); but this would be limited to the initiation of the change process. Desisters went beyond the issue of managing shame resulting from having been confronted by the justice system. They constructed themselves as emotional and rational beings, and structured their emotional life as a through line running throughout their life story as a whole. The formation of the core emotional self was associated with stories of emotional trauma that emerged as an overarching theme of desisters' childhood. Subsequently, emotional outbursts were central features in the episodes of violence and other problematic behaviours throughout their lives, and emotion awareness and emotional self-regulation were key elements in the desisters' change process. Ultimately, these skills were regarded as ongoing challenges to preserving changes subsequent to finishing the MBCP.

The impact of experiences of victimization on emotional functioning was portrayed by desisters as difficulties in regulating anxiety, sadness and anger, particularly in the context of affective relationships. These descriptions correspond with Morran's (2013) report on the consistency of themes of child maltreatment as precursor to anger dysregulation, in IPV desisters' recollections of their lives. Moreover, these descriptions fit well with research indicating that child maltreatment, neglect, and the witnessing of IPV during childhood result in enduring brain dysfunction of emotional

regulation (Reading, 2006), and constitute high risk factors for mood disorders (Russell, Springer, & Greenfield, 2010), problematic behaviours (Anda et al., 2006), antisocial behaviour (Sousa et al., 2011), and relational problems due to poor emotional regulation in adulthood, including IPV (Fonagy, 2004).

Although in the local institutions responding to family violence there is broad agreement on the devastating and perdurable impact of IPV on children' lives (State of Victoria, 2016), their guidelines for working with men who use IPV encourage practitioners to overlook men's experiences of victimization and the impact of these on their emotional functioning, because they maintain this could lead to an alliance with the perpetrator, and deviate the focus from issues of patriarchy and women's and children's safety (NTV, 2006). Interestingly, in spite of this, desisters accounted for the centrality of the emotional aspects of their lives, even describing how their emotional life was affected by gender socialization in terms of being taught to deal with emotions in a masculine ways; as for example, suppressing the expression of negative emotions representing vulnerability. They saw themselves as carrying vulnerabilities in dealing with emotions, which were aggravated by the constraints to emotional expression imposed by dominant masculine traditions; because, according to their narratives, men are not taught and encouraged to talk about their emotional experience. As these desister description stand in contrast to current MBCP practices, we can presume that the salience of emotional functioning in desisters' life narratives stems from folk psychology, that it was brought into the MBCP by facilitators, or that these themes reflect men's lived experience; or from all of these sources. Whatever its origin, emotional functioning was a key aspect of men's narratives for understanding both the use of violence and desistance.

7.8.1.1 Men's emotions

The interaction between masculinity and emotional life has been studied in psychology research, but this research has not permeated the realm of MBCPs. Pleck (1981) conceived masculinities as a set of socially-constructed ideologies that have negative impact on various areas of men's lives, particularly in the emotional sphere. According to Levant (2011), gender socialization leads men to a restrictive emotionality in adult life, involving deficits in identifying and expressing emotions

that reflect a sense of vulnerability or express attachment. He subsequently observed the normativity of difficulties in putting emotions into words in diverse male populations, coining the term "normative male alexithymia" (Levant, Allen, & Lien, 2014). Psychological studies consider the ability to identify one's own emotional states as a key element for enabling emotional self-regulation processes (Gross, 2014). Emotion self-regulation encompasses a range of strategies, including interrupting techniques, cognitive-reappraisal strategies (Farmer & Chapman, 2016) and bodily strategies (Kalawski, 2013).

Emotional dysregulation was a common feature in desisters' narratives of relational problems and IPV use against former partners. It was also a salient characteristic of their accounts of the episode of violence preceding their attendance at MBCPs. Desisters stressed the role of learning in how to deal with negative emotions for negotiating primary desistance from IPV. They described how, through specific MBCP activities, private psychotherapists' suggestions, or self-help literature, they gradually gained awareness of their emotions, became able to identify negative emotions, and to self-regulate their expression; commonly via interruptive techniques such as time out, and to a lesser extent through cognitive reappraisal.

These descriptions are in line with reports indicating that interruptive techniques are one of the most significant learnings that men gain at MBCPs (Gondolf, 2002). Indeed, desisters' narratives reveal that the work with their emotions within MBCPs was tangential and fairly poor, and that reflection on emotions and emotion transformation, which is considered crucial in sustaining emotional regulation ability (Lewis, Haviland-Jones, & Barrett, 2008), was not addressed.

Achieving stable emotional self-regulation emerged as a major issue in negotiating secondary desistance. Desisters regarded this a difficult task and as a significant ongoing challenge in the post-intervention period. The majority of desisters described how they relied on time out and continued occasional attendance at MBCPs as a way to strengthen their ability to self-regulate negative emotions, because they found the programs provided them with opportunities to talk about their feelings.

The narrative construction of an emotionally-damaged core self assisted desisters to navigate constancy and change throughout their lives, and provided them also with features that made them unique vis-à-vis others. For most of their lives they felt different from others, because they carried within the vulnerability resulting from early life trauma, which made them prone to emotional dysregulation in the context of affective relations. However, with appropriate assistance they became aware of their emotional life and improved control over its expression, in order to bring stability into their relational lives, resolving – or at least partially resolving - in this way the inciting incident that occurred at the onset of their life stories.

Importantly, for desisters addressing their emotional lives not only represented the overcoming of their emotional problems, but also a personal distancing from dominant masculine traditions that downgrade emotions and prevent men from assuming responsibility for their own emotional life and that of their loved ones. Therefore, the change journey transformed them both as a human beings and as men.

Privileging the focus on changing men's gender beliefs, while overlooking their emotional life and experiences of victimization, can be seen as contradicting the aim of challenging patriarchy posed by gender-based interventions with men who use IPV. Schrock and Padavic's (2007) study of how masculinity is negotiated within MBCPs shows that these programs routinely fail to address men's emotional disclosure and emotional vulnerability, due to their adherence to the imperative to avoid therapy; leading to a deficient negotiation of non-hegemonic masculinities with IPV users. MBCPs' exclusive focus on beliefs inadvertently contributes to constructing masculinity as essentially rational, and supports the dichotomy of men as perpetrators and women as victims, as noted by Tod Augusta-Scott (2007). Considering men's experiences of victimization, and working collaboratively with them to improve their emotional life from the perspective of the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982), could potentially contribute to enhancing resistance to hegemonic masculinity both within and outside of MBCPs, and in making this both an ethical and political issue.

7.8.2   *The psychosocial self: the mind*

Patriarchal beliefs and practices were depicted by desisters as layers of internalized beliefs and attitudes that gradually wrapped their core emotional self. However, unlike traumatic experiences, which were located in the heart, these beliefs and practices were situated in their minds. They described how patriarchal notions of life were instilled in them by powerful and violent masculine figures during their childhood, and how these learnings were subsequently strengthened and amplified by forces outside their family, giving shape to a traditionally patriarchal masculine view of the world and themselves. Desisters used this internalized masculine worldview in conjunction with their emotional core self to navigate constancy and change throughout their lives.

Although it was expected to find references to issues of gender in desisters' life stories, given the centrality of this framework in MBCPs (NTV, 2011), the findings of their developmental understanding of masculinity were surprising. Desisters resorted to social-learning understandings to make sense of the mechanism through which they were recruited into patriarchal masculinity. In addition to detaching from emotions and affection, they were vicariously taught from an early age to downgrade women, to feel entitled to a number of masculine privileges, and to solve interpersonal conflicts by resorting to violence. These ideas and practices were subsequently reinforced by peers and social institutions, such as school and sport, and configured their gender identity around mid-adolescence.

From late adolescence and adulthood, after achieving independency through their entry into the workforce, desisters commenced a lifestyle guided by patriarchal beliefs, values and attitudes. They became engaged in a lifestyle centred on partying and substance abuse with peers, and having non-respectful relationships with women. This party lifestyle led some desisters to develop substance-abuse problems and other problematic behaviours, such as violence and offending, which they portrayed as a result of the interaction of underlying emotional problems and dominant masculine traditions. Desisters eventually managed to settle down with a partner and have children. The party lifestyle ceased; but, after a period of stability, they began to experience relational difficulties triggered by external problems and their emotional

problems. Patriarchal masculinity became an influential force guiding their decisions, so that they detached affectively from their partner, withdrawn within themselves, and gave themselves permission to use violence against their loved ones, until the relationship with them broke down or they were arrested.

Gender frameworks and social-learning understandings were fundamental in desisters' understanding of how they came to be the men who perpetrated violence and how they were able to desist from violence. They helped desisters to understand the transitions from child to youth and from youth to man as being the result of the influence of the society, through negative masculine figures such as their father or other abusive male relatives, who instilled in them a patriarchal view of the world and of themselves. This developmental understanding of their identity allowed them to add a second aspect to the inciting incident of their life stories. In addition to the enduring psychological impact of traumatic experiences, they needed to confront the impact of negative masculine influences in order to restore the equilibrium in their lives. Therefore, while the challenge of overcoming the impact of emotional trauma was structured by desisters as the popular dramatic plot of 'men versus self', the surmounting of the patriarchal masculinity resulting from negative masculine influences was organized as the plot of 'men versus society' (Prince, 2003).

7.8.2.1   *Ambivalent responsibility*

Desisters portrayed patriarchal masculinity as a dark force that led them to make wrong decisions throughout their lives. Although they acknowledged their agency in their violence and abuse, while accounting for these events they made constant efforts to differentiate themselves from the attitudes and behaviours portrayed in their narratives, criticising their actions and the values these represented. However, at the same time, they justified themselves as having acted this way because misguided by patriarchal beliefs and interfered with by negative emotional states. Through this differentiation from the former patriarchal and emotionally-incompetent self, they claimed a new identity, while accounting at the same time for being the same person responsible for past violent behaviour.

This ambivalent sense of responsibility for past actions amongst desisters was also noted by Maruna (2001). He argued that desisters attributed agency to circumstances in shaping their deviated behaviour and placed this into a "contingent value system" (p. 135) in order to defend their ego from being seen as pathological and to represent alignment with conventional morality. IPV desisters in the present study appear to have done something similar in framing their past abusive behaviour as determined by a past contingent, patriarchal value system, and aligning themselves with gender equity as the present conventional morality to which they subscribed.

However, IPV desisters differed from Maruna's ex-offenders in that the former attributed negative behaviours to underlying personality in addition to the contingent value system, whereas the latter "rarely attributed negative behaviours to underlying personality defects or character weaknesses" (p. 136). This difference might represent IPV desisters needing to attribute their violence to the emotional trauma that shaped their personality, because through this they were able to explain their transition out of IPV and make sense of their ongoing emotional lived experience. An additional understanding of this ambivalent sense of responsibility for past actions, which contribute to blurring the dichotomy of 'us and them', can be found in self-serving bias studies that suggest that this ambivalent responsibility appear to be a common psychological phenomenon observable in the general population (Shepperd et al., 2008).

The placing of past abuse in a contingent, patriarchal value system can be understood as the result of desisters' reinterpretation of their lives through the lens of a gender framework. They claimed that they did not know about patriarchy and gender equity before becoming involved in MBCPs. At that time, they were doing what they believed was 'naturally manly', without questioning it. This suggest that the ability to identify patriarchal beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in their recounts of past life, and the capacity to account for sequences of events through which patriarchal beliefs were instilled in them, reinforced, put into practice, and led to negative relational outcomes emerging from the reflexive engagement with a gender framework. This rendered their past actions intelligible in a way that enabled them to externalize the causes of these actions in the society, and to take a critical stance towards the patriarchal value system. Indeed, these interpretations differentiated desisters' and persisters' narratives,

suggesting that understanding life from a gender perspective was a crucial achievement for desisting from IPV. Through this biographically-based meaning-making process, the gender framework extended its influence on men's lives and identities beyond the program completion.

7.8.2.2 *Critical thinking*

The configuration of a reflexive narrator with a critical stance towards past patriarchal behaviour seemed to play a key role in sustaining desistance from IPV. When accounting for their past abusive behaviour, desisters alternated from the first person to the third person subjective narrative mode, from which they criticized their patriarchal past. They saw themselves in their past lives as agents who allowed patriarchal values and emotional problems to dictate their actions and who did not look for help to stop this when they noticed their growing relational problems. This critical stance was not only directed towards their own past actions but to the actions of other men in their lives, such as their father's and peers' sexist attitudes, representing a generalization of the learned gender concepts (Vygotskiĭ, Davidov, & Silverman, 1997). This allowed them to distance themselves from patriarchal ideals in their past, present and imagined future. Contrastingly, persisters accounted for their patriarchal and abusive behaviour from the first-person narrative mode only, and depicted these events as facts of their lives resulting from external forces out of their control without taking a critical stance towards their abuse.

Fostering critical thinking has been described as a fundamental element in achieving significant learnings in adult education (Mezirow, 1997), and in promoting change in men who use IPV (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Paulo Freire's Marxist pedagogic ideas, considered the most influential educational framework aimed at raising people's critical thinking through the process of conscientization, are central in the original Duluth model (Paymar & Bernes, n.d.). However, subsequent dissemination and reinterpretation of Duluth Model in the U.S.A resulted in the loss of this component (Paymar & Bernes, n.d.), so that Duluth-based MBCPs became more attuned with traditional notions of 'banking education' (Freire, 1970), as observed in the MBCP standards implemented in Victoria (NTV, 2006).

7.8.2.3   Moving away from the 'old me'

Facilitators assisted desisters to understand their violent behaviour as an expression of masculinity and gender inequity, allowing them to appreciate a set of norms and values that rendered their decision to change as a moral and ethical imperative, as discussed earlier in the section 7.5 pertaining to motivation. A gender framework enabled desisters to become reflexively aware of their life as an option among various life options (Giddens, 1991), and at the same time it offered them a way to make other life options attainable: they needed to learn new ways of being men.

Facilitators played a decisive role in making this 'good life' attainable, by supporting desisters' efforts to traverse the distance from their patriarchal masculine identity to new possible ones. Desisters' descriptions of this process are similar to Michel White's description of how new possible personal identities are crafted in narrative therapy (White, 2007). Building on Vygotsky's ideas (Vygotskiĭ et al., 1997), White developed a model portraying the therapeutic process of constructing alternate identities as a journey through a 'zone of proximal development', where people progressively distance themselves from the known and familiar and move toward what it might be possible to know and to do as a result of social collaboration. He argues that "[i]t is this conceptual development that supplies the foundation for people to regulate their lives: to influence their own actions in purposeful ways, or intervene in their own lives to shape the course of events, and to problem-solve" (p. 272).

White (2007) suggests that essentialist ideas of the self "contribute to people's experiences of being restricted in their avenues to express personal agency and responsible action because they are subject of traditional power relations that are institutionalized in local culture" (p. 267). Desisters in the present study found in MBCPs the collaboration they needed to resist the restraints imposed by the power relations structured by hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). They learned that, as masculinities are socially constructed and diverse, there were opportunities for more caring, nurturing, and mindful ways of being men. As a result of their motivation to change and the encouragement from facilitators, desisters gradually realigned their gender positioning, questioning normative gender assumptions and changing their

behaviour with their children and partner. Kelly and Westmarland (2015) confirm the significance of men's gender realignment for desisting from IPV. According to their study, "those men who changed did so through developing different ways of being men in relationships with women and children" (p.11).

The framework of gender as socially constructed and diverse assisted desisters to navigate constancy and change throughout their lives. This framework also allowed them to change from strategies of primary control (changing the environment to fit one's needs and goals) to secondary control strategies (changing the self to fit with the environment). Although desisters had been negatively impacted by patriarchal masculinity, they were able to surmount these negative influences with appropriate assistance. After completing MBCP, they were no longer the violent, self-centred, unaffectionate, and irresponsible men they had previously been. However, they were still men, with heterosexual desire continuing to be a defining feature of their gender identity (Butler, 1999), and their relational goals portraying them as provider men.

Desisters' narratives described a transition from what Connell conceptualized as "hegemonic masculinity" and its prescribed models of "relations with women and solutions of gender relations" (Connell, 2005, p. 838), to more egalitarian, vulnerable, respectful and relationally-responsible masculinities. This transition not only represented a personal transformation within affective relations, but a social realignment involving an ideological change in terms of affective, emotional, interactional and relational practices (Wetherell & Edley, 2014). In addition to the behavioural change within their affective relations, desisters' socio-political transformation was portrayed as a social repositioning through accounts of challenging patriarchal attitudes of their peers, moving away from relatives and friends who support violent and abusive attitudes, and engagement in social activities to support non-violence against women such as the very fact of sharing their story for the sake of other men, women and children. This ideological transition contrasts with the studies of Giordano et al. (2015) and Walker et al. (2015), where desistance from IPV is conceptualized as changes in attitudes and world views, which are conceived as cognitive constructs about violent behaviour bereft from self-understandings and political repositioning in terms of gender.

Desisters' portrayed their gender value-transformative process as highly dependent on external support and guided by what MBCP facilitators showed them to be alternative life options, more morally and ethically attuned with non-patriarchal values such as gender equity and social justice. Likewise, Alan Jenkins's (2009) argues for the centrality of addressing the ethical dimensions of men's transition out of IPV, which in his view requires collaborative approaches to overcome the dichotomy of 'us and them' that characterizes the dominant confrontational practices of MBCPs.

Although the gender framework appears central for helping desisters to leave behind violence and embrace alternative masculinities, in the present research their life stories reflected that the way in which this framework was used during their change process resulted in highly negative portrayals of male figures, wherein men were consistently depicted as bad influences in their lives and as the only source of patriarchal beliefs. Except for male facilitators, in desisters' life narratives there appeared to be a dearth of positive masculine figures that could have served as sources of inspiration for non-hegemonic masculinities during their change process and after this. Most desisters expressed that they found it difficult to imagine new ways of being men because at the MBCPs - as Harry put it - "[you] learn about what's wrong and then you have to try and figure out what's the opposite a bit". Thus, collaborative practices that contribute to developing a multi-voiced sense of identity may potentially provide men with alternative ways "to richly understand the preferred versions of identity and the knowledges of life and skills of living that have been cogenerated in the significant relationships of [their] lives" (White, 2007, p. 137); which could assist them to challenge dominant notions of encapsulated core self and to experience life as connected with others around shared values.

7.8.3 Changing communication styles: the body

Desisters described how their deficits in emotional regulation and their patriarchal socialization as men impacted negatively on their ability to communicate with others, particularly with their partners and children. They reported consistent communication problems throughout their lives, in terms of difficulties in expressing their feelings, listening to and accepting other peoples' views, and feeling rapidly overwhelmed by negative emotions when discussing relational issues with affective figures. These

problems, combined with their patriarchal sense of entitlement to control partners and children, led them to develop a one-way communication style. Desisters claimed that, as a consequence of their change process, they improved their communication skills. They saw themselves as more open to listening, and persevering in their efforts to better understand others through asking for clarification, to accept the legitimacy of others' points of view, to express their ideas and feelings in respectful ways, and to withdraw from discussions when feeling overwhelmed by negative emotions, mainly by resorting to time-out strategies.

Communication problems have been depicted as one of the most common factors associated with men's use of IPV (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, McCullars, & Misra, 2012). Deficits in communication skills have been observed in IPV users and considered as limiting their repertoire of conflict-resolution skills in couple relationships (Babcock & et al., 1993) and parenting (Smith Stover, McMahon, & Easton, 2011). Addressing these deficits has been an integral part of MBCPs (Gondolf, 2012), mostly from a behavioural-cognitive approach (Herman, Rotunda, Williamson, & Vodanovich, 2014). Scott and Wolfe (2000) observe that men who stopped using IPV considered their improvement in communication skills as a key element for change. Babcock et al. (2011) conducted an experimental study with couples demonstrating that, through appropriate training, men who use IPV can implement new communication styles involving specific techniques borrowed from the field of couple therapy (Gottman, 1998), showing also a positive impact on expressed emotional tone. Likewise, Giordano et al. (2015) stress the importance that men learn from their past experience to avoid certain communication patterns leading to conflict escalation, in order to enable desistance from IPV. Similarly, Walker et al. (2015) report that men who desist from IPV use "better communication skills" (p. 2740), although the process through which men became able to acquire and use these skills was not clarified.

7.8.3.1   *What matters is the way that you deliver the message*

Desisters in this study described how and why they were able to change their communication styles. They regarded MBCPs' activities, focused on empathetic communication, facilitators' advice and coaching, and their own reflexive activity and

practice in relational settings, as the foundations for the improvement of their communication skills. They considered that learning about empathy was crucial for this transformative process. In the context of talking and reflecting on their empathetic abilities, they were prompted by facilitators to reflect on their limitations in understanding partners' and children's views and feelings, and assisted them to acknowledge the impact of their verbal and non-verbal expressions on others. The facilitators also showed the men the importance of respecting conversational turns, demonstrating interest in understanding other people's views, and postponing conversation if they feel overwhelmed by negative emotions. As a result, desisters came to understand that they were actively hampering communication in their relationships, and that they had been violent and abusive in their ways of communicating. They summarized these learnings as becoming conscious of the importance of how messages are delivered, demonstrating increased awareness of the role of their bodily performance in an effective interpersonal communication, and their inalienable responsibility in this.

Desisters linked their improvement in communication style to their increased ability to be aware of their feelings and to self-regulate negative emotions by resorting to reappraisal techniques, and framed this achievement as a gender issue. Attending MBCPs and starting to talk about their lives was the first step for improving their communication style. Some declared that this was the first time in their lives that they had talked about themselves. They considered this represented a move away from a previous masculine identity, because by talking about their feelings and inner struggles they were overcoming the idea that "men don't talk" - as Daniel expressed it.

However, improving expressive communications skills was not the only achievement. Indeed, desisters considered receptive communication skills as the most relevant for their change. Active listening was portrayed as a key element in enabling them to better understand their partner's and children's views, and to communicate respect and affection even beyond the intimate sphere. Changing communication style appeared to be facilitated by increased emotional and gender awareness, and at the same time appeared to be supporting changes in these two areas of their identity. Improved communication style allowed them to put into practice and embody new

possible ways of being men, encompassing a better self and hetero-regulation of emotions in relational contexts.

Desisters' descriptions of their transition from a one-way to a two-way communication style are in line with the findings of Kelly and Westmarland (2015), who report that men who ceased using IPV changed their communication style in terms of being more respectful of women's views, giving them more time to speak and listening to them, and ceasing challenge avoidance through prototypical masculine strategies such as silence, postponing conversations, walking away, giving minimal responses, or lying.

Contrasting with the rationalist cost and benefit conceptualization of changes in communication styles, of Giordano et al. (2015) and Walker et al. (2015), desisters in the present study portrayed these changes as rooted in reflexive processes involving issues of gender and emotions; suggesting that men could benefit from discussing communication skills not only as a matter of rational strategies for solving relational problems, as depicted by Babcock et al. (2011), but also as a gendered and emotional issue located in the context of relational life projects.

Desisters portrayed the improvement of their communication skills as the result of increased emotional self-regulation, self-awareness of their non-verbal expressions, empathetic understanding of the other, and openness to talk about their emotions. Most desisters referred to the latter aspect as crucial, and described this as giving themselves permission to be vulnerable. It was in the communication with their partners, children and other people that the will and the ability to recognize the other as a legitimate other turned into an embodied expression of a new identity, and the responses from others to this new form of communicating was the confirmation of this.

However, in their narratives of post-intervention, most desisters expressed ongoing difficulties in stabilizing their new ways of communicating with their partner and children. They attributed this mainly to continuing problems in self-regulating negative emotions when addressing disagreements, attempting to explain own behaviours and subjective experiences, and communicating relational expectations to

their partner and children. When feeling overwhelmed by negative emotions, they predominantly resorted to time out to prevent escalation: they interrupted their dialogues and abandoned the interaction. This usually led them to avoid further attempts to address the issues, and to resort to suppressive strategies of emotional self-regulation that left them with a sense of incompetence for both self-regulating emotions and communicating effectively with others. In these circumstances, they often looked for further external assistance, having a chat with someone at an MBCP. Morran (2013b) note that, for most desisters, finishing the program was not the end point of their change journey, and that they needed ongoing monitoring and nurturing to desist from old patterns of behaviour; suggesting that men could benefit from ongoing assistance after completing the program .

It is worth noting, however, that some desisters enounced an alleged lack of collaboration from their partners regarding the changes of communicational patterns in their relationships. They felt their partners also needed to attend a course to improve their communication abilities. However, immediately after mentioning this, they criticised themselves for diverting their attention from their own behaviour, and continued with self-criticism for their lack of competence and the need for further aid. This ambivalent sharing of the responsibility may be seen as reflecting MBCPs practices of confronting men's attempts to address dyadic issues and judging this as avoiding responsibility. However, relational issues were also addressed positively by other desisters, who explained that the collaboration of their partner was significant for achieving stable change (see for example Mason's story 'Francesca's contribution to my change' in Appendix B section B.3.2.4.6). Giordano et al. (2015) state that the dyadic features they found suggest some limitations to the idea that IPV desistance lies only in the individual's own decision making, motivational stance, or use of agency to change life direction. They contend that relational issues should also be addressed to enable desistance from IPV.

7.9 Doing secondary desistance

The self-recognition of the men as the protagonist of their dramatic stories, through being held accountable for their violence and being assisted to acknowledge the imputability of these actions to themselves, generated in them the sense of agency and

self-reflexion needed to initiate the actions to restore the equilibrium in their life stories. The realization of the risk of losing significant relations, the harm caused, and having turned into the violent masculine figures of their early lives, prompted them to embrace relational goals that set up the purposes for these actions. Once these insights occurred, and the men's 'I/me' became dramatically differentiated, these understandings of themselves as responsible and capable agents pursuing a good life remained constant in their minds and hearts, constituting the basis for both primary and secondary desistance (Maruna & Farrall, 2004).

While primary desistance was secured through a gradual learning process of new frameworks for understanding human behaviour and the ongoing implementation of new forms of relationship with themselves and others, secondary desistance was achieved through constant self-reflexive processes involving the regularized monitoring and control of the body in terms of emotions and actions. To move towards a new identity, men needed to depart from the old gendered regimes of self-discipline that constitute "unconscious conditioning elements of conduct (…) tied into enduring motivational patterns"(Giddens, 1991, p. 62), to embody a new regime, since the "regularized control of the body is a fundamental means whereby a biography of self-identity is maintained" (p. 57). It is in the men's critical reflexion on the contrast between the possible worlds offered by the old and the new regimes where the recognition of themselves as agents and their affective life purposes converged to motivate them to persevere in the continuing monitoring of themselves; which desisters summarized as the necessity of making efforts to maintain and secure their changes. This is in line with Acker's (2013) report on the centrality of the theme of the need for continual self-vigilance, in the life narratives of men who desist from IPV.

To make a new lifestyle possible, a person will "not only need a motive but also a method" (Lieblich, 1997). According to the new regime, men not only needed to exert self-control of their body but also to be mindful of other's people's minds and bodies, to be able to match their performances with other's needs. Empathy emerged as a key concept synthesizing men's need to monitor whether they were really understanding others and if they were self-centred. They needed to stretch their minds to imaginatively check how they were perceived by others on the basis of their bodily

expressions, or through direct checking. While empathy guided men's efforts to improve their communications skills, self-monitoring of their communication outcomes, in terms of how others react and how they feel themselves in the interaction, constituted their main source of feedback. However, men usually conducted these assessments of their communication outcomes privately: direct consulting with their partners and children was rare.

As a result of their constant self-monitoring, desisters became aware of the outcomes of their new communication style. When they perceived these as satisfactory for their partner, children and themselves, they persevered with the self-monitoring as part of the new regime by making 'good choices'. When outcomes were perceived as non-satisfactory, they deployed learned empathetic skills - although rarely through direct checking - and negotiated a solution for the relational issue. Good relational outcomes led to positive emotional experiences and a decrease of negative ones. This was experienced by men as rewarding, similar to how ex-offenders found rewards in honest work; although not as an "acquired taste" but as fulfilling long-desired goals (Maruna, 2001, p. 127).

The regularity of good outcomes provided some desisters with a strong sense of agency, with the experience of living a new life and a sense of being different men, as for example, Mason. In contrast, when men perceived communication outcomes as increasingly unsatisfactory for themselves, they lost empathetic abilities, such as checking bodily signals from others and direct checking, and experienced increasing emotional distress, breaking down the communication and resorting to time out and going inward, as for example, Steve. Although they lost the ability to fully empathize with others, their self-monitoring capabilities remained active, as did the consciousness of the difference between the old and new regime, enabling them to discern the need for help. Expert assistance helped them to reflect on their loss of empathy and to identify blind spots in their self-monitoring of their bodies. In addition, visiting the groups at MBCPs provided them with a renewed sense of having changed. These inputs allowed them to return to the new regime with reinvigorated determination.

Although most desisters reported the latter pattern of ups and downs after program completion, they considered that they were new men because now they were able to realize their problems by themselves, thus abstaining from using violence, and quickly look for help. A salient feature of these narratives was the description of intense emotional dysregulation, resulting from communication problems consisting in a failure to understand partner's and children's intentional states. The ability to make sense of own' and others' intentional states while interacting has been conceptualized in psychology as mentalization. According to Bateman and Fonagy (2013), mentalization is a "dynamic, multifaceted ability that has particular salience in the context of attachment relationships"(p. 596). They contend that the ability for a fast recovery and continued mentalizing under stressful situations represents a robust mentalization, which reinforces feelings of secure attachment, emotional regulation, and personal agency. Bateman and Fonagy (2006) maintain that mentalization problems are a defining feature of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD); whereas Dutton (2007) argues that there is an overlap between what he terms 'the abusive personality' and BDP, and that these people require a therapeutic approach rather than just a gender-based educational program. In a similar vein, Morran (2013) suggests that MBCPs "may need to consider issues of disrupted attachment, (…) experiences of childhood trauma, and the presence of alcohol and substance misuse in men's lives" (p. 316).

7.9.1 Ongoing expert support

Though desisters argued that their interest in continuing attending the program or "dropping by" for "a chat" (Morran, 2013a, p. 79) was also motivated by helping others, their need for a 'top up' appeared more central in their narratives. This does not mean that these men were not engaged in the sort of generativity described by Maruna (2001), resorting to the Jungian concept of the 'wounded healer'(Jung, 1966), which Morran (2013) also observed and conceptualized as 'giving something back'. As mentioned earlier, desisters demonstrated interest in helping others affected by family violence, and participated in the study motivated by their interest in sharing their acquired wisdom for the sake of others. This means they could benefit from affirming their good qualities and new identities by participating in redemptive activities such as peer mentoring. However, beyond its potential value for sustaining

desistance from IPV, the need for regular top-ups must be also examined in light of men's reported lived experience.

Even though desisters' stressed the difference between the old and new 'me', they also revealed continuities in their identity. As discussed earlier, while their gender positioning changed, they remained as men in terms of shared characteristics with hegemonic masculinities such as conceptions of heterosexuality and the provider role. Although they declared themselves to not feel entitled to control their partners and children, their narratives revealed that emotional distress was often triggered when they failed to negotiate joint and coordinated actions with them. They abstained from using violence and resorted to time out; but their feelings of frustration continued. This can be interpreted as the result of an incomplete negotiation of a non-hegemonic masculine identity, because they still feel their partners could be more collaborative. The study of Schrock and Padavic (2007), of how men negotiate masculinity within MBCPs, suggests that program ineffectiveness "lies not in their emphasis on transforming men into egalitarian partners but in their inability to do exactly that" (p. 644). Alternatively, this can be understood in terms of ongoing difficulties of attachment-based emotional dysregulation (Fonagy, 2004), due to the lack of appropriate intervention in this area. Interruptive techniques such as time out seemed not enough to help these men to cope with emotional dysregulation.

7.9.2   Particularities of how secondary desistance from IPV is negotiated

To steadily desist from IPV, men need to construct a new sense of self that requires input from a culturally sound theory of the self. Although this also seems to be the case for desisting from crime (Maruna, 2001), the narrative construction of the self and its transformation in IPV desisters was different. While ex-offenders constructed an old 'good me' to which they eventually returned after removing the layers of accumulated negative learnings, IPV desisters constructed a wounded and contaminated self that they agentically reshape through an expert-assisted learning and therapeutic process. Desisting from IPV is not just a process of freeing one's self from the layers of internalized patriarchal constraints, but also entails the recovery of an emotionally traumatized self. They had to gain awareness of the mysterious 'it' - the 'not-I' internal force that is part of the self, as described by Maruna (2001) - and

invest in self-reflexion and in learning techniques to achieve control of this 'it'. The 'it' represented the vulnerabilities that IPV desisters bore within as consequence of traumatic childhood, and the agentic self-regulation of this: the responsibility that emerged from the self-reflexive activity to embody the expectations constructed around the new life project, reflecting that self-identity is "something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" (Giddens, 1991, p. 52).

Desisters in the present study expressed a sense of increased self-belief and control over their future and present, which was not the product of biological maturation (Glueck & Glueck, 1974) nor the result of social control (Laub & Sampson, 2001), but the outcome of an assisted reflexive change process and the agentic commitment to a new life project. As the result of the change, desisters did not feel themselves to be morally better than other men using IPV, as ex-offenders feel regarding other criminals (Maruna, 2001). They felt, instead, merely wiser in terms of personal growth. That is why they shared their stories. They believed their stories carry wisdom that other men could potentially benefit from. Likewise, the term 'redemption' that Maruna used to describe desistance from crime does not seem to match the portrait of desistance from IPV depicted by participants in the present study. IPV desisters did not feel that they were saved from evil by someone who believed in them, but rather confronted with their mistakes and taught about new ways of being men; and MBCPs were not experienced as retributive suffering but as a transformative course or even as a therapeutic experience.

Considering MBCPs as having anything to do with therapy has been largely discouraged in the field of intervention with men who use IPV (Eckhardt et al., 2006); reflecting, according to some, ideological preferences (Dutton, 2012a). Although the relation between ideology and theory is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is worth mentioning that, during the process of analysis, Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) offered a vantage point for interrogating men's masculine positioning; but this concept gradually impressed as being too rationalistic for allowing the examination of men's emotional lives, since from Connell's approach, consciousness raising is seen as developing awareness of men's power within gender relations of power only. Coupled with this, Connell's

understanding of men's pain as personal, in opposition to women's oppression that is seen as structural, led to the consideration of men's emotions as subjective and personal in opposition to the political. This seems to encourage a disdain for the therapeutic process that has been observed in the field of intervention with men who use IPV; which position is in contrast with the findings of this study.

Working with men who use IPV appears to require a broader perspective on masculinities, one that recognizes that men's bodies carry emotional histories, rather than conceiving men's bodies as external entities on which culture instils prevailing masculine representations. Men's reclaiming of the centrality of their emotional lives can be also seen as making political the personal. Framing MBCPs as a therapeutic space rather than as an extension of the punitive justice system might be helpful for assisting men in successfully negotiating the initial shame and openness to change required for an effective intervention. Desisters attributed agency to themselves and at the same time to the broader socio-historical context and their bodies; and this appeared central for allowing them to understand and perform change. For men to desist from IPV, scaling up respect and gender equality in their relationships seems to be just part of the journey. They also need to find ways of embodying this through new ways of relating with their loved ones and themselves, through self-regulating negative emotions. The conception that men only want power and control in their affective lives seems too narrow for understanding men's lived experiences and hopes, and too restrictive on attempts to find more caring and less rationalistic ways of assisting them in making their hopes attainable.

7.10 Limitations of the study

The present study was focused on understanding how men who desist from IPV construct a sense of self, and how this differs from that of men who do not desist from IPV. The findings of this research cannot be considered as representative of all men who desist from IPV. The portrait of the primary and secondary desistance processes articulated in this study is not suggested as a complete and conclusive understanding of how men cease in their use of violence against their partners and children, but as the result of a hermeneutic endeavour that is subjective and incomplete. However, it renders visible significant and rarely-discussed issues of how

men stop abuse and remain free from violence. In the same way as, in telling their life stories, participants drew from cultural understandings that most people in Western culture draw from to make sense of their lives, the predicaments these men face in accounting for their change can be understood as representative of the challenges and dilemmas that other men in this cultural setting could encounter when trying to desist from IPV.

As in all narratives, the life stories analysed here were moulded by the particular spatio-temporal context in which they were constructed and by the audience towards which they were intended. Therefore, they represent the intersection of a number of factors that were not controlled and were not examined, because they were beyond the scope of the research, such as interactional issues between the researcher and the interviewee, public policy issues constructing the context in which MBCPS are developed and provided, and restrictions of language use due to social class, race.

The analytical approach taken in this research implies that narratives were explored and interpreted as representations of men's lives, with a focus on content and form; thus, issues pertaining to narrative performance were omitted. Although the latter could have allowed for a more detailed examination of emotional closure (Goldie, 2003), it could have also posed greater difficulties in obtaining ethical clearance due to the need for audio-visual records.

Finally, the research would have benefited from taking the results back to the interviewees to allow them to reflect on the re-telling of their life stories. This could have produced richer descriptions of the change processes and the processes through which men sustain their changes.

CHAPTER VIII:
CONCLUSION

8.1   Introduction

Men's behaviour change programs can help men to desist from IPV. However, the effectiveness for long-lasting change of these programs could potentially be increased if they are reviewed and improved in terms of their scope and implementation. In this chapter, the research aim and main findings are summarized, and the implications arising from these findings for the field of intervention with men who use IPV and potential future research are discussed.

8.2   Significance of the study

Men's IPV against women is a global concern, due to its devastating impact on women's and children's lives, its epidemic proportions, and its negative impact on communities as a whole. Intervention with men who use IPV aimed at reducing recidivism has been an integral part of the efforts developed in many countries to tackle this problem. However, to date, intervention programs with male perpetrators of IPV remain a contested issue due to equivocal results of their effectiveness. This has led to an increasing dispute between gender-based and gender-neutral psychology-based understandings of IPV, as to how men should be assisted to stop violence. This dispute has been characterized by a scarce interest in hearing men's voices and in examining successful experiences of change as a form of practice-based research. As a result, our knowledge about the change process and change maintenance of IPV perpetrators remains unclear and incomplete.

The aim of the present research was to contribute to filling a gap in understanding of how men who use IPV achieve and maintain desistance from violence. Building on contemporary criminological theories of desistance, psychological narrative identity theory, and the concept of hegemonic masculinity, a narrative study of men's lives was implemented. Through the conducting of life-story interviews with men who desist and men who do not desist from IPV, which were narratively analysed and subsequently compared within and between the two groups, it was possible to support

and expand on previous research on change in IPV perpetrators. An understanding of the subjective process through which men stopped and remained free from using IPV was described. The use of a narrative approach, with a focus on narrative identity, to both data production and data analysis, allowed for the derivation of discernments that would have otherwise gone unnoticed by traditional approaches; such as, for example, the role of gender and psychological discourses in the sequencing of personal identity transitions.

8.3 Desistance from IPV as a result of social collaboration

Desistance from IPV was portrayed as a gradual process of personal identity change unfolded over time. The sequencing and themes involved in this portrayal showed that men understood this process as a rebirth story, revolving around the story's moral that IPV is harmful. Although men's change journeys were initiated by external forces, men's identity transformations relied on agentic self-reflexion processes that needed to be carefully fostered and guided by competent and respectful experts. Through these assisted, self-reflexive processes, men became able to abandon the blaming of others for their behaviours, and to reflexively recognize themselves as agents imputable for their violence, its effects on others, and its impact in their own life trajectory. External assistance also contributed to the men's establishing of relational and self-improvement life purpose, which facilitated men's transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation to change.

Men's learning of socio-constructionist gender understandings of human behaviour allowed them to reflexively reinterpret their lives and their violence, and to initiate the distancing of themselves from patriarchal attitudes, practices and values. They critically weighed the impact of patriarchy on their relationships, and located their relational purposes within a novel ideological framework of care, respect, responsibility, and gender equity. The mediation of psychological understanding of emotional trauma helped desisters to make sense of their past experiences of victimization, the impact of their violence on their significant ones, and their experiences of relationally-based emotional distress. Although limited, the addressing of emotional issues within MBCPs was enough to allow men to increase emotional self-awareness and self-regulation through interruptive strategies.

The men's recognition of themselves as agents with relational purposes, and the reflexive reinterpretation of their lives through the frameworks of gender and trauma, enabled the improvement of their self-monitoring capabilities of internal states, intentional states, and bodily performances of themselves and others; which, in turn, improved their communications skills. Men's self-monitoring facilitated their assessment of the correspondence of their mental states and bodily expressions with their new life project and preferred personal identity. This allowed them to purposefully abstain from violence and resort to alternative strategies to negotiate relational issues, self-regulate negative emotions, and look for expert assistance when necessary.

External intervention appeared crucial to enabling men's desistance from IPV. Without this, change seemed unlikely. While justice system or police intervention was indispensable to initiating change, MBCPs and similar complementary assistance were vital to providing the context and the interpretative frameworks for making men's violence and men's paths toward change intelligible. MBCPs were perceived both as a learning and a therapeutic experience, perhaps due to the centrality of self-reflexive processes, the qualities of the relationship that facilitators established with the men, and the men's engagement in biographical reinterpretation.

Reflexive processes involving self-recognition as agents and critical thinking were key factors in facilitating men' primary and secondary desistance. While primary desistance was achieved through the external assistance to increase men's self-monitoring abilities, secondary desistance was achieved through men's autonomous self-monitoring and occasional external assistance to sustain and bolster self-monitoring. The centrality of self-monitoring in order to achieve and preserve personal change fits well with narrative understandings of personal identity (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1993), criminological research on desistance (Maruna, 2001), and psychotherapy research (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Mahoney, 1991).

As the intervention process appeared vital for desistance, the factors associated with the characteristics of this process became crucial to understanding men's identity transition out from IPV. The role of the positive relationship that facilitators established with the men, and the use of gender frameworks to gradually foster the

development of new concepts of possible masculine identities and non-patriarchal lifestyles, appeared central for men's change. Psychological notions of empathy and communication were also essential to fostering continued self-monitoring and awareness of others. Indeed, these skills were portrayed as key features of the new identity developed by desisters. Therefore, men's desistence from IPV cannot be conceived of as an individual effort only but as the result of social collaboration.

While self-monitoring emerged as critical for desistance, self-regulation of negative emotions also appeared as significant for achieving sustainable change; although not equally developed amongst desisters. This might explain desisters' expressed need for regular 'top ups' at MBCPs, which Morran (2013b) also noted in his study. This need for 'top ups' seems to be significant enough to be considered as an indicator of desisters' positioning along a continuum between primary and secondary desistance. Men who continued experiencing intense, relationally-based emotional distress, which made them feel they could potentially relapse and thus recognise the need for external support to secure their changes, can be seen as being closer to primary desistance. In contrast, men who reported a sense of having achieved a new, stable, violence-free lifestyle, with more robust self-monitoring abilities and reliable self-regulating skills, can be seen as being closer to secondary desistance.

8.4   Men's emotional lives: the neglected side of the story

When viewed through the lens of the research findings, the controversy between gender-based and psychology-based approaches to understanding and intervening with men who use IPV, discussed in the literature review, seems to be somewhat distant from what men considered to be important for helping them to desist from IPV. When men's voices are heard, this controversy impresses as a power struggle between groups of scholars, disconnected from practice, and trying to advance their own ideological agendas, while constructing perpetrators of IPV as 'others'. According to desisters' voices, in order to desist from IPV, both gender and psychological factors should be addressed. Indeed, desisters in this study constructed an experienced-based connection between these apparently separate worlds, of gender as socially constructed and the psychology of emotions, to understand their lives and their identity change. Desisters in this study stressed the negative influence of

experiences of victimization and culturally dominant traditions of masculinity, resulting in the impoverishment of their emotional and affective lives, and the centrality of becoming aware of their own and other's emotions, to desist from IPV. Stopping abuse and changing to prevent further violence, the present research suggests, encompasses more than just changing a set of deeply-ingrained gendered beliefs; or changing the psychology of emotions alone.

Men's emotional lives have been noticeably absent in studies of the change process in IPV and in the design of interventions with men; reflecting a rationalistic approach to men's lives that, perhaps ironically, appears to reflect traditional masculine understandings of life. More gender-sensitive research on how the emotional lives of men who use IPV can be understood and addressed, to enable desistance from IPV, is needed. However, and particularly of concern to intervention, it appears also important to transcend essentialist understandings of the self and emotions, in order to expand the alternatives for the agentic transformation of emotional life. The ways in which desisters appeared to benefit from internalizing new understandings of gender and masculinity revealed that a great deal of this beneficial impact derived from the anti-essentialist nature of gender as socially constructed. Men could understand their way into IPV and discern a way out of it because this framework opened up the space for alternative masculinities that could be attained through agentic moves. This contrasted with desisters' dominant representation of the dysregulation of negative emotions as a manifestation (and confirmation) of indelible trauma. From dominant discourses of psychological trauma most of them could not discern a way out of negative emotions beyond the use of interruptive techniques. Using strength-based approaches (Lehmann & Simmons, 2009) to addressing men's emotional problems from a gender perspective could potentially increase the opportunities to foster men's agency for self-regulating negative emotions, while supporting the development of more positive identity conclusions in this area of their lives.

8.5 Reflexivity involved in analysing life-narratives

It is important to underline that the salience of emotional issues in men's stories of desistance from IPV was an unexpected finding, which emerged thanks to the wide and depth scope of the interview format and the characteristics of the conducted

narrative analysis. The researcher was unaware of the relevance of emotional issues in the lives of IPV perpetrators and in their change process, as can be appreciated in the research questions guiding the study. In this sense, the theory of narrative identity, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, and the criminological theory of desistance, did not promote the consideration of emotions as a potentially significant element for understanding men's identity transitions. Certainly, the researcher's condition as a heterosexual man could also have contributed to privileging a rationalistic approach to the symbolic aspects of the negotiation of the participants' personal identity, over their emotional and embodied lived experiences.

Studying men's lives is a moving experience for a male researcher. In my case, the moving nature of this experience seems to have been amplified by the close collaboration of my colleague-wife in this research, through daily conversations after long working days of analysis and writing, particularly regarding gendered emotional issues. These conversations fostered the amplification of the resonances between the participant's life stories and my own life story, towards the experiences of other men with whom have I worked in the past as a practitioner, as well as to the experience of many male friends and relatives. This led me to the conclusion that emotions cannot continue to occupy a secondary place in the research on men's lives, particularly on men who use IPV. The insights that I gained through the analysis of desisters' life stories, on the significance of establishing ethical relational life purposes, and increasing emotional self-monitoring and self-regulation to desist from IPV, persuaded me that their stories do carry a type of wisdom that other men, regardless of their condition as IPV users or non-users, can potentially benefit from.

8.6   Further developing research and practices in MBCPs

Once the research was finished, and prior to the writing the research conclusion, I was asked by the agencies collaborating with the study to run a series of workshops for local practitioners with the aim of communicating the research findings. When they heard about the centrality of the positive qualities of the relationship between facilitators and men, and the significance of men's emotional lives in desistance from IPV, they seemed both intrigued and uneasy. Practitioners' expressions and comments indicated an initial reluctance to conceive that working with men's

emotional lives might have something to do with stopping abuse and violence against their partners and children. This sounded like an invitation to do therapy with the men instead of holding them accountable. However, to my surprise, their attitude seemed to rapidly change when working with men's emotions was framed as a gender issue and posed as a form of boosting men's resistance against hegemonic masculinity, and thus, as a form of political activism. Many of them were clearly previously unaware that therapeutic work can also be seen as a form of social activism (Gergen, 1998), and were eager to discuss this idea and its potential implications for the sector once the notion of therapy as a politically informed form of social activism, based on the 'Just Therapy' approach (Waldegrave & Tamasese, 1993), was fully presented.

Men who use IPV are increasingly coming into contact with the justice system and specialized intervention programs. Although there is growing interest in evaluating these interventions, and the voices calling for the development of evidenced-based interventions for male perpetrators of IPV are getting louder, the voices of the men who receive these services has been largely unheeded, and even discredited. This explorative research highlights the need for further research into the subjective cognitive and emotional aspects of the desisting process from IPV. For policy makers and program providers to ensure that their policies and practices are relevant and responsive to what men need in order to desist from IPV, and thus, to enhance women's and children's safety, it is hoped that the experiences and meanings expressed by men, reported in this study, will be taken into account.

Given the exploratory aim of this research, it can be considered successful to the extent to which it has shone light on the complex paths towards sustainable change from masculine IPV against women, and further opened the exploration of how change in IPV occurs, by posing new questions and encouraging debate on issues not previously considered in the field.

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APPENDIX A

Life Stories of Men non-desisting from Intimate Partner Violence
Simplified Transcripts

All the names of the participants, and the persons and the places they mentioned in their life stories have been replaced by alternative names.

A.1 Damian's Life Story

A1.1. Introduction

A.1.1.1 I didn't know I was doing wrong
<u>Interviewer note</u>: *Damian said he was discharged from the program six months before the interview. Once he finished writing down the titles of the chapter of his life story, he spontaneously commenced with the story of how he got involved in the program and then addressed the 'new life with wife', the last chapter in his life story:*

My wife wanted me to go, basically it was and instruction at the court side. I said it's a good idea, without us been interdict, before I went into the court. I went to the court, they said you need to go to the MBCP for a period of time; twenty two weeks, and that was the instruction; I had to obey the instruction.

It's a little bit of a long story. My incident was that I got myself in a situation where I wasn't happy at home. Things were going really well for a long time. Then I started building up resentment 'cos I had expectations, this expectations in life weren't being met. I started isolating myself away from my wife and my family and then I met another lady, and I had an affair with this lady. Whilst having the affair, after a short period of time I told my wife. I said; I am actually, I'm seeing someone, and I like her, and she makes me happy. That's where things got to be complicated, because I wasn't sure whether to leave my wife and my family and go with this person or to stay with my family. In the process I started to see a psychologist, my wife was coming along, as a couple. It was an open situation; I was being transparent with my wife. The psychologist was advising me; you need to live some time go by and take snapshots, images of that person, been with that person; at the end you will find what person will out away the other person.

In the process I was going to the psychologist I was seeing this girl three times a week. My wife knew that I was going to see her. It wasn't always something sinister; was sometimes for just a coffee, or we go out for a walk. I enjoyed her company; she was actually very suiting for me. But my wife was going through a bad experience then; she was actually upset. She believes that I was doing the wrong thing, that my mind wasn't right. She believed that I should be with her and with the children.

I was quite confused, but I was still at home. I didn't remove myself from home. I felt that was my right to be at home. And my wife was going through what they call emotional violence. I didn't know it was emotional violence, I didn't know emotional violence even existed! I saw a psychologist for a long period of time and he didn't say

to me that this is emotional violence against my wife. It was never explained to me. I saw my GP as well and when I said emotional violence he didn't even agree, so no one really step inside: "Damian, something is wrong here". I thought it was okay! It was like looking after myself and is my right. I wasn't happy at home; I met someone else, she makes me really happy, but I didn't have the guts to leave my family; I felt very guilty. And my wife is a good person, she's a very, very good person. And my kids are very good children too. I just had an overall resentment in my world.

A.1.1.2 The conflict
In the end I went away for the weekend with this lady, down to the beach. I told my wife; she wasn't happy. I never told her you can't spend money, I never told her you can't go out. I was confused, and no one told me this is wrong. And the lady friend brainwashed me saying you got the right to see me if you're not happy at home.

And when I came back from this weekend there was like chaos since I opened the door; my wife was there, my oldest son and my wife's parents, and my brother in law. My brother in law said to me: "you need to get your clothes and leave the house, remove yourself from the house". I could see he was emotionally distressed. I didn't get mad at him; I told him: "'you should leave the house". I put my hands in my pockets so he knew I wasn't going to get violent, because when I was young I did karate, I was taught when in a situation you pacified; and I said: "you need to remove yourself". I was a little bit stressed because I was in a situation I didn't expect, I was a bit ashamed as to what I have done, in a sense.

I didn't want my parents in law to leave. But my brother in law had some issues; I had a little bit of resentment with my brother in law 'cos he's not a saint. I tried to walk down the corridor to leave the house and my brother in law stood in front of me and started pushing me back into the house. He said: "you're not going anywhere" and blah, blah, blah. I didn't push him because I didn't want the situation to get physical. I thought I've been restrained here, this is against the law. And then I got the car keys in my pants and I turned towards to the kitchen and I threw the car keys on the bench. I said: "that's it"! I didn't throw the keys to my wife or nobody, just to the bench. I said: "I'm ringing the police, they gonna remove you from the house".

I rang the police. In the meantime I stayed at my study away from everyone. My older son came in and told me: "Dad, you need to make a decision". I said: "you're right, I need to remove myself from this house. I only need a couple of days to organize myself". And I came to the whole reality, I thought; my wife's not in a good position at the moment having her husband here still seeing another person, but I'm still with her too, we were still intimate.

The police came. There was a male and a female officer. I said: "there's a situation here, you got no problems, it's safe to walk in my house". The male officer stayed with me at the front and the female officer started talking to my wife. My wife has probably explained to her; my husband is living here but he's seeing another girl, he is not making his decision to remove himself. I think the female officer, who I felt was a bit biased maybe being female, maybe her experiences of what she was seeing out in the world, she decided to put a restraining order on me. The male officer said: "don't be surprised if we end up taking you away from the house". I said: "why is not my brother in law being removed from the house?" He said: "this house is yours and

your wife's; your wife is okay of having your brother in law to stay in the house, so we can't remove him". In the end she came out and they said: "you have to leave the house". So they put me in the back of the divvy van and they took me to the police station.

They put me in a cell for one hour. Then the officer came out and said; do you have a place where to sleep tonight? I said I'll find a place. He said; you go home and get some basics and leave the house. So I went home, I got some basics, put them in the car and then I just drove to my work and I stayed there for a bit. I felt stupid been at work, I felt an idiot, so I drove back to Bundoora, 'cos the next morning I had an appointment with my psychologist. I slept in the car and then I attended the appointment with the psychologist. I told him an order is being put to me and I got to go to the court on the next day, and I just wanted to visit you and let you know and tick off that I've been to visit you. So I went to the court and I sat on the one area and my wife sat in the other area; it was a terrible experience for me just to see my wife through a window, distressed. I felt bad, I felt really, really bad for my wife. I felt really guilty.

In the court they said I can go home, if I want to. That I don't do any violence, any family violence, and they informed me to come to into the program. I stayed with my parents for about four nights, and then I came back to speak to my wife, and then I came back to the home. I've been there since that time.

I had a lot of resentment, and that's what I think started the problem, expectations and resentment is what has created me to become that person that I became.

A.1.2. Life story chapters

A.1.2.1 New life with wife
New life with wife because now she realized how much she wanted me, when she realized I was gonna go, she realized that she really value me. I wanna show you during the interview how I really value her as a person and I care for her, and I don't want to see her hurt, I don't want to see her upset, I don't want to see her becoming sick in any way from any of my actions.

So it's an opportunity really for us to start a new life together. The psychologist helped me a bit to see that what really upsets me is not my wife; is all of the externals. Might be my parents, her parents, her brother. What happened is, probably over the years, I've used my wife as a scapegoat. But we have a new life now with my wife. But the children still question mark, because they became aware of what happened with me. I was simply seeing another girl. So the kids know, and they have some resentment. Our relationship is still itchy with my three children; a little bit, not too bad. But you don't know people get affected; they will have a trust issue with me. I think I can relate to their experience; if you have a stable life structure and suddenly you realize that this structure can be drastically changed, I think you would feel a little bit insecure and unsafe.

I understand; MBCP has helped me to see the big picture of how my actions affect other people. I was in a stage throughout my life when I was just thinking about myself. I wasn't getting anything from my parents, I wasn't getting care and love and

understanding. So, I started developing resentment, a whole resentment towards the world.

A.1.2.2 Parents life and culture

<u>A.1.2.2.1 My father is a selfish man</u>
Well, my father it is interesting; I think a lot of the problems that I have today steams from some experiences he had in his childhood. I think this is the root of everything. His mother had five or six siblings, but every one of them died under the age of seven. So my dad grew up with the resentment in life; why did my siblings died? My father was the only child in the family. I think a little bit spoiled by his grandparents and people around; he got a selfish trait. But he's very social; but fundamentally he's a quite selfish man.

And then his mother died when he was 15. He might have had certain kind of resentment to life. And then his father went on to marry his mother's sister. I think he felt like his life had short changed him a bit, I believe; this is coming from the psychologist as well. I believe that my father was attracted to my mother and my mother's family, because she had a big family, and they were all happy. She had brothers and sisters, and she had mum and dad.

<u>A.1.2.2.2 My father rejected me</u>
In my childhood my father used to be disrespectful with my mother's father. I think because my mother's father didn't pay him special attention; for a long time he had resentment to my mother's father. I remember lots of arguments, lot of arguments in the house; it wasn't good. Maybe my father had expectations of my grandfather to be treated as a special person. When I was a child, if I was out of order or something not right, my father would always say to me you're just like your mother's side, you're just like you mother's father. As a kid you'd start to think I'm not good. So my father had this verbal abuse; he shouldn't have been doing this to his son.

And even my older sister; I remember times my mother used bad language with my older sister. There was a lot of abusive. But my parents argued a lot, they've always have argued. With my psychologist the story came about, he sort it worked it out; the psychologist said I've found rejection in my early childhood up until I'd say my teens, I've experienced basically not being accepted by my father, so I might just have been a scapegoat to him.

A.1.2.3 Early childhood to early teens

<u>A.1.2.3.1 Dad wasn't that bad</u>
I came at one year old to Australia. I was born there; I came here at one year old.
I had a good childhood; my father wasn't a monster; he took us on holidays. When we were younger they bought a little shed near to the beach. We had the house down the beach and my dad said I'm going to take you fishing on this big boat; as a kid I was very excited.

He knew that I cut all the boat pictures that came in the newspaper and put them in a tin can, so he knew that I liked these things, so he said; I'll by a boat, because I was interested in a boat and he had the relation to his father, I suppose, because his father

was a fisherman. So he bought a boat and he became a fan of fishing. I had good days, we were down in the beach most weekends; I rode my bicycle up and down the street, during the summer I walked to the beach and swim, and we go to the boat, so we had happy days.

A.1.2.3.2 Tensions with younger sister
We were good with my sisters, but the one after me, she was like a tomb boy, in her mind she thought that I was getting more privileges than her, and so the relationship wasn't that good. She used to be a bit crazy. Our relationship now is not good. She wants me to have a good relationship with her. When I'm with her I feel I'm going to have an asthma attack, she makes me very nervous. I don't feel good with her around because I felt over the years; if I sneeze, she will sneeze, if I took a step this way, she will take a step that way. I don't like to go to her place, I only go there because her daughter may have her birthday and my wife says is the right thing to do; but when I go back it takes me almost two to three days to calm down.

A.1.2.4 Teenager

A.1.2.4.1 First girlfriend
An important part was the first, we called them disco, there was a church disco, we got dressed up with nice pant, nice shirt, we went to this church disco. I saw friends I went to primary school with; we're talking and dancing. That night there was a girl that liked me, I can't remember how she got my number, but she rang me up, and then from there I started dating this girl; she was my first girlfriend, but we had a real in love relationship.

She was my first, you know, real love, the end of childhood. She was really a good person, but I wasn't ready; my maturity and I think I had insecurities. I still have them. She was lovely, she was confident, played music; she used to laugh a lot, and I was attracted to her, but then I started to be a little bit possessive with her. We go out, if the guys looked at her, I get a little bit upset or if she was overconfidence with other guys I'll be upset, so in the end her father said: "you're a good person but you're very hard on her". She moved away from me.

A.1.2.4.2 Ladies everywhere
Then I started to go out and I saw young ladies everywhere and I thought; this is fantastic! I sort of I don't want to go back home, I want to go into the world now, meet women. We didn't drink, we couldn't afford to drink, we had cigarettes because that was the cheapest option and, we didn't go to have sex with women in the first night, we were very innocent, very innocent boys. My group was good quality people; we didn't get in any trouble.

And then this girlfriend I had, she saw me after about three months, and she wanted to get back with me. I said no, I can't come back because now I've seen more of the world out there. So that was a transition that was an important point in my life. She was a good person, but I think I ruined it because of my insecurities. I think stems back from my father's as the psychologist said.

Then I had a good friend, Mitchel, and we're still friends today. We've been friends since we were 16. He is a very good person; he believes I'm a good person, and we

are still good friends up until today. We did normal things; I pick up my mate, we drive to the city, we got into a club in Carlton to play pinball machine, have cigarette and look at the girls. There was not such a thing like abuse of women. There was just having fun, having a laugh, having a cigarette.

In one of those occasions that I went out I saw my wife; oh, she was a lady on the dance floor. Then my friend and I we're fighting about who's gonna dance with her. So when I was with her I started to make contact with her. That develops in another chapter, and that was a beautiful chapter as well.

A.1.2.4.3 School trajectory
In the background I'm becoming a later teenager, when I met my wife, in the background I was working as apprentice in the Australian airlines at 17. What happened with me is that I wasn't good academically; when I was young I was very remedial, the lower in the class. My reading was poor, my math was poor. I was a bit naughty, but not a bad kid, probably easily distracted personality.

I came out a catholic primary school and most of my friends went into a catholic secondary college. I saw all of my friends getting into college except for me. I went into the public high school. My parents said that they couldn't afford it, but they always had the money to do lots of holidays and self-indulgence, I think that ultimately was for my dad's selfishness, but in my position to my relationship to the situation I had a little bit of resentment.

When I went to high school I started to hang around with bad boys, we were all a gang, we used to walk around. We never got into any fight. And then one day this French teacher said something to me; and the table got up under my lap and I moved the table forward. She got up frightened, she got mad at me; she said: "you go to the coordinator now". And the coordinator was the head teacher. And when I went there he said: "you're going to get nowhere in life, you're a looser". But funny, that was a turning point in my life. What happened in the end, in the near future, I started studying and I became a straight edge student. I still have the report at home. I became a two as a student, so I became very, very high.

A.1.2.5 Early manhood (start to work at 17)

A.1.2.5.1 Disappointed with society
When I started to work I had expectations that I'll be with good people, high morals, decent people, like me. But I realized that all of them where mean; they weren't that good. I found people like stabbing other people, mocking at him, people stealing from the airline. I had my expectations in general and that's where I got stuck in my life; that's my problem. I was very disappointed socially with the work force. I was there working and learning, but I found a little bit withdrawn.

I had friends with whom I used to go out, and people use to talk with me and laugh, but in my part I was disappointed. I suppose that represents the society for me. In my mind I was disappointed with society. I thought society would be with more beautiful people. But I kept working in that field.

A.1.2.5.2 The obsessive boss
At one stage I had almost a nervous breakdown because, I think the third year of apprentice, I was working with a boss who was a bit of racist. He also had obsessive

compulsive disorder, and for me was a nightmare coming to work and working with him. He used to park his car and walk around six times, then wipe his feet on the gravel and jump on his car and then he came out. And then he would come and sit in front of me; I'm not used to swear most evenly, it wasn't comfortable. And then if you finish your job at the airlines you need to wait for inspection. I asked him to come; he might come after 20 minutes, and if things weren't lined-up exactly for him, he would persevere; it was stressful. I tried to fix the problem; I became a little bit religious in the sense of trying to understand, to forgive this person if he gets mad, angry or swears. That was a hard work. At that age I shouldn't be doing that, I should've just been learning and having a bit of fun. I had some disappointing experiences in my early years in the workforce.

I see life from that view because of my early childhood. Maybe if I've had a more happier childhood. My wife says sometimes I'm critical; maybe you feel your parents could love you or nurture you more you wouldn't worry about those things.

A.1.2.6 Marriage

A.1.2.6.1 An old fashion romantic relationship

In those days it was quite normal to get married at 22, 23. My dad was involved in a social club for the Phoenicians and we used to go for dinner and dances. Through that experience I saw the men who were a bit older than me getting girlfriends and getting married. For me that was the flagship; that's what they're doing! That's the picture I was planning for my future, and I stepped into that picture in the end.

It's very hard to meet a person like my wife; she's amazing person. I met her on the dance floor, she was sweet. I think I was 19, she would've been 16. But her mother didn't want me! Because I wasn't from the same nationality; she's Italian. They were worry about what their family and friends and the relatives would say; the expectation is to marry to an Italian. Her mum didn't really want me. But then, it proved in the years to come she said; I didn't want him, but he ended up being my gold, I couldn't asked for a better husband for my daughter.

We had a very traditional old fashioned type of relationship. She was brought up in a very strict Catholic family. We didn't even have sex before we got married. I suppose one of the last stories you're going to hear of from that generation. I couldn't see her much because she had to secretly ring me when she was out; she'd say come to this nightclub and we see each other. It was romantic, but I was going out, still meeting girls, but I wasn't having sex with girls. I thought too much happening in here, I got to make a decision because I'm going to get in trouble; I'm going to lose the one that I want, so I finished that.

A.1 2.6.2 The vision

Previous into marriage I saw the future with her as having a happy life, a prosperous life, but also too, where my mistake was is that I had I high expectations. I had the vision to have parents when we get married, they'll be of some assistance to help us. I'm not saying in the way to provide me with a car or provide me with a house, my vision would've been that when we had kids they'll come around and visit. And they did. But also I thought when kids get to a certain age, maybe we can, maybe my wife

could work part time and they could look after the kids. But they never looked after the kids. My wife would say they had their kids, they don't want our kids. I said they should love the kids, they should help, they should see you and me prosper. And I remember my father in law, he's actually a very nice man, but I remember one day he said to me: "why should I help you to look after your kids so you could drive a Mercedes"? And I felt a bit resentful of him saying that.

A.1.2.6.3 My parent were mean
My parents didn't give us any support at all. Besides, they go and wanted family holidays. I just don't believe both of my parents have a really beautiful heart. I think they're both extremely selfish people, very, very selfish people.

I think its malice. There was a stage we have Christmas at their house every year when our children were young. It was nice, beautiful. And then, suddenly, they said: "no more". They stopped. And we can understand it was giving too much work for them. So I started to do it at my house. And my sister, they never volunteered the others; I started to do it every year. I was okay; but then it started giving me a bit of resentment; Easter, Christmas, my dad's birthday, father's day, my mum's birthday, and that was like, my expectation was like; we can't make a big dinner, but we want you all to come to our house so the kids can be together, but they never did it. And now we don't even see each other for Christmas.

Sometimes by default I might see my parents now. I can pick up the phone and talk to them, but I feel sometimes, with the work I've done with the psychologist, these are the externals, the internal is more me and my wife and my children. When my parents are in the picture it makes me more anxious, so I need them to be more distant. But then they don't ask what's wrong with my son. I've been a pretty normal person; I work, I have wife, I got kids, I'm not an embarrassment to them. I just feel disappointed. It's like a trait that goes through everything.

A.1.2.6.4 Early years of marriage
We got married, and we were happy, we're doing hop of the airlines, traveling. Working for the airlines I had cheap airfares. We were happy, we were romantic, all the way, the seven years before the children. And even today when we spend the day together at the casino. But I think there was a flag post seven year ago. My wife always says we were great before we had our kids, she said when we had the children all the tension and pressure started on me.

And again, I thought I was to save my future in this world where my in-laws been, maybe the typical Italian family; don't step inside; look, bring the kids to us three days a week, or they would see my wife struggling a bit and my mother in law automatically coming with the bowl of soup or something, or I'll come over and do some ironing for you to help you a little bit. Those were my visions and expectations. But they have their lives, and they were living the happy retirement; went to bars one day, pokies the next, bingo the next, that as a good thing, but I've always believed that it should be a balance in life. I can't control their lives, but I would feel better if they've showed a bit of love to their daughter and their grandchildren, but it didn't happen. They become like: "no, you do your own thing; we're not helping you".

What happened our marriage failed, sometimes I blame a little bit. Throughout our marriage we hardly went out as a couple. I didn't maintain the marriage, the romance. My wife would say to her parents: "you might be minding the kids"; they'd say: "oh no, we're busy, we're having pizza night". Then my wife was embarrassed to ask them anymore. I have strong resentment towards my in-laws, a very strong resentment, and I have resentment towards my parents.

These expectations were more about my children. Because pre-children my wife had a lot of cousins who were given houses when they got married. Their parents had work hard and invested in properties, and they had the injection into their lives. And they were more lazy people! My wife is very hardworking, and I'm very hardworking, and them, they're not very hardworking.

I never went to my in-laws raging and said; oh look at all the other cousins, they got help; why don't you give me five thousand dollars? I said to my wife I don't want that, I don't need it. I got hands, I got work, I'm not a lazy person; the only thing I want is a bit of support, a bit of help. That's all I wanted. And through that help it would be a side of love and care and respect for their daughter, and care and respect for their grandchildren. And as we prosper as a family they can sit back and say look at what we did.

A.1.2.6.5 I turned non-attractive to my wife
My wife is a saint. She never criticises nobody, she never condones those feelings. She always try to defuse any criticism I have to my parents, any criticism that I have to my in-laws. I'm not saying that my wife is simple; she's a bit more slower; I might be more quicker. She doesn't have those nerves, she's a good person. She's just a diligent person, she'd put up the hard work at home with the kids, she don't complain. She'd put up with me, my winging and carrying on with home my resentments. But there was a stage where she started, because I started becoming this person, she started to get a bit away from me, because I wasn't attractive to her; I'm always sort of complaining. That was more like three years ago, so more in the current chapters, relationship breakdown.

A.1.2.6.6 Children and the conflict for the unplanned child
I planned two children. The children came good: Josh, the first came healthy. We were selfless parents; we did everything for our children. At the age of 2 I had him on my lap driving a mouse clicking things, and then at 4 I told him about the airplanes. And with my second son, was outstanding soccer player; he played for Victoria. They thought he's a prodigy. I put a lot of time into his soccer. I made sure they went into a catholic primary and secondary school, the best I could do.

The children came and my wife decided to stay at home and look after the kids. I had the vision, I would like her to go back to work. Even maybe fulltime and the in-laws maybe will look after the kids. I accepted that was fine, we would live of my wage, so we did a humble life, but we still had everything for the kids, we were selfless people. But then the third come along; she was an accident.

I saw the future and I said this is going to put us six years behind; again you're not going to be able to work because you wanted to stay at home with the kids. And we had arguments within the first stage of the pregnancy. I said I don't want to have

another kid; we have to make a decision on the way to terminate or continue. We had big arguments at home. I said to her this is going to ruin our lives, you've never got support from your parents before we're not going to get it now.

We went to a lady psychologist and she said to me the relationship you have with the baby is different to a mother's relationship to the baby. The mother has the baby in her tummy, and is hard for her just to say is terminated. That was all fixed when my wife kept going the termination. I was home and they rang me from the hospital saying you wife is really bad, she's crying; then she put her on the phone and I knew at that point, I said no, I said stop the procedure, I'll come to pick you up. I said don't worry, we'll have everything, we'll have the baby. At that point I realized that if we didn't have that baby, in the future my wife could look at me as a monster.

A.1.2.6.7 Poor baby Laura
My wife had preeclampsia, Laura was premature. And then what happened, poor Laura baby, she noticed her too cold, something is not right, she's getting apnoea attacks, she's stopping breathing. So they had to take the girl to the hospital to intensive care and a bit of a nightmare started in everything. She was in in the ICU for a long time, the nurses were intubating her and they scar her. Then this inflammation it was going, so she was not eating. I said something is not right here. We took her to the hospital and they said we got to take an emergency tracheotomy. Poor Laura, had a tracheotomy for nine months. And we had that hardship again, nobody really helped us, no one stepped in and said why don't you just go out and have dinner. They were still having their holidays, and the cards nights and the pizza nights. I thought they don't give a damn. I just saw the world and I became a very resentful person.

A.1.2.6.8 I felt abandoned
I just became a not nice person, a non-attractive person for my wife. And then she was away from me a bit, turning her back on me. She didn't do anything bad; she still wanted to be with me. I felt abandoned. The psychologist said to me that I was feeling a thing of rejection, like now your wife is rejecting you, and my kids were doing the same with me; they've started to be a bit more rebellious to me. I think is tacking back to my early childhood; my father was giving me this message; you're not good enough, the rejection thing was happening. I thought damn everything, damn everything. I'll pull myself, and I met a person, I met a person. My intention was to meet her, have a coffee with her, and I didn't expect anything more. But then we ended up having a relationship. And this developed; she said for her meeting me was like winning three lotto. And for me she was ultimately she was very suiting, made me feel really good.

That's why I had conflicts; do I give up with my wife? Or do I decide with this person?
And in the end I thought the honourable thing to do, and I still had had feeling for this other person, the most honourable thing to do is to disconnect from that person, and go back to my family; and keep my wife safe and my children safe.

A.1.2.7 Becoming redundant to helping children
It is called becoming redundant because I spent so much time with soccer. We used to do six to seven days a week it was soccer, and good school; when they were young so much participation in developing the kids. If they needed my arm I was to pay to

chop my arm and giving to them. I was gonna give them every opportunity in life to do well because I was so resentful. I wanted to be different to my father.

My life was, a lot of parts of my life was gone, because most of my life, almost all of my life, was around providing for my family, for my children and then suddenly they don't need me anymore, so I felt like I wasn't needed by them. Then I started to turn on me a bit, because of my resentments and my winging carrying on about my in-laws or whatever.

A.1.2.8 Self-care
Self-care was; oh, they don't need me anymore, what am I going to do? And I started to have a little bit of depression and midlife too, I was 47-48. So I started fitness. For two years I started high intensity fitness; I was doing a lot of running, I was doing weights, and I was physically very fit. And I suppose walking along with that I started getting fit and confident, my body was good.

A.1.2.9 Relationship breakdown
Talking one night at the soccer where my second son was playing, I sat next to one of the fathers and I heard a man had an affair and another one had an affair. Affairs weren't anything in my head back then. And I said to him; how is it that that man, to have an affair? How can he get into an affair with another woman? I said I've never had an opportunity. He started laughing, he said because you've never put yourself in that position. He might hit on twenty women, and he might get one. And I think it triggered something in my head, I thought when anything going not right for my marriage, maybe I should put myself in that position to meet someone. A work colleague that had separated at that time started to look for single women and he just put this idea in my mind as well.
As I started getting fit and confident, I thought maybe I can meet up with someone to have a coffee or whatever. I went online. I thought let's get on and see if any girl would find me attractive. There was one lady that I was chatting to her for about three weeks. And then I saw one from Thornbury and I grew up around there, and she looked nice. We started to chat, and we started to talk about the old days when we were young in Thornbury.

I was like going back to my teenage hood; we had a lot in common, beautiful. I though I'm going to meet this girl. But we just had a coffee, there was no disrespect; I was not interested in having sex with her. I shook her hand, we started talking. That evening I drove her back and I just shook her hand, and I think we just kissed on the cheek. Then we started to text and then we developed into a friendship.

I really enjoyed her. She was great, because she joked around. And when I became a bit resentful or a bit negative, she makes it into a joke! I thought she's defusing me every time that I get into the bad Damian. She just grabbed the back of my neck, saying that was wrong, and she put things into perspective; whilst with my wife it could flare up into an argument.

My psychologist said to me I could be trying to get acceptance from my father. He said all the things I was trying to accomplish were intended for my father to step in and say I love you son, I accept you for what you are. So all these expectations,

they're not even for me, maybe they're for my father, just to get approval. Maybe is too late, maybe it's just become habit for me and this is the nature for me now.

A.1.2.10 Next life chapter

A.1.2.10.1 I want to be good and loving like Ricky Martin
Do you know Ricky Martin? They showed Ricky Martin in TV and, I'm not sure if it's his true identity, but he showed his personality, of loving and caring, and unconditional. I want to be more like that. Is almost to be the person I was when I was 15-16 years old. I was a very good person; I was very romantic in life, not critical at all. I want to be clean; I want to be good; I want to be a good soul in my future. I want to be doing the right thing; I want the people around me to be doing the right thing as well.

With this lady I was seeing I was doing the wrong thing, but she was also doing the wrong thing because she was seeing a man who has a wife and has children. I don't really want to have that sort of people in my life because I think their mind is not right. I want to protect myself from the bad people of the world. And if people are doing something bad I'm going to speak, I want to say you really need to think about what you're doing. Like a mate of mine for example; he's courting a lady for three years, and he found someone from work and he started a sexual relationship. And, yeah, we sit there and blah, blah, blah…he said: "oh, she's like a Ferrari", and we can sit down like men and laugh, but now I'm not going to laugh anymore, it's not funny. Maybe that's a men thing, and because we wanna be mates we support each other even in bad things, but I think what we need to do is to say; look, it might be fun for you, it might be fun for her, but what if your kids find out? It's gonna be hard for them, isn't it?

I wanna be not just a good person; I wanna be a very, very good person. I want to be the person that the people look at me and say: 'oh, he's wonderful". I just want that people feel like; "oh, there's something about this person, there's something special about him". But more important, I want to know in my heart that I want to keep my wife safe [starts to cry] I'm sorry, I just feel guilty, bad [continue crying]. My wife, she's a sun; she's such a good person.

A.1.2.10.2 I didn't know I was doing something wrong
What I did was not good, but when I was doing it I was thinking is all fine, I'm finally looking after myself. But I wasn't seeing the situation form another people's point of view; so selfish. What I found was like honey, it was absolutely suiting. She made me feel like a man; manly. For her point of view she was seeing me as a man unhappy in a relationship, in a failed marriage. She did everything in her power, she said the only thing I haven't done is to beg you. I said it's hard for me to just leave the wife and the children, to abandon them.

I couldn't go on to her, and in four months I could ended up in a fault relationship with her as well. And most likely I would've bordered crossed my issues, my resentment and issues, and insecurities into her relationship, and I probably would've failed. That's why I was scared whilst I was with this woman. My wife must've said: "I'm not going to heal you anymore; you've been with her, now go, stay with her". So, that's why I never had the courage to, I couldn't, I couldn't decide, I couldn't

decide, here I have honey, make me feel so fantastic, and at the other side I had the reality, the reality that I had responsibilities and a wife, good person, I had three beautiful children, three good children, I had a home.

The psychologist didn't say: "to me you need to realize what to do, you need to come to a conclusion; I'll give you a week". He just said: "keep taking time". But time; months, and months and months, and he did a lot of time with us. Maybe the situation with the police was like an intervention of someone different, was coming and say you have something wrong here, give me a stamp on the wrist, take me away in the van, and going to the court and come very serious. I didn't know, no one told me that there is emotional violence.

But back then I wasn't caring because I thought she won't go, she wants me, she was fighting for me; so I was like in a win-win situation. But towards the end of the situation she said to me: "you should take a decision, I can't live on this". The emotional stress was affecting her weight, her capacity to be a good mother, her place in her work. Now is all clear in my head, but back then, because this other person was suggesting me to try to split up: "come to me, come to me, just leave her". Your kids will be okay. She had a spell on me; I believe she put a spell on me. I tried to split up with her eight times!

A.1.2.10.3 New life with wife: she is trying to give me what I need
My wife wasn't giving to me what I needed, but in the counselling situation I was announcing in front of the psychologist that my wife wasn't giving me what I need. But now she's giving me what I need. She's making every effort. She's very strict and very good person, she can't maybe, because I wanna be flirtatious, my wife hasn't enough confidence to be like that, she would've been uncomfortable; whilst the other girl; oh, come on, give me a kiss, give me hard, you know, how can I say; I enjoyed that as a man, it made me feel like a man! But I can see my wife now, she's making every effort to shorten the bed, she'll put something nice on, she put some perfume on. She now will give me a hug and say it's so good to be with you.

At 50 years old that's pretty good if you gonna have this little fantasy, this little bedroom relationship. She can understand, but her mother always brought her up very unconfident, her mother is quite unconfident lady. She was always raised very submissive; so my wife never had confidence. And then when she was in a relationship with me I encouraged that submissiveness because I think I got a wife that is a good protocols, she's not trouble, she's not flirtatious, so I encouraged that. But now I realized, and I said to my wife, you know what I want to see? I want to see you beautiful, not just for me, just for yourself; I want you to become more confident person, and not even with me, with yourself; I want to see you more happy, I want to see you smile.

I'm not looking at the relationship for what I can gain. I earn gains still, but I want her to gain in life, she deserves that. I encourage her telling her; "let's go out? I want you to look beautiful". And she would put some really nice clothes on: "I'd say; oh my god, you look nice. If I was at a bar and I didn't know you, I'll be looking at you saying I want to meet that woman", things like that. I've started a restoration work. But I've also been doing something for her submissiveness that she was forced to have in her early teenage-hood by her mum; I'm trying to tell her: "you don't have to

be the person that your mum wanted you to be, you can be a bit more confident, and that will make you more attractive".

A.1.3. Key scenes

A.1.3.1 Highest point

A.1.3.1.1 The potential big family happy life
I think it led up to marriage, because that would be the start of the rest of my life. I saw a really good future; I had a very good job, I was marrying into a good person, I've found a very attractive girl; probably more attractive than I thought I could get; and I thought, she's like a saint, she's a beautiful soul.

But I also imagined that we're going to be happily married and I'm going to be probably more biased towards the culture that she's from; all the Italian, and the fact that is a bit more family orientated, and the kids are going to get more love and more support, and we'll get support and we'll prosper as a family. The kids are going to get a good education and we'll have a nice house, we'll have a nice car. I imagined my in-laws being more involved with the kids, helping us. I would have a wonderful life. And then I'd return we could look after the old people as they get older. In the meantime we see our kids grow to be beautiful educated adults. So, it was a vision I had, that was probably the highlight.

I had this vision pre the marriage and during the day of the marriage. I felt proud and happy. I could never ask for a better person to marry.

A.1.3.1.2 I have to be careful with what I wish for
I'd say everything I wish for comes to me. They're not bad things and they're not impossible things. I got to be careful with what I wish for, because before I met this other person, I made a wish, I said; I just want to fall in love again, I want to have the feeling of being in love, I don't care being driving a Mercedes or a BMW, I just wanted to have that wonderful feeling again, and I don't know why when I met this other person I was falling in love with her.

I love my wife, I love my wife. But I wasn't in love, lah, lah, you know. But with this other person it was like unbelievable; it was like the honey moon period. That's why I'm saying to you now that I really need to be wise and careful; I need to be a good person. I think a lot more good things are gonna happen to me in my life, I really believe that. I'm going to prosper even more, but I can't move on and accept that prosperity as a rotten person, I got to be a good person to receive this prosperity.

A.1.3.1.3 The new life with my wife
My wife and I talked about my need of feeling loved when we went to the psychologist: "you're not affectionate to me, you never say I love you, you never cuddle up, you're very cold; I need it, I'm an emotional person, I need". The other person, she was giving me everything. She tried everything in the text book to take me, to give me. I think she wanted what my wife had. She was resentful to my wife too; she was saying: "she only works part time".

I told my wife when we went to the psychologist and we've been announced to express why I ended up with her, so my wife knows why I ended up with her, because she provided me the certainty; now my wife is trying her best to provide me. But if I've to see her trying to provide and she looks awkward or, I took her to the casino, and it was a really nice eve. And then she said: "thank you for taking me out". I said: "you don't have to thank me for taking you out". I don't want her to feel like a slave in a sense because she has to say thank you. I'd like you to say to me: "I enjoyed your company today", I said to her. So, we communicate.

On Saturday night we went out to the casino, we went to have a drink here, the bar here, to listen to a guy playing music, then we went to another bar, we had a laugh. We did a few things and I said: "this is good, this is very exciting", we were like teenagers, we're running around different bars, having drinks, we never drink alcohol that much. It was good, so we are living what I call the new life with my wife.

A.1.3.1.4 No more externals
The facilitator in this program had an analogy where a jug; this is the man of the family; and it pours into one child and a bit into his wife, and the jug is there, half full. Then he gets it again and he pours. The analogy is the energy, the substance of that male, but if no one comes along and pours into his jug he's gonna have nothing to give. So that's what I need; I can't just keep being selfless all of my life and accepting. I need people in my life to put, give me that energy back.

My parents aren't giving it to me, they're giving me worse. And with my in laws is the same; I'm not getting that sense of energy from them. So now our relationship has improved because my wife realized that she's got to give me a little bit to make me feel good. And I want to give her my care feel as well. Unfortunately we are not getting it from the externals, because if we would get it for the externals as well we'd like dynamite as a couple, as a family. But we got what it is, it is; I got to accept that.

We will just visit those externals when we have to, and just say hello-good bye and come back to our family, and we live our life. I don't think they would mind us at all. Actually I don't talk to them; I don't have a communication anymore since this incident. They're healthy; they're still doing these fun things at their age. When the time comes, if they really need us, then we got to step in and help. But, for now, we got to start to put into ourselves; we're gonna make ourselves the important people.

A.1.3.2 Lowest point

A.1.3.2.1 Laura was about to die and my wife is not going back to work
When Laura was born and she ended up with a tracheotomy. She was in the ICU before she got the tracheotomy, she was very grave and they said: "just prepare yourselves". And the people around us, I don't think they took it as serious as they should have. I remember my sister older sister came and she didn't even come in the room, and she said; oh, do you wanna have a coffee? I'm thinking; don't you want to come and see your niece? Because she could die today or tomorrow!

I think that was the lowest point because I felt very helpless, I thought; oh my god, now my wife, this baby is born, you just not going back to work. My in-laws, they were no interested at all in-in helping, they even said to my wife when she was

pregnant with the third; oh, bad luck, it's your problem, don't concern us. I thought God has brought me Laura's, I felt so humble. It was a good experience, very humbling experience. I started reading about Buddhism, I started to practice certain things, in picking certain things from that religion, certain practices of being selfless, not having want in life.

A.1.3.3 Turning point

A.1.3.3.1 The confrontation with the high-school coordinator
I wasn't good academically; when I was young I was very remedial, the lower in the class. My reading was poor, my math was poor. I was a bit naughty, but not a bad kid, probably easily distracted personality.

When I went to high school I started to hang around with bad boys, we were all a gang, we used to walk around. We never got into any fight. And then one day this French teacher said something to me; and the table got up under my lap and I moved the table forward. She got up frightened, she got mad at me; she said: "you go to the coordinator now". And the coordinator was the head teacher. And when I went there he said: "you're going to get nowhere in life, you're a looser". But funny, that was a turning point in my life. What happened in the end, in the near future, I started studying and I became a straight edge student. I still have the report at home. I became a top two as a student, so I became very, very high in maths, English; I loved to write, passionate! Like a man possesses reflating I think that's something that I never really realized. I became; how can I say; my weight elevated, my writing was romantic and I was getting good responses from the teachers.

That was a major turning point, that's amazing. That teacher would be probably somewhere having a cup of coffee and have no idea what influence he had on my life.

A.1.3.4 Life theme

It's just about survival. I think I wanna come out a winner, most situations in my life. That's why I have great expectations and I expect the outfit around me, the men around me, my company, to have the high expectations with me; we're going to come out winners.

And maybe it is, again, it is ultimately just trying to prove that I…   to get acceptance. Maybe above the thought of the theme of me being a winner, maybe there is something higher to that reflexion, and is basically being accepted.

A.1.3.5 Effects of the interview

I thought it will have more effect on me coming to the interview; more like an operation or something amazing. Not really, not really. I mean, it's very interesting for me to walk away with the final words that we just spoke about was; being accepted and being loved. I think if I am accepted and I am loved, I feel that if most men were accepted and loved and supported there wouldn't be so much violence, so much family violence; not just family violence, it wouldn't be so much violence in the world. I think men don't get enough love and support.

I don't know why I'm not fortunate, maybe is just my predicament. I just feel that throughout my life I haven't had much support and love. I haven't had it from my mum; and I remember as a kid I used to say to my mum: "you're not my mum; as I scream at her". I had an untie living with my, my dad's untie, like a grandmother; she lived in the house with us, because when we lived together in Melbourne with my parents, siblings; and then in the back we had a little unit. And my dad's father and his step mother and her sister lived in the unit. She used to be more loving with me, she loved me, and she was more like a mother for me because my mother wasn't very good. She was almost little bit two face; with people she's loving and laughing, then at home she used to be a little bit nasty. But she got her issues too; her behaviour relates to her relationship with my father, having to put up with my father's father and his relatives living in the house. So there were always a lot of opinions. She probably wasn't allowed to have as much opinion, there were complications there. But what I'm trying to say in my situation today, I look back, and I didn't get much from my parents.

A.2 Tony's Life Story

A.2.1 Introduction

A.2.1 Demographics and current life context

I have an Italian Background, but I was born here in Melbourne. My parents came from Italy in the fifties. I have one brother and two sisters, I'm the oldest. I was born in 1971. I'm single at the moment. I live with my mum fading out. Before I was living as a family with my partner for eighteen years. I have one child, a biological child, she's 12 years old. And two step daughters, they're 23 and the other will be 25 soon. I have contact with my daughter I pick her up from her grandmother's place once a week.

I was court ordered to attend this program. I'm unemployed. I did get to Centrelink but it was too hard. I went there and I spend about 4 hours there and I still couldn't work out to get in there. When I went there I had to go into the computer and I got no computers skills, I'm a computer illiterate, it made me just too nervous there, so I didn't worry about it. I was supposed to go back and see them, but I never went, it's just pretty hard for me, I just looked for a job by myself.

I've worked most of my life as a carpenter, formal carpenter and construction. I stopped working because of lots of things. Close to two years ago I was eighty kilos, I was a pretty solid boy, and suddenly I just lost weight. I was sweating at night, I didn't feel right. I started getting tests and through the test they got into my heaps. I was very stressed, I wasn't really interested in that much because I was worried about my house and work. First they said take some time off. Now I'm back to 67 kilos, but at once I was 62 kilos, I was worried of my health. I didn't worry about my work. I just sort of flipped, I was more worried about my health. And now, since the separation with my ex-partner I sort of don't care about my health but my work. I've worked all of my life and I don't know another way to live.

I'm living with my mum. She's 62. I'm not happy about that situation. No other choice at the moment, until we come free from solicitors and sell the house with my ex-partner. I'm not in a good spot at the moment, but I think things are going to get better.

After the introduction of the interview by the interviewer he started writing straight away and after finishing he said: I think this could help me get some lessons, I think it is going to benefit me. I've never looked at my life back before until you tell me to. I would like to have interest back into life because I have lost interest.

A2.2 Life story chapters

A.2.2.1 The childhood

A.2.2.1.1 Happy family life
The only thought of my life is that Mum was always there. Dad is a hard worker, he had this butcher shop. He worked hard. We always had the best of everything. Dad provided very well, and Mum looked after, she was a fantastic planner. She always kept us nice and clean, always kept the house clean. We had a beautiful family life, it was happy to be at home. Dad was always good with Mum and Mum was always good with Dad. I never remember any bad memories. As a young kid I was happy, I always had a smile. So I was sort of the black sheep of the family.

My brother was a year younger than me, so we always played football together. It was always plenty of playing outside the house that Dad got had a pool. And he bought next door behind that he rented and chopped the backyard so we could use the entire backyard, so we had plenty of room to play. And my sisters as well, but they liked to play with the toys. I was closer to my brother because as a kid you are full of energy, and you can't really play soccer and football with the girls without hurting them. But my sisters were there and we were close as well.

Soon as the shop was closed on Sundays we would go to the country, or we would do thing as a family. Dad spent a lot of time at home with us. He wouldn't be locked in without going out, drinking. He didn't enjoyed playing cards, because being in a butcher shop you're stuck inside for some years. That's why he liked to spend time being outdoors. It was good times.

I remember that as a young kid I was in a swimming group and I started playing football as well, for a team. I was taking training during the week and we played on Sundays, and they'd take us on Sundays to watch us play. I had everything as a kid, I couldn't ask for anything else.

A.2.2.1.2 Kicked out from primary school
Maybe the trouble may occur around the end of that. At grade five I went to the zoo; I was little bit naïve in a way, and some of my mates went into a canteen that was there and they started pinching some stuff and they said came here with your bag. So I went in there and they started throwing things in my bag, and we were caught pinching things, so I was kicked out of school at grade five. Mum and Dad were upset with me. But I didn't really realized what I was doing. They just caught me up when they reviewed my bag. And one of the teachers got his wallet pinched or something from there and he was trying to blame us, so I was upset about that, so I left that school.

A.2.2.1.3 Living with auntie at the country side
I went up to Daylesford, my auntie was teaching up there. It was really nice. My auntie was a beautiful person. She passed away seven years ago now, she was only 53. She was sort of hippy-vegetarian. She was actually living in a house in the school. The school was huge, it was probably about 10 acres, big football ground, big play areas, and I stayed there for maybe 6 months. I really loved it there. But to tell the truth I didn't miss my family. They came up once in a while. I really loved it up there,

I loved being with my auntie. Life was different there. I made friends I was the only European up there. I smoked cigarettes. I was 9. After that point I was always close with my auntie.

A.2.2.1.4 Back to Melbourne to a different school
I failed that year. Once the term was over that was it; so mum and dad said on the next year you're going to a different school. I started in a catholic private school and I was in the same year as my brother, so it was a little bit funny, they said you don't look like twins, and said I failed, so that sort of hurt a little bit. We actually all moved school, my brother and sisters as well. It was hard. My brother was different from me. He was taller so he looked older. He was taller and skinnier, and I was a little fat and the girls liked him. He was very popular with the girls and stuff like that. And me, I think, all I remember is that I started to fight with other kids and stuff like that.

A.2.2.2 High-school

I think I always had a lot of friends. In the transition from primary to high-school I met more friends and I still kept that badass attitude. I remember my first day at high-school, actually even from the first day the teacher; I cannot remember what he used to teach, but I was sitting at the front with a friend and the teacher gave me such a slap. The first day! This big black teacher gave me such a slap because back then you were allowed to. I was just talking. From then on I kept always getting into trouble at school, always being called to the principal's office. I wasn't interested in school. I was just waiting for the recess to come out and play football. I've always played football; I think I stopped playing when I started to work as a young man, so I played football for probably ten years. I also used to go to swimming, I was part of a swimming club; I used to do that before school.

In high-school I was also interested in girls. I fell in love with someone when I was very young. Actually the first day I met her I lost my virginity, but not to her, I lost it to another girl, at the pools. I was 13 and I thought it was the best day because I not only lost my virginity but to some 17 years old girl. I actually met the girl that I felt in love with…I even dreamed with her the other night. That relationship was on and off for years I think. The last time I spend time with her was probably when I was about 24. The thing is that she didn't have a stable family. Her mother had left her father when they were young. We had different lives; she was from an Australian background.

My parents knew about my troubles in school. They have realized that I have always been different from my brother. My brother studied and he got good reports, he was always excellent and mine was mostly decent. It didn't worry me at that time. No resentment with my brother, even when we were young he used to get all the girls and we're all good. It wasn't until I started to get a little bit older that I started to receive attention as well.

In high-school I started to hang around, like the amusement power and stuff like that. I used to meet a few people I used to go with to an arcade centre and I started to experiment with marijuana. My brother didn't hang around with the same crowd, he

didn't smoke cigarettes, he didn't smoke marijuana and anything like that; I sort of rebelled a little bit. I think I first tried marijuana probably at 12. I started to smoke cigarettes when I was about 10.

At high-school my Mum ended up being a top shot lady, and they told her a couple of times that they wanted to kick me out of school, but the only reason they didn't kick me out was because my mother was there. It didn't worry me. School wasn't anything that I cared about.

A.2.2.3 College

Then from that school, my brother, because he was always good at school and stuff like that, he went to another private college and I just went to a TAFE. And that was great I had all the freedom in the world. There was no mother there so I just cruise through. I met new people and I had a bomb there. I think I would've been 16 when I first got there. It was great!

It was year eleven, I don't know how I passed but I passed and went to year 12. Halfway through year 12 they rang up my parents and said: "does your son still come to this school"? And they said: "yeah, he always goes to school; because we haven't seen him". I used to just go to the TAFE and hang around there. The girls, there were lots of girls. We just go there and smoke cigarettes, have coffees and mock around with the girls there. I stopped attending school.

Then my parents told me what are you doing? And I just cannot be bother, I just go to mock around with girls, and smoke cigarettes. At the time I was working part time at my cousin butcher shop.

A.2.2.3 Worker life and partying

<u>A.2.2.3.1 Working at butcher shop</u>
Actually I started working when I was probably 13 or 14. I started at another shop just after schools. And then from there I said to my parents I'm not going to school and I just kept going to the butcher shop. So I started at my cousin's butcher shop, I must have been 17, and I started there for about nearly 2 years, and then my father got sick. He had problems with his liver; he was never a heavy drinker. They still don't know why he passed away.   And then after that I went to work in another butcher shop. But this time I had a big group of friends.

I never finished School. Mum wasn't happy, but I don't think they could control me. They've never been able to sort of control me. They said: "you've always be the black sheep of the family". Everyone else was good academically. Both of my sisters have good jobs, my brother built up a business.

Being the black sheep didn't worry me, it didn't face me because a lot of the time with that girl that I was telling you about, my first love, I ended sleeping at her place, staying overnight when I was young, 15 years old. And Mum and Dad really didn't like that because it wasn't good example for my brother and my two younger sisters.

And then from there I went to another shop and I stayed a few more years. I stopped working at my cousin's shop because my grandfather passed away and I just didn't like that they didn't give me enough time to spend with my grandfather before he passed away. I was sort of resentful for that, because I was pretty close to my grandfather. He taught me how to drive, he was good to me. It hurt me a lot when my grandfather passed away. I felt very close to my grandfather, he was a good man.

I was still at the house of Mum and Dad. They didn't care, they realized that I settled. I kept working, I worked long hours but I had a big group of mates, and we go out and we do lots of things. We go to drive-inns, we go to the cafes, partying, going night clubs and stuff like that, drinking, smoking. It was a good life.

A.2.2.3.2 Working in construction
The thing is I wasn't earning good money as my mates. A lot of my mates were working in construction, and they were earning better money than me, working less hours. On Eastern they would let it go, they would go out bush. I got to work seven days, so I missed down a little bit. So then I started to do construction; I just had enough. I just didn't want to lock myself up in a shopping anymore. I think I would have been about 23. I was on and off with the same girl; obviously I had a lot of other women, and she probably would have other men too, she never told me about it.

I started off labouring. I've done domestic labour for, probably three years. I worked through a builder which had other blokes; he had his cut men makers, he had a paster, so I just rotate whenever someone needed me. And then I met another builder through another carpenter that was there on a construction site. The money was even better. I did enough to go mock around from one block, to another block, to another block. And then from there I worked probably three years in construction with that builder. And then, one of my mates who knew that I was interested in leaving labouring and going to carpentry brought me to do a year course as a carpenter. I started as a formal carpenter, and I have been doing that ever since.

I moved out on a few occasions with the girl that I was telling you about. I think the first time when we moved together was probably about 19 or 20. And the last time she was looking after her grandmother and I went to stay with them. We broke up and then we got back together and then we moved to another place, probably a couple of years after that. I think she was working in a theatre group, not as an actress I don't know what she was actually doing there.

I didn't have a guiding plan during this time. I'd always come in and out from my parent's place. A lot of times I came back and then leave the home anyway. Mum and Dad were always good, I can't complain. They were good with other friends, even with my friends and stuff like that, and my sister's friends, and my brother's friends. If anyone came around there always would be plenty of food and plenty of drinks and anyone was able to plug in a chair, come and sit down.

A.2.2.3.3 Met Margaret (ex-partner)
Then I met my ex-partner that I just split off now; Margaret. I met her in a party of her brother; he was my sister's boyfriend at the time, it was his party, it was his 21. I had a sort of connection with her, but she had kids from a previous marriage. I think I would've been about 27. I was still going out, partying and stuff like that.

I started to hang around with her and her kids. At first my parents weren't really too impressed. Because I thought that maybe I should meet someone that hasn't had kids and start my own family. But I ended up falling in love with her, and I still kept working. I just started to slow down. My lifestyle started to change in a lot of ways. As I fell in love with her I didn't really want to go out and meet other women anymore. She treated me really good, the sex was good, we got along well, we had similar interest, similar taste in food, similar humour and had the same viewpoints in life. I liked to spend time with her.

Then I moved in with her at her house, the first house that she had with her ex-husband. Then she sold that and I bought a house with her at Horton; it was really nice up there. I bought the house because I thought it was the right thing to do I was in love with her and I'm still in love with her. I really just wanted to be with that person and we bought the house together. It was nice up there. I was working in construction, it was really good money at the time. Margaret had a business with her brother and sister in law importing 2 dollars stuff. As soon as I met her I sort of changed my life.

A.2.2.4 The birth of my daughter

Margaret got pregnant and in 2001 she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Our relationship was still good. Even before my daughter was born I started to get aches and pains, and sore hips and sore hands. The doctors realized that I had arthritis. Even before my daughter was born I said that I could have hips replacement, but I kept pulling it off, I kept just working and dragging, and limping around. I started to feel a little bit bad about myself. I started to smoke more drugs. Claire and I smoked drugs, just marijuana.

A.2.2.5 Heaps of pain

A.2.2.5.1 Feeling sorry for myself
I think it was 30 or so and I said I could have one of my hips replaced, but I was too young. So I sort of kept working, dragging my ass around and started to smoke more marijuana. My life sort of changed, even though I had a beautiful baby girl I loved her and I still do I will love her to death. I started to go within my shell. I started not to enjoy things anymore because I was unable to do what I was able to do when I was younger. Sports, just normal things; even when she was younger, when she said: "Daddy put me up on your shoulders, go for a walk somewhere" I couldn't. Sometimes I couldn't even hold myself with my hips and when you are unable to carry a kid on your shoulders and stuff like that, you start to feel sorry for yourself and I was still very young. Even with my mates, as I wasn't going out anymore the group got smaller and smaller, just started to, to not wanting to see anyone. I just started to lock myself. I started to go within my shell.

A.2.2.5.2 Dad died
In 2003 my mum rang me and said your dad wants to speak to you, and my dad got on the phone and he said to me: "I have cancer". I started to cry. I knew that was going to be bad. He said, don't worry, I'm going to fight with it. He was only 57. I was still employed as a carpenter, but I liked to spend as much time with my father as

I can, Margaret was happy with that, so I stopped working at that time, and I started to just spend a lot of time with my dad. Towards the end I think he was more stronger than me; he was lying there in the bed. He was just wasting away and because I've been always the child that gave him problems and sort of run away from them and do my own things I never really get over his death. It affected me a lot; it affected most of my family.

He was a very good person. He retired early, he made his money, he brought investment in properties, brought us the best what he gets, a good education, not just to me but my brother and sisters and all that. He was a very generous man, very kind man.

A.2.2.6 Hips replacement

After the death of my dad I returned to work at the same company that I left. The boss called me I was actually trying to go through work cover because of my hips and he said: "come". He knew the situation, even though I had bad hips he said you are a good worker, you are liable; there is a position for you. He said we will train you up, give you fork lift license. So I started working, just running the truck, loading the trucks with the same company. I've done that for 7 years. It was good money still and I wasn't killing myself like I was.

So I ended up having hips replacement. I was working in the machine, obviously if I would've been working in office it probably would be different, but I enjoyed the work that I was doing. The money was better, they gave me a company car, and I was able to use their mobile phone. I was still good, but I still shoved away from my friends. But the work site I think wasn't too bad.

With Margaret we weren't as close as before. She thought she had a postnatal depression after our daughter was born, so sex life wasn't as good as was before and we wouldn't talk as much as we did, but we were still together. I was busy with my work and my time was consumed there as well. But I sort of closed myself in; I didn't feel myself, because when you start to lose the ability to do things you don't feel yourself, you feel like not good enough as a worker. Everyone else walked around straight and I limped around. Margaret never, in any way, made me feel bad about it. She never made me feel that I wasn't good enough, but it was more just myself.

Even before the hips replacement I started to have a different outlook on life because I was in pain, and I started to smoke more marijuana, and started to withdraw from my social world. The first hips replacement was all right, it took me a little bit of time to recover. I've done it on the holidays because of the job that I was doing. And then, half way between I was gonna do six month time and take a little time off work, and before that, I lost my job. The company had bought out another company and they started to put their blokes in. Actually a person that got them a job with me, he sort of shafted with me. He said I was having drugs at work and stuff like that, which I wasn't, I was spiked after everything was done because I've been using heavy machinery, so I lost my job there. So then I spent a little bit of time out of work waiting for my next hips replacement, which I didn't matter because I was all right at that stage.

A.2.2.6 New house, but things started going wrong with my partner

We just sold the house because Claire wanted to move into a new place. So we bought us some land in another place with the intention to build on it. We sold the house before I lost the job. In between then we stayed at her mum's place with all of the family; me and my daughter, Margaret and the two kids. We stayed there until our house was build and then we moved in, probably 3 years ago. She wanted a pool, so with the money that I got from my long service I put a pool in there because that was what she wanted. I thought that would make her happy.

She wanted to get married and I didn't want to get married. I don't know why. I couldn't even tell her why. Well, I probably wasn't the easiest person to live with because I smoked marijuana and sometimes if I didn't get my way I threw things around. I was angry, not just with her but with life in general. I didn't look for help I didn't even know that I had a problem. I just I sort of, after falling off because of the pain, and I had aches and pains everywhere, but I've always being sort of that, when I don't get my way I throw thing around, more so with the start of the pain. Margaret had wanted to be married for a lot of years, but it didn't interested me, it's been so many years with her anyway without getting married, a piece of paper is not going to change… She obviously felt different about that.

I was in a way back gone to the tools because I didn't have the cushy job that I did; because I had to borrow a little more money, I did have to pay the rest of the house off. Probably I got even worse, getting back on the tools wasn't doing my hips any good. I went to work being in pain and come home being in pain; I just locked myself out. And then I started to drug me during the day at work, go and park the car in the morning, and roll a couple of joints, I smoked before I went to work. I smoke at times another joint there, then go out at lunch time to have a couple beers, and smoke another joint, and then go home to get on the bong. I was always just numbing myself out. I was just getting depressed because I didn't know how to do anything else my education doesn't, leaving me where I asked for. The far forward was going back to butchering, was not a choice because like the beef and even the pigs are heavy.

Margaret was sick of being with the person I was. I feel now looking back on it, I feel I didn't do things that normal people do. Like we go out to a function and I said: "just drop me off home, later on you can go". So, just being hanging just to go because I missed having more marijuana for three or four hours, or whatever the function took. Just around the drugs, you know, the drugs and she probably got sick of that.

A.2.2.7 The fight with step daughter (not a good chapter)

The incident happened when we went to Lorne. Probably it just started Christmas. They rented a house with her brother. It costed about 8 hundred bucks a week; I pay for one week they pay for another week. And the head wouldn't allow big dogs in; so my step daughter, or ex-step daughter, I don't know how to call her, she respected that, she didn't bring the dog into the house, and it was all right, I was fine.

Before that when I started to lose weight and having swedes at night, the doctors said that might be a sign of depression, so they started to give me antidepressants. Then a couple of months before Christmas I said to them I don't feel any difference with

these tablets, I am still sweating at night, I'm still losing weight. And she said, maybe is the dosage, so she gave me double dose, and after that I was hyper all the time and a little bit more agro, more agro, not my same personality. When you smoke marijuana you are more relaxed, you don't want to do anything, but I was going to the gym more, I was jumping on the bike and going for rides and walking, I was just a completely different person.

Going back to the dog, she was happy to leave the dog outside. And then when we got back from Lorne, one night she came back from somewhere and she put the dog inside and she started washing the dog in the bathroom, in the shower, and I said to her mother, I don't mind to bring the dog inside, but being a dog, put it in the laundry, there is a basin in there, you can wash it there. I was telling it to Margaret because she is Margaret's kid, and I've never really discipline them because I thought I'm not their father, and Margaret has always done the discipline with them. And my stepdaughter came out and she said: "oh if you have something to say, say it to me". She said: "I actually have friends out. If you, if you are a guy we would be able to work this out". She made it out like she was going to ring up one of these guys. I made the assumption that she was going to call this guy. I said: "call the guy, call him, I don't care, do whatever you want". Margaret left with the kids and she stayed at her mum's place. That night I got upset and I stepped on the dog's house and I broke the dog's house. And the next morning they came back home and I was still hyper; I didn't sleep; and we started escalating about the situation, and I pulled down the pool things. Her daughter called the police.

I got taken away, I got putted into the divvy van, handcuffed, and throwing on the back of the divvy van in a forty degree day, and they put the bloody heater on for me. Then they tried to drag me up, I told them off: "I got a hip replacement"!

A.2.2.8 Stopping marihuana

That was sort of distressing and ever since that I've been a different person as well. At the start I was a little bit angry, very angry at the situation. Putted in a divvy van, getting kicked out of my own house, getting an intervention order for a year so I can even go into my own house, I can't be more than 300 meters from there; at the start I couldn't see my daughter. Not even the fact that I missed my daughter's first day at high-school. I haven't got a family anymore, I've lost my family.

That anger is passed; I stopped taking antidepressants, I stopped smoking marijuana since that day on. I stopped taking antidepressants that day too because I couldn't get the tablets from the house. All I got was a pair of jeans and a pair of thongs; it was up to her; I didn't even have a top on.

A.2.2.9 Future life chapter

I'd like to get back with her, but I miss the fact that I've lost a good woman, and I've lost the ability to see my child, watch my child grow up. And I've realized that the simple things in life. Running to the garage to smoke dope just planning to do different things, have lots of social life, and now being at mum's, just seeing my brother and his kids and sort of get envy I saw that; and my sister and their kids, and

my other sister and their kids doing things and I think, if I had, maybe if I had been a different person and done other things instead of worrying about dope.

The future doesn't look good for me, doesn't it? I'm sort of in a crossroad in my life; I know that my body is not going to do what I've done through the last 20 years and I'm not going to be able to go back to the butcher either, so I'm a little bit anxious about that because I'm not trained up to do anything else.

A.2.3 Key scenes

A.2.3.1 High Point

The birth of my daughter; it was just a normal caesarean. I hold her first at the family, it was a special moment, I suppose that's the happiest moment of my life time.

A.2.3.2 Lowest Point

My father's death and the realization that I've lost my family. Put it on the same level as well. Obviously, as time goes on maybe I'm going to feel different about that, but at the moment I feel like I'm mourning the loss of the family life in the same way as the loss of my father.

A.2.3.3 Turning Point

The realization of having arthritis, I'd say and losing the ability to do things at a young age.

A.2.3.4 Wisdom Event

I can't think of anything.

A.2.3.5 Next Chapter in Life

Recovery, maybe travel, I've never been out of Australia. A different work. Sooner or later, even when I'm not ready at the moment, to meet someone, get a work and get back into sex.

A.2.3.6 Regret

That'll be easy, that'll be the current thing that it is stuck in my mind now, the loss of my family. Not being myself, not being able to see a better future.

I don't think that I'll ever be the same. I wouldn't go back to the drugs. The next person that I'll meet there is no way that I'm going to treat her the same way that I treated my ex-partner. And just like open up to people. I think even though I've lost my immediate family I'm getting to know my brother and sister a little bit more, because when I shut my friends down I shut also my family up. I started to spend a lot more time with them, as well as I've started to see my old friends that I used to hang around with years ago, I'm slowly getting there. Probably I talked too much about my ex-partner and how much I miss my daughter and stuff like that. But I think, talking

about it and giving myself a chance to learn with the men's behaviour group giving myself opportunity to grow, to learn different things, to get back to reality, back to not needing drugs or alcohol to change my state of mind. I'm at the stage where I'm a little bit lonely, but it is going to get better.

A.2.3.7 Life Theme

Life, the theme? You got to take the good with the bad. Just looking at my life I had a good, you know, thinking about it; I had good and I had bad.

A.2.3.8 Effects of the interview

The interview has been very good. Healing, because I've never looked at my entire life before. Hopefully in a years' time or whenever released, if you do need to speak to me I'll have a different story with a different perspective.

A.3 Sami's Life Story

Interviewer note: Sami was attending the program parenting without violence in parallel with the MBCP at the same agency at the time of the interview.

A.3.1 Introduction

A.3.1.1 Demographics and current life context

I was born in Turkey and then I migrated. My parents came in 1970 with my brother but they left me behind, and then I came in 1975. My father's brother is married with my mother's sister; they left me with my uncle and auntie because as a child I was pretty sick; I had gastro, but in the old days gastro was dangerous, especially in a place like Turkey. Herein the reason; they probably couldn't bring me because I got no medical certificate to pass.

I don't remember much, I think because I went through a lot. I have a lot of problems remembering things because a lots of back and forth. I don't know if my mind just shouted down some of the things that I don't want to think about; I'll tell you the story.

I'm 45; married for nineteen years, but I've been with the same girl; let's say for twenty-five years nearly. I have three children; 18, 15 and nearly 9. My wife is Turkish, but born here; she's a massage therapist. I have a little business; cleaning business, small; just for me. I do other things; I do a little bit of acting as a research subject.

A.3.1.2 How I ended up attending MBCP

I ended up here, we just, It's been up and down with my wife for a few years, and then the worse that you can do is to have alcohol, because it fuels the anger; so I just have a bit of too much drink one night at home. The kids were around but noticed no difference, because I was interested in my computer, having a drink, watching stuff. I got a bit drunk, too drunk. And then with my wife we had a big, big fight; my oldest daughter got scared and called the police. Probably was the right thing at the end of it because I wasn't in my right mind anyway, I was too drunk; so it was probably good thing at the end of it, I mean, I ended up here.

I wasn't happy to end up here but, once I came here, I actually don't mind the experience, just it's sort of hard for men to talk. You know what I mean? Because no one is at the same weeks; so, like I'm on 16th now and tomorrow someone might start new and he'll not be happy that he's there, and Fiona, the facilitator will ask us, and we would explain how our week went and all of that, and then people look at and then I think a bit uncomfortable to talk; the lower the weeks, less likely the people to talk.

This experience is showed me that we can talk; all men have that problem of not talking, especially to their wives. Like, I've been together so long, it's gone; you

don't work on your relationship, you got the kids, you're too busy with, and work and everything, and you forget about your relationship.

The police referred me to court and the court sent me here; they give you an option to come here. My wife dropped the charges but the police didn't drop the charges. Then you got like a social worker and he come up and he says: "do you wanna join the men's behaviour group? I advise you to join it; at least this way looks like you are making an effort to work on yourself rather than saying no, ain't got no problem, and then you are in front of the judge, and the judge might say one month jail maybe, or community work". So the options were; if you take this and you work on it then just be an order. I think normally they allow us to stay at home, but I can't do any domestic violence, or financial violence, or physical violence for a year; you got a year of good behaviour. So that's how I ended up here.

A.3.1.3 Cyclic arguments with wife increased due to parenting teenagers

We probably fought many times; couples, are not always up. It's always up and down, everyone argues and stuff. We've been together 25 years and probably over the 25 years we probably had maybe ten big fights; not physical, but arguments. Lately it got a bit more because my wife is under a lot of stress from the kids, teenagers; and for her it's easier to fight with me than with the kids; is easy for us to argue because she is always stressed.

To have kids up today, just being disrespectful and not doing stuff around, and mum is working, and then mum come home and have to clean the house, they haven't cleaned the room and she screams at them: "clean the room". And then they don't listen and then says to me: "oh, get the girls to clean the room" and I'm like: "what can I do"? Apart to saying: "girls can you please clean your room"? "No dad"! Then what do you do? What's the next? "Move"!

I've tried to change my behaviour towards them now. Like, my youngest daughter is now screaming a lot. I think it's all those feelings now, she is just feeling, and the frustration and anger. I'm trying to talk to her now, when I see she's angry and wants to scream I always call her and say: "what's wrong"? "I'm angry". "Well, because you're angry you don't have to scream". That's what I'm trying to do now, just trying to communicate with them more; from what I've learning from here. I've also done the parenting without violence program.

A.3.1.4 Early prevention and not too much power to the children

I've been saying to these guys that we should had been taught those things, men's behavioural change and dealing with kids, when we were at school, not now, because is too late now. The government does need to teach kids about feelings at high-school; it would probably be a good idea, but now the government suspend the money!

In Turkey when I was growing up - I've gone back a forth a few times-, parents, schools; everything is very strict; I grew in that strict culture. I went back in 87; we used to get beaten up and smacked around by the teachers, and punched and everything. When I went there it was just this kind of culture shock because I'm sitting there in class, teacher walks in, all the kids jumped up: "good morning sir"!

And I was sitting and they picked me up, like: "get up"! I go: "why"? They said: "he'll kill you, if you don't get up they kill you, is disrespectful". I said: "in Australia we just don't care teacher coming to class, we don't even say good morning, we don't even care".

What I'm trying to say is that in Australia is very to lay back. Lots of rights for the kids; it's very hard discipline in this country because the kids got all the rights; they learn all those rights by year seven, so they know; if you touch me I call the police, or if you do this I'll leave home, I'm going to Centrelink to get my own money and move out. It's coming to the point that they don't have to prove anything; they can go now and say: "oh my dad hit me, and that's it, it's true"! Even if I didn't touch them; that's what I'm trying to say, that's the problem here.

So it's very hard, disciplining is very hard. If we grew up in the Turkish bred we would have more respect; we were respectful, we were mostly, probably a little bit scared of our parents, but mostly were more respect to the parents. I think the kids today now do not respect anything but if not themselves. I said to my daughter the other time: "if you don't respect yourself, then no one is going to respect you; don't expect the boy to respect you if you don't respect yourself, so be careful with what you do and your reactions".

A.3.2 Life Story chapters

A.3.2.1 The agreement (0 years)

My father married through an arrange married, there's no love. My father saw a girl, tells his father, they find mutual friend, and mum and dad get engaged. Because my father did engage his brother comes into the house and saw my auntie, and then they ran away because his father doesn't want her because she is too modern. My paternal grandfather is monstrous religious; my father is also religious, Muslim; so they ran away and get married then.

One year my parent married my brother was born. Around this time my uncle and auntie got married, but they can't have kids; over two years they cannot have kids. Then my mother gets pregnant again and she says she wants a girl, she doesn't want to have another kid. My auntie says: "I cannot have any kids; if it's a boy, can I have him"? And my mother says: "if it's a boy you can have him". This is the story that I grew up with. I heard it from my grandparents. Only the last year I've found out that my mother didn't want to give me, was actually my father who gave me to my uncles.

So the agreement was; yes, if is a boy you can have it. So my uncle was actually naming when I was born, he named me after a soccer player of that time. Somehow the two brothers made the agreement, but the two sisters never got along, so I think my mother, when she got birth, she didn't want to give. Then, at some point, I started to get sick with bad gastro and vomiting. The doctor said he probably is not going to survive. After that my parents wanted to go overseas, to Germany or Australia; they ended up in Australia and I ended up sick. They thought they probably won't be able to get me across because of the medical certificate, so then my mother said: "okay we will give him". But actually when I was born they took out my birth certificate under my uncle and unties' name, so my birth certificate was never my real parents.

A.3.2.2 Survival and knowledge of one self (0 to 7)

My parents basically left me there, that's why the survival comes after the agreement as a child. And my auntie looked after me like their own child, and good feeding, doctors, and all those sort of things, and I survived. I've got out of the sickness and I'm 3, 4 years old; I believed there are my parents, so I don't know the truth at this stage.

I've started hearing things, that's why my knowledge of oneself. My grandfather, my mother's father, said to me: "they're not your parents; your real parents are in Australia". And my brother came for holidays, half way of my cousin, but then he said; oh, they're not your parents, your real parents are… This is unlucky for a young kid, very disturbing; so that's what the knowledge of oneself is.
My auntie then has her first daughter, then another daughter and then a son, later on, but because she had kids my parents say: "okay, now you have kids, now give my son back", probably in 1973, 74. My auntie says: "no, I now brought him up like my own son". So anyway, my parents came back and said: "we want our kid back"; they said no; then they went to court. They got some witnesses, which were not real witnesses, and they said they knew they aren't my parents, they said I was a twin, and that my twin had die and something like that. I remember going to the court and they gave me back to my paternal parents. I remember walking down the court room and coming down the stairs… This is why I say my memory is very sketchy; I think I've blocked; I don't know, I'm not a psychiatrist but, I'm telling you the story, so you know better than me I presume that I was under a lot of stress for a young kid learning who your father is; your parents, and then is like; not, they're not.

Then I lived probably one and a half year with them my real parents, back there, and then in 75 I came here. I remember leaving my uncles behind; it wasn't a good thing, I try to remember but I don't remember that much of that period; I presume it was probably traumatic. And the thing was that my maternal mother is very strict and my auntie is very easy and more maternal; my mother isn't, my mother is very strict; she is not very huggy type sort of person. As I come here I remember my auntie saying; just call her mum and just let it be, don't go there and try to be pigheaded and say no, you're not my parents and all that sort of stuff. So, yeah, I was told to say that, so I did and that what it is.

A.3.2.3 New world, new beginnings (8 to 15)

New world: coming to Australia, totally different, new language, new country, new everything; left everything behind, learning new friends, new school, very hard. Not wanting to come here, wanting to go back, I wasn't happy at the first initial because I thought my parents are there in Turkey.

I don't really think I settled at all, I was probably not happy because every time I went for a holiday in Turkey and I saw my auntie and all of that, and because my mother was very strict in this period; I was scared of her. She said you'd better

behave and do what I tell you, because she is very strict but she's still my mother. When I got there, my auntie, because she still suits like my mother, she's like: "here's your brother, do you want to name him"? And I said I don't know. Even though I knew what was going on I said to her: "I can't remember", and is not that I can't remember, I was just somehow scared of my mother.

Now I'm giving you another thing here; my father here, my real father is very pleasant, very calm and my uncle is the opposite; alcoholic, always bashed my auntie, so I lived in this violent. Do you get where I'm coming from? So I'm coming from 0 to 7 from a violent, not towards me, towards my auntie, he always bashed her and drinking, he's alcoholic, still today. He was nurturing towards me too, but I was scared of him indeed. So living with them I went through probably a bit of violence that I've probably blocked out as well. You don't look into those things unless you come into a men's behaviour and you digging more and more.

So I got back in Turkey for a holiday in 79. I knew what's exactly going on but I don't know what to do because I'm stuck in the middle, thinking before saying the wrong thing. My mother is going to get angry and I don't want to be in trouble here. I was only 11, for a kid is very hard to deal with something like that. I think I went to sleep until it was like four or five in the morning. My uncle, another uncle went for his wedding, he was probably younger than 29. So, four in the morning, pissing down rain and I said to my uncle: "I want to go to my auntie's house" and he said: "okay". So five in the morning I go, I knock on the door and my auntie is crying because I don't remember anything. I told her that I don't know, I don't care, and things like that. And then I said: "cannot do this to her; I do remember and I want his name to be" and she said: what was I doing"? "I'm stuck in the middle". As I went there I actually stayed with them the whole holidays. Even at that stage, I felt more comfortable with my auntie than with my mother.

I did improve my relationship with my mother, but there were always bit of that psychological thing of mistrust. I'm just saying, I'm not a psychologist but, looking back, thinking about that time, maybe mistrust and abandonment. And my brother didn't make it easier because he was very domineering; he was three years older than me, he was always bossy, always hitting me; it was hard. I've never been close to my brother, maybe because of the previous 0 to 7 years where he used to say you don't have parents; maybe I had resentment against him from that and never really bonded. My wife still says to me: "how can't you be really close to your brother"? I say: "we grew up like this".

A.3.2.4 Cultural change (15 to 18)

I went back to Turkey again, so again here a cultural change of now. Because when I went back I went to school and everything in Turkey, and high-school. I've done years ten to twelve. Because my parents wanted to go back to Turkey for good, and here I wasn't really studying too well, they thought, maybe a new start, new beginnings, some changes maybe with my study. But they couldn't do it there and they came back to Australia. I was there by my own with my auntie and uncle again to finish school, and I was very comfortable too.

Going to school in Turkey was a change, the whole school was different, the country was different, the people, what you do. I mean, I was wearing shorts and people were

spitting on me on the streets because you were in shorts, in a Muslim country. I got used to it by 16.

Manhood was bit different because up to 15 here in Australia everything is loosed; the girls kissing guys. I've never had sex at that age, that's the truth but, I had other things, but not penetration. If I'd stayed here it would've been a dramatic sexual revolution. In Turkey sexual exploration was finished because I was very much worried about being from overseas and everybody knew that you were different. I didn't want to put myself in a situation where someone might say: "oh, he done this to me" and I have to marry that girl.

At 18 I was culturally the same, but from 15 to 16 I was still that adamant; the way I speak, the way that I act, I was different. So I ended up having a few girlfriends but not physical girlfriends; hold hands, maybe a kiss in the cheek or something like that. I wasn't really intimate or anything with anyone until probably 17, just when I went to the palace massage to become a man.

I wasn't thinking in going back to Australia, I was there for good, but when my parents came back when I was 17 I couldn't stay the last year; my mind changed, I wanna go back to Australia. Because in any way you look life here is much better than in Turkey. If I had stayed I could have probably gone into Uni or something; I could've gone studying interpreting, I could have probably studied something else, like engineering because I was doing maths and mechanics at school. In Turkey, unless you gonna go and study and get a really good job you're not going to get a really good life. All my cousins there now are struggling, that's would've been the life if I wouldn't be here. I think in Australia is more comfortable; the future was more bright here.

I came here at 17 for a holiday. My mother was still overseas; my father was here by himself, so I came to stay with my dad for two and a half months. I got work, I got some money for myself and because when I was here I hanged around with my friends and saw the culture here, and then: "Oh! This is alright", you know what I mean? When you're 17 you have the girls, you got into clubbing, and the girls over there, and the cars and the girls. Then I got back there Turkey and was like, now that you've tasted that at 17 the whole day, you'd only want to go back. And I had a lot of friends here because from 8 to 15 I got a lot of friends, and 15 to 17 there I got a lot of friends. I have 300 friends in Facebook; everyone in my Facebook is my friend.

A.3.2.5 Coming of age (18 to 21)

It's a change of getting into adulthood and independence, working, earning your own money. I didn't try to get into Uni, I tried mainly mechanical apprenticeship. But I think I was too old for apprenticeship, and I didn't really like it because it's too dirty and that stuff. So I just went out and just got a job, factories, whatever is available; Toyota, Ford whatever.

My first job was doing my mechanical apprenticeship, but when I left out I went to Ford, fitting in some rubbers on the doors, and then I went for a holiday in Turkey again, and then when I came back I started at Toyota putting the engines. And probably around 21 I hurt my back in Toyota putting the engines; I went on a sickness benefit at that time.

It is also going from a teenager to an adult in the sense of drinking, going out, girls, smoking marijuana, partying; so that's what the whole thing. I should've call to this age "party time". Because that's what it was all the time; you just work, money, weekend, Friday, Saturday, Sunday going out; clubbing, girls.

But I never had a relationship for more than a month with a girl. I don't know if the whole thing starts from here; of rejection, not to be rejected, not really wanting to be in a relationship, not wanting people to get close. That's what my problem is to that, that's why I'm here; of me being so jealous of my wife, my insecurities of being abandoned, that's probably what my problem with my wife is related to that, that's what I'm trying to deal with at the moment: "alright mate, you lived it, okay; you come here, you got your kids, you're going through, deal with it, move on"; that sort of thing now. So I've never really had women and girls, I've never had a relationship, let's say. Every time I got into a relationship and the relationship got a little bit serious, I jumped out of it.

I was into the Australian culture at that time; beaching, partying, not really getting a shit, smoking dope; probably from about 21 to 27 I smoked a lot of marijuana. I stopped because I had children and I went back to study and everything. I was still smoking, but when I started IT, and I had to be fresh in my mind, I gave up cigarettes and marijuana all together. But I might still today, in a party someone smoking a joint and passes to me, I would have a puff, but on those days that I'm talking about I was smoking 24/7. I don't think that has to do with my psychological thing, I think is that the peer group that you hang around with.

A.3.2.6 The closer path: pre children (21 to 27)

21 is when I got together with my wife, and it was my first serious relationship. We were friends for two years before starting to go out. That's why probably my relationship worked, because I knew her for two years before as a friend. Because as friends you tell each other things, and then they know everything about you and you know everything about them.

She was only 16 or something when I met her we were just friends; and her coming of age. We went out for about five years before we got married. We didn't have problems with her family because we just said we were engaged, we're serious; and it's the culture here as well.

21 to 27 was 'the smoking years'; now my wife never said anything to me. She might have got drunk five times but, she's not really a drinker or a smoker. She had smoke with me, but not sitting down to smoke, she wasn't part of that. We were living together and my friends used to come over all the time, she would sit with my friends because she grew up in an area where we grew up together. Her cousin and my brother were very good friends, that's why I knew her since I was a little kid. But, because there's an age gap of three years, when you're 15 you don't look at the 12 years old, but they turn 16, then it became different.

A.3.2.6.1 The problem with my wife

It was a good time, but there was; I don't know, probably it was more me than her. Probably a lot of issues that I had to deal with before the relationship, about abandonment and feeling insecure started to kick in. Most of the things would've been the acting out of it, would've been the jealousy. Not that I'd ever stop her from going out with friends. I've only felt uncomfortable with it, but I never said: "no", or never burned up with her. Which it might burned inside of me.

My wife is very nice looking; lots of my friends say: "how did you get her"? So maybe that's a part of it, that's probably where the insecurity is, thinking: "oh, does she really love me"? "Can she go with another man"? That is where the insecurity and the jealousy kick off from that. That's probably why, the whole why I'm here.

Because for probably sixteen years she was at home looking after the kids, and then she got to this stage when the kids grew up and then went: "what've I done with my life"? Then she went and did massage therapy for two years of study; and then she went to start to working. But because of all my insecurity I said to her I'm not comfortable with you massaging men, straight out. That insecurity, which I have to deal with it myself, really is not her fault. It's my fault, but still I got to tell her: "alright, you want to do massage, I'd prefer you to do something else but if you want to do it, that's your thing'. She said: "I can do Muslim women and I'll do only women massage"; making me feel comfortable. Once she finished school, she got a job somewhere and then she started doing men, and I said: "it isn't to be men"! She said: "oh, you can't tell me what to do!

It sort of made me feel like; really? We've made an agreement, sort of. At least she could've respected it a little, I thought. Because of our culture and all of that, there's no way that any of my friends would allow their wives to be a massage therapist and massage men. Arabic or Lebanese friends guaranteed! But even some of my Australian friends wouldn't probably want their wives to do that.

I have a fight inside myself. I had an awakening, social conscience between 17 and 18. I've always gone to the socialist, not into political party but my political thinking, reading Marx and Engels. A friend of mine iced me a little bit on the religious thought. I was doing like a pure Muslim. He said to me; "where is God, what fucking God is"? And all that sort of stuff that annoyed me: "you've better think about it yourself", he said. So then I've got interested in thinking about it: "maybe he's right". I went more depth into it, so I went opposite to Muslim. But there's also an upbringing; my grandfather never brought any of his friends without their wives. You know what I'm trying to say? So I wasn't really strict; I was also saying about that she didn't go out with her friends and all of that sort of stuff. This is where this hot blood blown up; this is where the blood came from me feeling insecure of her massaging guys.

Then I'm like: "can I meet your friends at work"? She said: "Oh, no! Why do you want to meet my friends"? "Just a bit so people can put a face on a man, at least they can see me that I'm your husband and maybe they would treat you differently in a sense; at least looked at me". If I met your wife and I didn't meet you I can't really have respect for you, this is my mentality. It's like; if I met them, they might see me as a person rather than her husband. If I know you personally then I would feel really bad to try to take your wife out. That doesn't go in my books, my upbringing, my

thinking. It's like the same thing that I would never go out with one of my friend's sisters, because it's just like betraying his trust. That is where it comes from; respect, culture. Probably I've been mixing to it, but that's what I'm trying to say, why I'm here; she said: "I wanna do males and all of that".

You know that we have the circle of violence here, it's the, build-up; it's gonna blow, it's gonna blow! And then I said to her: "I allowed you doing massage on men, but then I feel insecure in myself anyway". But then she would come and say: "oh, there was a really nice guy I massaged today" and that doesn't have my insecurity. I know it's not her fault. Of course she knows how I feel; she knows that I'm the jealous type and everything. Wouldn't she know after twenty-five years together?
I told her from the start that I wasn't comfortable with her massaging men.

And that night that we had the big fight we were talking about this stuff and all that wasn't going too well. I was sort of a bit upset so I just said I'm going to have a couple of drinks, she wasn't there. "Oh, I have to go back to work"; nine o'clock at night she went back to work to do some paper work. I'm already agro, aggressive, so I drink a bit more. I don't remember because I drunk so much, which is not the right thing to do; it's the worst thing to do. It's kind of hundred, two hundred times my fault.

So, because I'm drunk I'm sensible enough not to drive, so I asked my daughter to drive me to her workplace. As I got there I said: "there's no lights". I went there and: "oh, get in the car, you're coming home". She was like: "oh, I had enough of you fucking jealous bastard", and all that sort of stuff, so it just escalated. And me being drunk; then we got to the big fight, and she comes home and we fight then. That's when my daughter called the police. I don't remember half of the stuff; all I remember is waking up in the police station on the floor in the police cell; to wake up benched; shit!

I don't normally drink that much, but when I drink, I drink a lot. Like; I don't drink once or twice a week, but if I got to a party and I drink from the start, I don't stop 'til I get hammered. I've drunk all of my life; I said, my uncle was an alcoholic too, so it could be subconscious in the mind of an alcoholic. And peer group; if your friends are all smoking and drinking.

A.3.2.7 Twenty one to twenty seven: the power of culture

Like I said, from 21 to 27 it was just sweet; two people living together. Yeah, we had fights; I was probably insecure, but not as much. That's because I was trying probably to fight that cultural thing with my thinking, social thinking: "she's got the rights, she's a woman, I can't force her; she's got her own thing". Rather than saying: "Muslim, yeah, women you'll walk behind, or you'll stay at home looking after the kids" and all of that. I wasn't like that. It was all like: "I can't control her, she's a woman, she's got her own rights, she can do what she wants"; so, that's crossing my thinking, I don't want to be and hypocrite.

But I can't stop that cultural thing. Ninety percent of Turkish men in Turkey will not let their women massage a man, so that got to be cultural. None of my friends will do it. But my friends even, I don't like this because the stigma that comes of it; I said to

her at the start that there's a lot of stigma with the massage industry. So when I go to my friends they joked with me, they go: "oh, your Missus does happy endings" and I feel uncomfortable, but I know they're joking.

Two weeks ago she went and got painted with a guy and I said to her; that makes me feel very uncomfortable. And she said oh: "I had enough of you". And I said: "no, I'm telling you that I'm uncomfortable with what you're doing". And she: "oh, you've gone to men's behaviour group and you've learned nothing". I said: "yes I have, I didn't say you done anything wrong, I said I feel uncomfortable with what you've done and I should discuss it with you and tell you that I feel uncomfortable rather than holding it inside of me, because this is the way you end-up blowing in a big thing, and in a big fight". I'm trying, but it doesn't help when she's trying to go the opposite, and see how I react. I'm still doing right dealing with all of my issues at the moment, but you can't start a switch; I can't just turn the switch off and on.

I think she felt that we probably grown apart. Before, 21 to 27, beautiful relationship; let's go to a restaurant, let's go into a pub for a couple of beers, anything, the spirit of the moment. But you can't do that when you got children, everything changes. Now everything is regimental, six o'clock we eat, seven thirty we wash the kids, at eight o'clock we sit down and have a coffee; maybe, if we are not tired, we'll have sex. It becomes like a mechanical thing, even the sex becomes mechanical. And sometimes I might not perform and then she says: "are you already done? Don't you love me"? Because you can't perform, but sometimes it's that you're tired or the psychology is not there. All women think we can always have sex, because we're pigs, you know, we're men. But I say to her sometimes psychology is stronger than the actual sexual feeling; if I feel like down or not happy that could influence my sexual thing.

So from 21 to 27 it was all spirit of the moment; do whatever you want, spend your money, relax and party.

A.3.2.8 Life with children and responsibilities (27-45)

When I had my daughter I went back to study, I studied for two and a half years and then I got a job, and then became, mechanical, more mechanical. I was still smoking marijuana around 30. Once I got my job it was mechanical, it was just wake up in the morning and go to work. I'm saying for her, I supposed, because she woke up to look after the kids.

We were both mechanical that's why we never had time for each other and sort of grown apart, because from there we were enjoying our lives 21 to 27, to totally then change it. Even today I say to her sometimes let's go out. We went out couple of weeks ago, we went to a club but we thought to get a hamburger and a drink before, and she got angry because we couldn't actually talk, we didn't talk; probably me more than her, because women tend to talk anyway. She was unhappy because I didn't talk. So she said: "is this really finished? We can't talk"!

Now I have trouble to talk to her because in the men's behaviour group what I'm learning is to communicate anything, any of your problems. Now what I do say to her: "I feel bad about you doing this, I feel uncomfortable". I think the biggest problem we have with conversation is that it taken in the wrong way all the time. We haven't

talk to each other and we've lost that bond. That mechanical thing in life what we gone through, and the kids are being more than eighty percent of your life, and you're running around for the kids all the time, so you forget about dealing with each other.

A.3.3 Key scenes

A.3.3.1 Highest point

Probably my children, when they were born and the feeling you have of; oh shit! I just made a human. So during the pregnancy and all of that you can't tell until the baby comes out the whole dynamics changes. That's a big significant thing in my life. It's just that feeling of immortality, thinking this people that got our blood, and they're always going to be part of us, and their children are going to be my grandchildren and their children great-grandchildren, and if kids are coming they might say two hundred years later; oh, my great great-grandfather Sami, he came from Turkey. Even my last daughter, I was just like, I don't know, it was out of the body experience; just that happiness and no thinking, nothing mattered.

The first time she was scared, didn't know what to expect because she didn't know how she was gonna be with the babies, and she spotted: "am I going to love her? If we gonna put her in bed are we gonna roll on top and kill the baby"? We didn't know because we have a lot of the unknown. Even though we had my parents and her mum we tried to do it on our own.

So that was a big thing of me thinking; well, now mate, is not just about you anymore, it's all changed, you can't just think of yourself now; you just brought this little person into the world.

We both wanted the second one; we thought it's a bit cruel to have just one kid because psychologically the kid will be no good; it's good to have a sibling to know your place in the world. The third was an accident and we decided to keep it. Only the second was planned, that's the truth, the first one wasn't planned either. My wife was starting a career in retail; she actually said I'm back in a month to work, we give it the childcare. She had the baby: "no", mother instinct.

A.3.3.2 Lowest point

The lowest part was the whole saga 0 to 7 in Turkey where my parents were fighting over me and I didn't know where my place was. Everything changed; very uncomfortable, very unsteady. Probably that's when the insecurity. Why would my parents leave me? I was just in knees, shocked when I found out about the whole thing I know in life, is all lie. So what the truth was, what the lie is? It is hard for a kid trying to process that. From that period I can hardly remember lot of stuff, very traumatic.

A.3.3.3 Turnig point

Turning point was the political social consciously waking up; because if you're a Muslim you don't question a lot of things, because you're not mean to question a lot of things. So coming from that closed mentality to opening the mentality was

probably the most important turn around in my thinking, in my relationships, in my way of looking at the world, and looking at situations. It was more about global thinking; before my awakening it was more just closed stuff, thinking about Turkish and Turkey. I think the awakening was community awakening. That was a big fight between cultural upbringing, religious upbringing and logical thinking.

A.3.3.4 Wisdom event

A wise decision was give up marijuana and recently drinking, I mean, I've socially now I've been drinking.

I think my wise decision has been sharing my wisdom with lot of ignorant people like my friends who don't like reading and stuff like that; sharing what I've learned with my friends. The wisdom probably was coming from reading, learning myself; Marxism writing was important in the awakening.

A.3.3.5 Next chapter in life

A.3.3.5.1 Harmony and inner peace (45 - future)
My last chapter 46 and on would be harmony and the peace. Is what I'm trying to achieve with my problems. And if I can do it with my problems; I'm not saying I might split-off with my wife tomorrow, because I'm a bit tallying the situation. I'm not really superb at the moment. I'm dealing with: "is she happy"? And I'm dealing with some others issues, but again, she's testing me sometimes, she says: "oh, you're not learning anything"; but I am, but it's very hard, is gonna probably take me ten, fifteen to twenty years of working on it, or maybe one year, I don't know.

I want to do harmony in the sense of harmonize my relationships with my immediate family. And probably I'll be finding it very hard, but I'm very close to it, to talk to my parents. Actually my wife told my mum that I had some feelings towards them, not good feelings. The other day my mum said to me: "your wife said this to me, but don't go to tell her that I told you". I don't know if she's trying to start a trouble with my parents or if she's trying to help me along. But I can't talk to her because my mother said: "don't tell her that I told you", because she told her in private. I would love to, and I should because it is a build-up of that circle of that violence if I don't ask her these questions that I'm keeping inside of me. Now I'm in the dilemma of why?

I'm thinking my parents are old now, and my father's gone nearly into full dementia, so soon he's not probably know anything anyway in the next five years, so it is time to talk. But I'm not a person who can't deal with my feelings very easily, I'm not a person to show emotions a lot. Don't get me wrong! I cry and everything, but sometimes I just find hard to express my feelings of cross.

I think that's the harmony and the peace I'm talking about; I'm talking about expressing myself, telling people, telling-out my life about something when I feel like it rather than keeping it inside me.

A.3.3.5.2 Therapeutic expectations about MBCP

My project right now is exactly that thing; harmony and the peace, and deal with the things I can while I can, no just cry tomorrow; my father's dead or my mother's dead; shit! I've should've talked to them about that.

The first step in this project would be to deal with my problems first, so I can deal with the next problem If I can't work my things out; and that's we have done everything here and I've learned over the sixteen weeks; if I cannot deal with my iceberg in myself then there's no way I'm going to be able to deal with any other thing that I'm worried about. This program is not going to be the end of it, there's no chance. I told them I'm at five percent, I'll be only sixteen weeks and I don't want to fix myself five percent; I'll work nine five percent to go. If the program is not enough the guys here would change telephones as sort of finishing off, so we can keep in touch and support each other. Maybe looking to a bit more counselling, maybe for myself, maybe with my wife, or relationship counselling maybe. Because now I can see my problem, but she can't see hers; but I can see hers!

I've done the parenting course, and the fathering without violence, which lots of things you learn about the kids that you've never really thought about and think; oh shit, that's simple but it's true. We've learned about the security circle where the kids as babies go and play and come back for a hug, top-up on their emotions.

This is an awakening of myself; I've never looked into myself before; I've looked at everything else. I can see everything and everyone else's but I can't see the problems in myself.

A.3.3.6 Greatest challenge

Being a parent and a husband; there's no one harder than that. It's just trying to find your place and the responsibility; it's all about somebody else and not you. Because all your life you grow up looking after the number one and then you're gone; I'm number six now, because I have two daughters too!

The challenge would be living with humans, different humans; my kids are different people, they have their own character and thinking; and my wife is different, so everyone is different. Being father is probably the biggest challenge of my life, the expectation of your kids being grown up being good people.

A.3.3.7 Greatest loss

The biggest lost is probably my uncle who died probably eight years ago. He was like a mentor, like a father. That's the one who took me to the house in the morning. So my uncle was more like a father-brother-friend. He was my uncle, but he was really cool; he gave me Marlboro cigarettes that in Turkey were really expensive; he was an engineer; and he had a little bit of saves, so bit of cigarettes and girls, going out; so he was more like a friend. He was a very smart man, studying; he was my mentor in studying mathematics, he always helped me out through school, technical drawing; friend with my friends; he said: "boys, come on and jump on the car, I'll take the kids around" so he made us feel important. When he died I was sad like my own father has died, so my uncle is probably the biggest loss in my life as a mentor or confident.

A.3.3.8 Regret

Probably educational lot of regrets, education that I should've done when I was younger to have a comfortable life after; but you don't think about that as a kid. Maybe I should've stayed in Turkey and studied. With my English, even if I came back here I could've even being a psychologist, or social studies, and the when I came in and do a little bridging course.

Probably the biggest failure I find is that I should've studied. I wasn't stupid; I just didn't have the motivation. I got the motivation later but it was too late, because when you got your kids it is very hard to study. I went back and studied, but I had to keep on the workforce rather than going to the university, like I did and IT diploma. My wife was pregnant when I was in the course. She gave birth on my last year of school, for the second baby, we had the two years old then. I did not have the luxury of saying I'll continue with this study, which is probably another regret; and probably another regret is not studying what I wanted to study. I didn't really like IT, but my friends and I went like: "oh yeah let's go", and IT was maybe jobs and all of that. I should've studied probably something that I liked; history, social studies, something that really interest you, that keeps your mind working all the time, something that it really grabs you; that's probably the regret.

A.3.3.9 Central theme

That's a good question! You don't think about these things. I don't know how to answer this question, to tell the truth. Probably someone who wasn't too selfish, who have tried to think of other people as well; other people's feelings, except in his relationship because is a bit hard on that, but community wise.

Someone who left a legacy of good person; troubled men, I know it's very hard while I'm talking about this I'm breaking my wife's heart all the time. Intimate relationship becomes very different to friendship. I just hope leave back saying yeah, he was a good person, he tried to do the best he can.

That's why I'm interested in harmony and I'm doing this study here trying to learn a few little tools to deal with. If we always fight, if we're not going to deal with our own and have not any bit of peace, then you're not going to be able to deal with any other problems. If you don't deal with your own, then there's not chance that you're going to save your marriage; if you cannot work out your own problems.

But now I'm more attuned with that, maybe I'm not going to save my marriage. Before that would've made me angry, but now I think; if is not going to be, it is not going to be, and there's nothing that you can really control, the other person's will.

A.3.3.10 Effects of the interview

I've never talked to anyone like I talked to you, not in full detail. It's probably a little bit alike to actually talk. That's why I've been finding the men's group good as well, because I can get things off my chest and no one judges. It's really hard to talk to people when they're going to judge you. Even my wife, she judged me.

This was talking without worrying, and not worried about the person being judgemental. I felt comfortable. I couldn't talk to my friends like this because they'd

say: "you're a dick head mate! Get over this"! But it doesn't work that way, is not easy to just switch off and on.

A.4 Robert's Life Story

Interviewer note: the interview was interrupted after two hours due to the closing of the program's premises. He agreed to continue with the interview on the following day.

A.4.1 Introduction

I am 54 years old, Australian citizen. I'm unemployed, but I'm looking for a short TAFE course. I've been married for eight years and a half with a Japanese women. She's 44 and works part time as facial massagist. We I have two children: a girl of 7 and boy of 5.

A.4.1.1 Getting into the program

Oh, you know, like basically I through something in my wife and hit her and it cut her and it distressed her and it distressed me. I was extremely distresses and shocked, not so much that I expressed anger or aggression, but just that I hurt her in that way; and so I didn't know what to do and didn't know how to experience it and didn't know whether I should go to the doctor or what to do. So I called man's referral, men's line, men's help line I guess and I just spoke to someone and basically went through what happened with the guy. And one thing leads to another, and he gave me a number, I called Monashlink I couple of times. I was kind of pretty upset when I was talking to them and I just wanted something, the next thing to grab onto and to move towards some kind of resolution I guess. I have been attending the program from the begging of this year. There is like a twenty week commitment that Monashlink asked me to make and then beyond that I can come monthly maybe for another six months.

A.4.2 Life story chapters

A.4.2.1 Great-grandparents

My father's grandparents came out here pre-settlers'; middle-class country people that owned a couple of farms and had a dairy. They were Irish Catholics obsessed with religion. Irish in Australia are, I am presuming, only slightly less than being aboriginal, only slightly more above. My grandfather, apparently left the family house at fourteen years old, this is around the time of the First World War or Second World War. He changed his name to Cooper, which is an English name in London. The name Copper meant that you're a free man of England. Also he changed his age so that he could go to the Second World War. He survived the war*;* he ended up later in his life sheering, working with land out in the hills in a little bush hut. Changing his name was almost like as I would tell somebody now: "my family at that point changed from one family to a new". So he invented the Cooper family; disaster.

I was quiet young, in my teens, when my grandparents from my mum's side died, and my father's parents died before I turned ten.

A.4.2.2 My father run over a child

Before I was born my father had an accident. My father and mother lived in a little house in a little street in Morwell. And my father at that time had a truck that was his business, apparently he was coming home, driving to their street and some kid came running out, the truck had a trailer. Apparently a child came out and swang and fell and was killed. Then they left that town and I think that underline was this sense of shame and guilt.

A.4.2.2 Kilmore years (1959-1966)

A.4.2.2.1 Happy times with my father
At that time when I was ten I was living with my parents I had two older brothers and a sister, I was the youngest. I don't have really clear memories of my father being there but I think maybe he was there. Maybe he was working if he wasn't there, maybe he was there and I was just sleeping. Before ten I got a couple of key memories with my father. I got these two memories, they were around the same time; of him just lifting me up and I was holding to his stomach and I was a little kid. I'm sort of remembering a bit of him being really caring, protective, yeah good man, which is kind of contrary to my usual memories of him. My parents divorced; there was a big problem with my parents when I was about twelve. The memory that I always go back to be'cos that was a mayor event and it had ramifications like changed my life, and changed all of my brothers and sisters lives.

A.4.2.2.2 Happy times with my mother
I got this clear memory of my mother, I think my birthday or maybe some other special time for me, and my mother made me a Zorro suit. I ended up getting a Zorro sword as well, 'cos we used to go to Victoria Market's and I have this memory of going there with my family, be'cos around that time my Dad was working, driving in and out of Melbourne. And at that same time I had an imaginary friend called Bill; people called me that name, they transferred from the imagination so it came a nick name for me. It was a good feeling going all together to the Market, a very good feeling.

A.4.2.2.3 Starting school
I started school when I was like four and a half. I was a bright kid. But I have a memory of getting into trouble. I was climbing one chain ladders, and there was a kid down the bottom shaking it and I am getting scared and I came down and then I hit him and then the memory went from that to being at the Head Master's.

A.4.2.3 Cohuna (1974)

Life in Cohuna was just like a really contrasted life it was some really good things and some really not so good things.

A.4.2.3.1 Good things
It was really country, we had horses and my brothers had motor bikes, cars that are not registered for the road; they didn't have licence 'cos they were to young but you could have these old cars or motorbikes and just drive them on your property and around the paddocks. The first time I drove I crashed.

A.4.2.3.2 Not so good things
When I first got there it was so hot that during summer holidays the thing to do was swim, and I got really intensive bad sun burns and passing out, and blisters pain. And being in grade two, in primary school and not really having many friends and getting into trouble with teacher like with the ruler; just school was not great for me. I used to get called stinky 'cos we didn't have shower in the house. I used to wet the bed, so I used to be called stinky, and that hurt my feelings I guess. I remember at one stage there was not a lot of money, there was not a lot of food and it was beginning to be arguments between my parents.

A.4.2.3.3 Good at Maths
I remember being in grade five in school and being really good at mathematic, getting really high marks. I didn't have a lot of friends through primary school; there's also this girl that used to tease me. In grade six my two older brothers were in high school there, secondary and primary school was like only separated by a football field. I started developing relationship with my brother's friends; not so much becoming their friends but just knowing who there were and stuff like that.

A.4.2.3.4 End of primary school beginning of high school
By the time I got to high school I started fighting, I was fighting and staring fights. Grade six I started smoking, like twelve years old. I was trying to emulate my elders. My father was a smoker. I guess his father was a smoker too. My two older brothers were smokers, my older sister smokes, my other sister smokes. My father was working away a lot; because of that he was away for extended periods of time.

A.4.2.3.5 Being a man and working
My older brother, been expelled from school, and was working. I was nine or ten 'cos I guess that was the cycle of the family. The great grandparents they came here, I quite learned somehow that it's work, it's not university, it's not studies, it's work.

A.4.2.3.6 Traffic accident with my father
He came back from working away. He started working doing Cohuna- Melbourne transport drive. One night I went with him. I used to go with him a lot but one night I went with him and we had an accident, and I was in the truck, we were both, but he ended up in hospital for a long time, few months. After that he seemed to drink more. When he came back from hospital he seemed to be unemployed and I was in grade six; I was around twelve I think, and it was around that time that I think he started having an affair. I like to put this view on it; he had an affair with somebody else to make him feel good, bolster his masculinity.

A.4.2.3.7 Disclosure of affair and the increase of domestic violence
My father had an affair with my mother's friend. My brother walked in on them having sex. That produced lot of problems and then became domestic violence situation. They both used violence; my father physically. This was a very traumatic experience for my whole family; many fights for a number of months and alcohol from my father.

The way I remember it was; my mother and father arguing and me my brother sort of coming very distress and saying stop this; intervening. I threw a cup to my dad one

night because I used to take sides; my mother's side I guess, and one night my next brother two years older threatened my father with a gun. Because also another kind of role that I took those days was to try to shape parents consciousness. My father he has other children, he left, when my mother and father separated and suddenly my family broke up, my father ended up staying with the women he was having the affair with.

A.4.2.3.8 My behavioural problems started
I was often away from school and when I was there I was antagonistic towards teachers and I just disconnecting and becoming a very aggressive individual 'cos I'm hurting, because my family is falling apart and there is nothing I can do about it. I end up in trouble with the police. I argued with one of my brothers at this coffee shop and then I jumped on my bike, road off swearing, and I was riding I went passed the police station and one of the police stepped in front of the bike and stopped me. I had grimy long hair; so that kind of trouble.

I broke into a house and stole a jar with fudges and coins in it and went to the local shop and bought cigarettes and lollies. I was thirteen years old, the cops came to my family's house in the night. Went to Chelsen's court a couple of times I remember. I had to go to probation at least twice, maybe three times before fourteen.

A.4.2.4 Traralgon

A.4.2.4.1 Transition to Traralgon without father
We moved to Traralgon and my father came there but he didn't stay there, so I think maybe my mother thought the whole family was moving but my father had another idea. Because he moved our stuff and she bought a house like with a husband wife package in mind but it didn't happen, and so at that time she was distressed, she was just totally falling apart and then she got working and stuff and started to put her life back together. My elder brother Sam is still in Cohuna married with a child and my sister no longer in the house; don't know much were she is, maybe Melbourne. One eldest brother moves to Traralgon but with his partner; so I was with my mum, a little brother around two years old, and a sister.

A.4.2.4.2 Falling into limbo
I stared high school but I got to grade eight. Having probation I got suspended from school three times and then, in grade eight I failed one year, failed that year from not being there and not working, (instead) just going fishing, swimming. So I didn't go into school. I became very depressed and very lonely and joined a gang. Dad, he wasn't in the radio anymore and my mum she was going to work and I was staying at home taking care of my little brother, a lot of time alone, I was just falling into this like limbo.

A.4.2.4.3 Back to Cohuna
I went back to Cohuna, just wanted to feel the weather again, run away, get away from where I was. At fifteen it's okay to leave school; it was the beginning of stepping into my own life. Grandfathers lifetime, fourteen, thirteen years old, father maybe the same, my sister seventeen, my eldest brother Sami he's working at fifteen. At fourteen, fifteen you're leaving home, it's kind of part of the processes.

A.4.2.4.4 Picked up by Police

I've gone back to Cohuna I was living just here and there. I remember that we had a place that we were sleeping, a farm house out of town and we were caught. We were pick up by the police one night and I'd stole a pool table ball; 'cos the thing was in those days to have a car and have the keys stick with the pool ball. I ended up going from there to a boy's home, like a reform school.

A.4.2.4.5 Boy's home (Reform School)
I was taken to the police station and then went to court. It been my third or fourth children's court appearance and the actual charged was thief; was put in prison, the boy's house, for four months. And that passed by a bit of a blue and I smoked a lot of cigarettes. I had more than two fights because it was a culture of violence. What happened was that there was a pecking order and you get above just by taking fights, 'cos I already been in fights in school. I had one fight with one kid in the boy's house where I hit him and he didn't even fight. I just punch him, split his lip and then I got into trouble.

I had post traumatic distress; I'm fucked up individual. But I didn't even know it; I didn't even know what sort of trauma was in my head. Like I'm kind of like sad in a moment and distressed totally fold inside and confusion and I can barely even get in touch with it sort of in denial.

A.4.2.5 In between

A.4.2.5.1 Back to Traralgon
After the boy's house I went back to Traralgon and started back into school. I was sixteen or seventeen and I went into a higher level. I was very smart but I think academically it wasn't that level. It was three levels above the year that I never completed; so I failed.

A.4.2.5.2 Initiation in sex, drugs and risky behaviour
Also at that time I was transiting into Melbourne. Transition from being a teenager to early adulthood. There was a lot of experimentation with sex, drugs and risky kind of behaviour. My brother, he was six years older than me, he had a motorbike that I used to ride and I was only seventeen. I had no licence. And there were lots of magic mushrooms and marihuana around this same time as well. That brother before me he'd started using heroin. He was being supplied 'Buda sticks' which were marijuana grown in Thailand and he'd go through my sister in Melbourne so he was selling that and they were smoking it a lot. I was smoking it at my age sixteen, seventeen and that kind of like wasn't my identity, drugs weren't my identity but it was a part of the forming of what was to come.

A.4.2.5.3 My sister went to prison
I was seventeen and my family is falling apart, my mother is in poverty and my sister she's going to make some money by importing heroin. She ask me: "do you have any money"? So I get her a hundred dollars, which for me was my whole, everything; and she was going to give me back two hundred. But again, I had no idea of, I had no idea! And she probably didn't have much more of an idea about it, so that happened we went there and she came back and somebody stole it from her because she's a child; alright and she's trying to make twenty thousand dollars of five thousand to bail her mother. That's a sad story, she comes back and someone stole it so she went

again and something happened with her and somebody else, and she came back to Australia through Gold Coast and she ended up getting caught and going to jail for three years or something.

A.4.2.5.4 Family consumption and trafficking of heroin

Also around that time my eldest brother Sami started using heroin. He's six years older than me, he's twenty two and I'm sixteen and I'm coming out of the boys home and he's using heroin, selling heroin, he's addicted to heroin and I remember staying in a place in South Yarra with him and he's a twenty two years old drug addicted narcotic trafficking gangster.

A.4.2.5.5 End of school

I went back to school, I tried heroin, sniffed heroin. I told one of my teachers and around the same time I was smoking hash and there was a lot of smoking and I gave another kid in school some hash. He got caught with it, he told that it was me and that was the end of my school, and stared working ordinary in different jobs. I was learning to sell marijuana, I was getting into small trouble occasionally.

A.4.2.5.6 Music in parallel

Around that same time as well I was trying to develop myself. I bought a guitar I went to take guitar lessons and I started doing that and then I stopped. I met some guys again, sort of older, and they had a farm house and they had musical equipment and they were going to be a big band. So I hooked up with them and learned to mix and they only preformed a couple of times but I did the sound mixing for them. And at the same time there was other friends because by that time I bought an electric guitar and that's when we went punk.

A.4.2.5.7 Got fined

I was driving this powerful car with a trailer on the back with my sister in law from Bendigo to Cohuna, to pick up stuff because her and my brother had moved. We're drinking beer on the way, I'm not totally drunk, but we came into the back streets of Cohuna and my judgments off, I don't have a licence, I'm probably only seventeen. Anyway, so I'm not really a accomplished driver, high way is okay 'cos you sit there and you go straight. So I was doing the roundabout but when I came around the trailer jack sniffed out, it came out. So a concerned resident saw this happening and called the police and I had a fine of five hundred thousand dollars, and I had no money and the police would come into my house if I didn't pay in a certain time, if I didn't make arrangements and commitments and I didn't. For a thousand dollars I had to go to jail 'cos I'm like a childhood probation kid, so I left because I didn't want to get caught 'cos I had no money.

A.4.2.6 Melbourne

A.4.2.6.1 Little bit of crime just for surviving

I stared crashing at houses sleeping on other people's flows and couches for a short period of time; just selling a little bit of Marijuana like twenty dollars here or there, so I could make five dollars so I could live for a day or two.

A.4.2.6.2 Older brother went to prison

At that time maybe my older brother was maybe in prison 'cos he ended up going into prison system and spending all that time in prison that is the result of risk behaviour that came out of drug dependence, 'cos drug addiction the cost forces people into crime.

A.4.2.6.3 Going to prison
I went back to Traralgon and the police came to my house and they took me to Jail for the thousand dollars, and I stayed in jail for like sixty days or eighty days. So for a thousand I owed the government, a thousand dollars, they put me in jail. The delinquency in a twelve or thirteen year old which was not even delinquency, which was the root of a kid that was in a difficult home situation.

A.4.2.6.4 Living in Melbourne and first girlfriend
After jail I went back to Traralgon. I came down here, to Melbourne, 'cos with my punk rock friends we would often leave Traralgon and come to Melbourne because we wanted to meet people, hear rock music. So the girl that I met; it was in new year's eve 1979, I was twenty so I met the girl and we were going to this club together, then I stayed at her house and then I kind of backwards and forward from Traralgon to Melbourne. Then we decided to move into an apartment together, and she had money, I didn't have money. I was in the government benefit and that sort of stuff. From that time I lived here until I was 47, so 27 years.

A.4.2.6.5 Break up with first girlfriend
After a couple of years we broke up because I met somebody else; like living with one girl having sex with another girl; that sort of thing. Then she kind of was having sex with my friends, destructive relationship or it just became. I hurt here and she hurt me.

A.4.2.6.6 Second girlfriend, starting using heroin
I had no permanent address again and at the end of that relationship I met somebody else, but also by that time I started to use heroin and the human that I met had also, was like the same age as me, and when I first heard about her I hear about the kind of music she liked and the kind of person, like the tragedy of her life, and I thought, just like me! She was stunning, she was gorgeous. I was still in the same apartment with my ex. Also in that timing I learned to make clothing from like jackets and stuff and I was working in a shop in Chapel street which was high in fashion shop making leather garments, I was learning to cut and sew. Then I bought a sowing machine and I started making things at home, I was making some things for a guy that was in one of the circles as well, that was a heroin dealer, so I'm making this jacket and swapped for heroin.

I wanted to save her, to have children with her. And she would say: "let's have strong healthy sons", touching me deep inside; like: "yeah"! "You're gorgeous, yeah let's have sex again, let's get out of Melbourne. I want to get you out of your drug addiction". And also my drug addiction was beginning there two.

It was never going to go above of that. She was working occasionally in the streets; and by this time I'm a drug addict, so I can't really get a job. So we split up and I met somebody else that was also in the same area.

And also during this time I tried to save my brother, help, rescue my mother. Rescue my mother had been I guess a thing from when my mother and father were arguing, since I was young.

A.4.2.6.7 Dodgy Jobs

I worked in dodgy jobs; handing out leaflets on the street and then I had another job selling departments that are clothing, fabric shop. Nothing was kind of like long term, ever.

I was learning to cut and sew, then I bought a sowing machine and I started making things at home. I was making like some things for a guy that was in one of the circles as well that was a heroin dealer, so I'm making this jacket and swapped for heroin.

A.4.2.6.8 Heroin addiction

I was beginning to become drug dependent. I was beginning to circle in the black market. I only perceived that things like bad or negative because of the restrictions that they placed upon me. I've been drug dependent, injecting anything repeatedly. Being drug dependent is not a great thing. I became addicted to heroin from the mid-eighties to ninety three. And being in the black market is restrictive as well. I never had the ambition to become like a black market kind of guy. I wanted to be like an artist I guess; I guess that under all that I just wanted to have some kind of expression, some kind of voice in my life.

A.4.2.6.9 Getting in the Black Market

My brother is in prison because he's committed robbery or he's not, he's just out doing purloin and stealing gold jewellery, selling it and I'm living of that circle as well. So he'd do crime and I'd get some money, some benefit some times. And the relationship between my sister and her boyfriend and buying heroin was just a part of another closed circle, so that enabled me to become a drug dealer, a heroin addict.

I wanted to have a place in the world and I wanted to have relationships with in that. And I met a girl with a car, she had a functioning life, she was attractive, she liked me and I liked her too. And it's just that what followed, that kind of mixed of unmet. Me mixed with drugs and alcohol and at that point in time as well because, I had like no family, no direction from family. I came into a society in seventy four, seventy five, which is sexually kind of liberal, I guess, with wife swapping and like; here I am at twenty years old in Melbourne, in the early eighties and I had no sexual boundaries, no moral obligation to that one person.

A.4.2.6.10 Third girlfriend

She also had an apartment as well and had a mother that was paying the rent. I ended up staying with her a lot, and then we moved out of that apartment 'cos we said we'd pay the rent, 'cos the rent was only like forty dollars a week. Then we were buying heroin from my brother in law, 'cos my sister is heroin, she's released from jail by now and she's back in Melbourne, and she's a heroin addict and her boyfriend is a heroin addict and they are supplying us.

With that woman we lived together for seven years. At one stage we just used drugs and sold drugs and read books, went to restaurants.

A.4.2.6.11 Finished school with the nurse
I had this feeling of "normal life". Both enrolled in a school and did a year twelve course, which is like the last step before going to university. She had ambitions, she wanted to become a nurse. We were sort of living a double life 'cos we had alia, which was behind our door, small time drug dealer trying to scratch together enough money for drugs every day. She studied and she became a really high level intensive care nurse. But she's still a methadone, I think even now she got one part of her life, but she didn't get the other part.
Towards the end of the seven year period I met somebody else; 'cos around that time I started having a break down.

A.4.2.6.12 Break down
I stared losing the plot; a really intense period were I became agoraphobic and intensely paranoid and in fear of police, prison. I slowly stopped doing what I was doing, dealing and consuming. Well, I was on methadone at the same time. I was working at the time in a casual job in a school and part of my job was to go to the supermarket and buy things for the school. I was trying to fly under the radar, I wasn't ambition, 'cos I was a drug addict and heroin dealer so couldn't really be out there. So I had this little job that was three days a week, and I went in one day and 'cos in those days smoking in the building was okay, I'd go up in the roof and smoke, cigarette break, and one of the women said: "where do you go for your cigarette break"? And I said: "up in the roof". And I thought then that the police were coming in and searching the school for where I was pirating drugs. Then I'd leave the school, and also I had no licence, so I'm doing a job where I use my car every day and I got no licence. I had this intense break down for about four weeks. Then I went out one night by myself to a pub 'cos I could sort of relate to music, to melodies I guess. I could hear the themes, came back into this here and now instead of leaving in fear which is projecting to future.

A.4.2.6.13 From my science nurse to the artist girl
I came back into the same bar and ended up with a girl picking me up. I didn't know that I had sold heroin to her through somebody else, she'd seen me and she decided that she wanted me. That's her sex life I guess. Her house mate I knew and I'm standing beside him and listening to the band and I'm kind of recovering by this time from the break down but not fully, and she ask him to introduce, so we got talking and she was like exotic, an interior designer, an artist. She was all this things that my "science nurse" I felt wasn't, not supportive of me in my hours, it's what I need. So ok, I'm thinking of this fresh image, I guess, and she ended up taking me back to her place. I stayed for a few hours, and then I was working after that, I was working in a restaurant so I would finish work and I would go to her place and I would stay in her house. We would have sex for a few hours and then I would go back to my girlfriend. I was kind of losing one relationship 'cos she still wanted to use heroin. I couldn't, I couldn't relate to that any more, I didn't want to. And the other woman although she had used heroin, she wasn't heroin addict, her thing was drinking. She had been addicted to heroin; she worked she has spending money and so I did too, so we would go to cafes and we'd drink so it represented me. I was getting away from drugs and I was doing something different, creative. I ended up moving, that relationship, did end

and I moved out into another apartment in the same area by my own. From '93 to 2004, I guess roundabout, I kept using drugs and not using drugs.

A.4.2.6.14 Rehab and unexpected pregnancy
From 1998 I was in a drug rehab in these suburbs over here, and that's when I started to get involved with narcotics anonymous and I went to Byron Bay. I've been in drug rehab for a month or two months. There was party to celebrate being drug free and I met somebody that was in the NA fellowship up there. And we spend a couple of days together in a house in Gold Coast and then she became pregnant at that time and I was the father of that child and at the same time. I was sort of in denial.

I came back to Melbourne, not using drugs for a long time. I'm working, I studied a bit then; well, I was about to study. Working at coffee shop in St' Kilda, then working in a restaurant and then the child was born and I went to Byron Bay for the birth of this child. I had this denial, until the DNA results came, when the child was about two years old. By that time I was back in Melbourne and I was with somebody else and I wasn't using drugs, but life was pretty chaotic. I had no sort of foundation. I was living in dodgy boarding house because I spend the previous years just selling drugs and using drugs so I had no skills. I worked in coffee shops and working in restaurants is a step up for me. Being able to take more bigger tasks and stuff 'cos I was in the beginning of rehab, but outside not within a rehab institution, within the society. I was going to NA a lot 'cos I started going to NA in 93 after 'cos I went to detox, went to methadone and everything.

A.4.2.6.15 Woman from Japan
The actual end of Melbourne chapter was 2006. For four years, since 2002, I'd been involved with a woman from Japan. She was going back to Japan, she found out she was pregnant. Within a week of that news we decided: "let's have the child, and I'll go to Japan". Historically the Japanese women traditionally go home to their families for the last month or two before the baby is born and live with their mother. She wanted to do that. "That's what you want? Why not, okay". Cos at that time we had had a relationship for about four years.

A.4.2.6.16 My brother died and I went on drugs again
But in 2002 my first brother died, and I didn't respond. That was a really bad time so I started using drugs again, and that went on for another two or three years. Even when I was involved with this lady, I was still using drugs but not as hard. I was also selling them because of a habit, I was also making like a few hundred bucks here and there. Anyway, I'd been drug free for a year and a half at that stage when she found out that she was pregnant. I went to live to japan. It changed my life.

A.4.2.7 Life in Japan

A.4.2.7.1 The wedding planned by my in-laws
Her parents were planning a wedding and she said to me: "what day do you want to get married"? They have a special holiday season in Japan called golden week. I said: "out of those three or four different days, how about the third, I like the third 'cos I like three", 'cos I had like a numerology context. And she said: "yeah, Ok"; so we chose that day. And it wasn't until later that I got to Japan, I'm getting married that

her parents were married the exactly same day. So then I kind of took this like, all right, you're my destiny.

A.4.2.7.2 Working as English teacher in Japan
So I started working full time as soon as I got there and it was incredible, it was just suddenly unbelievable. It's the longest period I've worked continuously for seven years, pretty much non-stop, and almost every day. And I went into that country without speaking Japanese! I had to work in primary schools with other people that had little English and we had to achieve an outcome within 45 minutes, I had to do that between four and six times a day. The first job that I had I was terrible, probably the worst ever teacher and I maybe only kept the job because I was contracted. I did learn and by the time I left Japan I was very, very good at that role, I really loved it.

A.4.2.7.3 Comfortable life in Japan
Japan was an opportunity where I learned from living. New life, had a wife for the first time, a baby. Her family lived nearby, her mum just put an apartment, so we lived in the apartment and we didn't pay rent too, we paid corporate fees which was like a few hundred a month. My life in a lot of ways was really soft, parents provided us with a car and fuel was paid for it.

A.4.2.7.4 Japanese intellectual friend
I was coming out of some subway station somewhere, going on my way to another school and I wanted to have a cigarette but I had no cigarette lighter, and I went to somebody that I saw just sitting on a seat outside a coffee shop which was very rare. Anyway, I just went up to this guy and did the gesture of: "can I have a light"? He looked at me and started speaking English; I thought, old Japanese guy in his sixty, I was so shocked and this was the first person that I did encountered except for the school. I said: "what are you doing? What do you do?" He said: "I write books". I said: "alright, wow that's great, I just got to go down to a school down here and work for a few hours and I'll come back and if you're still here". Because he said: "I write books and I sell them in that shop over there". "When I come back if you're still here, I'll have coffee with you, I'll buy one of your books, you can sign it and I'll support the arts culture industry of the planet one more time". And he was there and I bought his book; then I came back and we had coffee and we smoked cigarettes and we talked and we became friends from that day on. He was a Japanese intellectual. He became an important person in my life, kind of a teacher that teach by example, and just about life and behaviour. I've learned to take care about people, to really care, to consider more. I kind of learned it but I don't practice it every day.

A.4.2.7.5 Leaving Japan
My wife's incentives, I didn't learn to speak a lot of Japanese, our children were about to start school so we had to make a commitment to one place or the other; Australia or Japan. And I think my wife thought we might be better in Australia. She decided she wanted to go but then she didn't really put a lot of commitment into it. Once she decided I kind of got on board with that decision and forced it.
The Japan Earthquake, terrible problem with the radiation in the sea, so it might be best to remove children from that food supply. There was that, and back here in Australia I hadn't really been a part of my family, since the Traralgon days, a long time ago. And in the meantime while I was in Japan, in 2009, my oldest brother died. So part of me wanted to come back and live amongst me family again and be a

brother to my other brothers and sisters, participate in that bigger more extended family, and just to speak English. But I think maybe staying in Japan could have been a great idea.

A.4.2.8 Melbourne II

I don't so much regret it, but it's just I don't have full time work here; I don't even really have a part time work. Culturally Australia is like hostile. The apartment we rented it wasn't high standard but it was high price and asking the landlord to fix it. I mean, I'm not trying so hard to find a place here in Melbourne. I need to work, stablish myself financially and begin to build a life here in Melbourne.

A.4.2.9 Future chapter

A.4.2.9.1 The effects of the interview
The interview has been kind of healing, in a way. My past and the mistakes that I made myself, and the mistakes that were just waiting for me to fall into. Just the whole kind of life circumstances. I'm kind of reconciling my life. And I guess, and Melbourne. It's like I've never really been, felt a part of main stream Melbourne. It was sex, drugs and rock and roll.

In my future there's room for me to become a leader even you know, just within my family. Take on a more kind of leadership positive role. That's the only outcome of this interview, reviewing my life and putting it into more context. Like every day is a new day, and today and yesterday have been two kind of surprising experiences. I had no expectations being involved in a process like this. And I'm sort of happy that I could do it 'cos fundamentally, I guess, I believe in contributing to life, to be a positive impact rather than a negative.

A.4.2.9.2 Story of loses
A lot of sadness as well. Because of that life as well. One of my friends of when we were twelve years old died here in Melbourne when I was in my twenties. Drug thing. He died from that and then later my friend Robert died in Adelaide from an overdose and he was twenty six, and just sporadic, two brothers.

A.4.2.9.3 Get work or going back to Japan
I need to do some training in something to get work. I'm kind of like the future is short, medium and unseen so if I can get some work and at the same time generate some other income, then I'll buy a house in Melbourne or the edge of Melbourne. I want to grow a garden, vegetables, teach my kids were food comes from and get them out, gardening.
My wife said something about moving back to Japan and I said: "well, look we'll retire there"; 'cos Australia just changed the retirement age from 65 to 70. And she said: "if we can't buy a house here there is not much point of staying here, we were financially better way off in Japan that we are in Australia"; we are always struggling for money in Australia because I am not working full time.

A.4.3 Key scenes

A.4.3.1 Highest point

Japan and being there, living there, having children, marriage. But there's sort of flash points where there's like one day I left a school in Osaka, in the first six month period while I was there, and I was travelling on the train and I was just sitting up there in a train and I thought: "fuck! I mean, I'm here on this".

A.4.3.2 Lowest point

Probably the lowest point was hurting my wife I was for the aftermath fully present. There was no drug, I wasn't being taken by the police, I wasn't been reward for, there was nothing, just this. And I had this seven years' experience of being completely present and responsible for myself and I sort of come to this, so that was probably the lowest point. Hurting the person that supposedly the most important person in my life. And the further lowest point, the impact that my behaviour has had in my children and the outcome of that in the future. At the moment my son he gets angry, 'cos my wife and I were arguing a lot for the last six years I guess, seven years, five years. He gets angry and I think it's a response, he doesn't know how to, he gets similar to what I use to do but now I kind of do it differently. Get to a tipping point and then get angry, and my wife does it as well. To some extend and I see he does it. So now I'm trying to create scenarios were I asked him; the other day when he was in the twilights between being awake and being a sleep, I thought I'd kind of get into his consciousness and say, look, if sometimes you get angry can you try and tell me first, and so I'm trying kind of like remap his mind.

A.4.3.3 Wisdom

In the future there will be some wiseness (wisdom) I think.

Maybe there was wisdom but, maybe there was just an absence of bad luck, there wasn't good luck, there wasn't wisdom there; just wasn't bad luck.

I got shocked into this life with my parents in the difficult crisis they had and that was just the beginning of a series of events. I've tried to educate myself and work, but I think just the combination of sadness, lost and grief; I developed skills of escapism. And never having a home base. I think that in the teenage years selling marihuana to friends and having my first can of marihuana when I was twelve years, old thirteen years old.

A.4.3.4 Life theme

About learning alone.

A.4.3.5 Effects of the interview

Get the feeling that this might be important, sort of catalyst in my life. Maybe I'll start writing on how life can evolve, can change.

A.5 Veer's Life Story

A.5.1 Life story chapters

A.5.1.1 Childhood

I was born in India. I have two siblings, two sisters. They both are teachers from their professions. My father was a railway officer, he is a very genius person, very good, a role model in my life because he won seven gold medals, so I'm very happy to be the son of my father. My mother, I'm also blessed with her. She is a very decent lady, she inspires respect. I had like a very happy childhood

So in India the people have the three medium English; and their mother language. They have to choose according on how much the parents want to spend on their children's. So they preferred we go to the English medium. They spend ample amount of money on our studies. There is no government founding thing in India. If you are like top of the list, like very studied person, they got the scholarship but rest of the persons in India this is not possible.

Personally I was a very shy kind of boy; very less speak. Like not in touch with the people. It happens in these days as well with me. I'm a very good thinker, I always think. The people say: "where are you"? "Because you are not listening to me". But I am listening to them, but I'm thinking what kind of person he is. I like to observe the people; if they are good to me or not. If they are good, I will do the friendship with this people. If they are not good, then I will play with them.

A.5.1.1 Student life

A.5.1.1.1 Focused on my studies
That is my first part of life; my second part is student life. I was very good for the teachers not first of the class but, there were forty students in the class. So my position was always in the first two, so just because of these habits I have chosen science. When I chose the science, like, no one has a science background in my family, but it's very hard. I go for the teachings, and it's like very heavy books because everybody knows that mathematics of India and Pakistan is the toughest ones of the world. But I have done it in a proper manner. After that I chose as part of my student civil engineering; doing the constructions and all these things. This is a special kind of work where you calculate quickly how many bricks you need, how many cement, like bags of cement.

And I have done a little bit of engineering as well because my father is from the railway background. I have done extra engineering, like two years course correspondently. So I have done the graduations as well, because I'm like very keen to learn the history things, so that's like an Arts school. And in the National I have played hockey and got the medal for the best technical student. So these are like my qualifications, so I have big bunch of certificates.

During this time I didn't have a lot of friends around me. My parents, they gave me inspiration all the time: "till you are living with me just focus on your studies, just focus on your game, the rest of the things are not part of your life".

At certain stage my colleagues said like, if you keep going for the studies, for the game, it is hard to continue your studies because this is the last level; and if after that you want to continue with your game, then chose the other part, the arts group because science students is a dead lock. So I have finished with my sports, but I'm happy because my father said it's a lot of hard work in those sports.

A.5.1.1.2 I went into science in spite of the difficulties and sacrifices
I think that the only turning point in childhood is that my father was a simple graduate and he didn't want me to pursue my studies as a science student, because there is no one in our northern country family who can give a hint on how to clear that science subject. But I have chosen the science subjects. This one is a turning point in my life; the rest of things are normal as other people.
My father wants me to do the Arts school because according to them it's like if you get stuck in the middle of grade twelve it's very hard; because the people that went in to like bad society. But if you have capacities and if you think that you can do it, then it's a lot of pressure from my side. But I have chosen the science things and that's why I'm here.

In India there is always some pressure on the father because in India there is no help from the government side, so it is a lot of challenge because we have to listen and obey to parents according to their pockets. And for the girls, they don't want to send the girls to science school because of lot of religious restrictions. So we have to listen. If I'm not wrong, not less than 75% have to listen to their parents, about which part they want you to go and which part they easily afford.

So it's a pressure on me as well, but not so much because science you need tuition. But I did the commitment that I would listen to the teacher in the class and that I wouldn't go to the tuition as much. I will apply in the morning time, because there was a section in the computers for the tuitions; like, if I get the first station in the morning, like 4 o'clock, then they charge less money, so I would always wake up like at three in the morning. So this challenges every student, every student face in India.

Studying is like a very hard time for me because that adolescence period just started, so a lot of dramas in your brain as well. You have the pressure for your career because everyone knows that after completing the career if you won't get the job, the rest of the life you know, it's gone. So it's hard time; for nearly five years I struggled a lot.

My parents said; we are giving a lot of money, so don't go to the market, don't go to the shopping, spend the time at home, always studying like a book worm and all these things. Because you have two sisters also, so then they got married and you have to look after them, so because of these things these five years of my life, my childhood is, we can say –excuse my manners- is fucked.

I'm thinking these days that the life of the male in India is more tough compared to female; because lot of people they're house, wife, so there're lot of pressure on

earning money. So that's why they spend more money on education because we can say that he is the man of the family. We have to look after our parents, we have to look after our kids, we have to look after our grandparents as well; so we don't have much time to spend to live with ourselves.

Because of this I missed the precious time of my life, young age, I want to play with other people. In Australia the people, the children, they don't have any stress on their brain. I have seen wars and fights, arguments in front of, like my father does, but when I would think about the children.

Comment: Life in Australia is too easy for the children. But how come to the life in this country, the lives of the children are very, very easy. So they have to choose their career; if they want to play music then the government is looking after them and everything till grade 12, even the parents are getting the money, it's not a burden. If you are happy it is alright; if you're not happy we will go to the bank and get the new account number and we will put the money straight in your account. 90% of the children they give their own account number and get the money straight away from the Centrelink. 90% of the children don't have that much mature brain, so they spend the money on the drugs. They are ruining their lives in Australia because they are young, so they don't want to work; they normally start thinking of the education at the age of thirty.

A.5.1.1.3 Origin of psychiatric problems due to the lack of entertainment
I think that on that stage some psychiatric problems things to do with me. Like, it started from very early years. We don't have that time to spend with our friends; entertainment starkly finished for the five years, because engineer is a five year course. Two years for the father of science, for the grade eleven and grade twelve, so six years continuously. Continuously very hard, hard work to pass the courses; and I stared engineering at the age of 18 and finished everything at the age of 23.

A.5.1.2 Career

A.5.1.2.1 More sacrifices in first job
When I finished my engineer and everything I was thinking that I would get a good job, in the government sector in India. Because India is the second largest populated country, so a lot of struggle for getting the job, but I got the job, but it was a private job.

After finishing my studies I was thinking that the life would change, but life is not like that. Because in the civil engineer we have like, the shift starts normally eight in the morning for the labour class and finish at 6, but engineer you have to go one hour before the work will start. So we have to go to the work one or one and a half hours before with not extra money; it's a fourteen heavy hours in a day on the site, there is no holidays, no payed leave, no sick leaves. Entertainment: nothing.

A.5.1.2.2 I started to drink
At the age of 27 I started, I used to take like a turning point in my life. There's again a turning point in my life, I used to take the drugs, not drugs, I was starting to take three or four swigs of whiskey every day, after work; when I was on my way to the home. Because in India there is no law, you can drink and drive, you can do anything. You

can drink on the work, they have no issues if you work properly, if you're drinking, then it's not a problem for the boss, there you can do whatever you want to do.

I'm not alcoholic, but I started with two cups, I increased my capacity up to the half of the bottle. Half of the bottle is a good hell of alcohol if you are taking half of the bottle every day. You need a good amount of money as well; you have to have good health other way you lay down.

I was living with my parents, always in India. But my father said you are young enough, you are entitled to drink.

After that, in the late twenties, I was worried for my better future, because that part of my life is not good. Because I was spending fourteen hours in a day, because for one month, one year, two years it is alright, but if you are keeping going like this for the rest of the life and it's, kills me.

Comment: Hard and unfair current work. But the life is not easy anywhere; here I'm, I just slept two days. If I show my time shift now, you would say oh my god, I want to see your salary as well because I don't understand how do, how I have done ninety hours in a week! So I have to pay like big amount of tax because salary remains the same.

Going back to the twenties there were no the parties, but when I finished work, lot of the people, the contractors, they said: "okay, we will enjoy today, let's have a drink after work".

A.5.1.2.3 Turning point in career
And the turning point came in my life because my boss was very happy with me, and he said I knew much more than engineers because I was doing management; my communication skills is very important, so according to my boss he said my communication is very good. The labourers are very happy with you and you are listening to the people in a very accurate manner. In a number of times the people came just to check around and have a look, but they choose to buy the flats. You have a convincing power, you convince the people in a very good manner.

So we started the work in Russia that year. I said: "I don't have passport", and he just laughed at me because in India everyone wants to go overseas, but I never planned to.

Comment: Restrictions of living in Australia and the discomfort of having to attend MBCP.
Even living here I'm thinking maybe in two or three years; I will go back to my home country. Comparing the two countries, if a do have good money, it's better to enjoy it in my country. Here if you have money, you have no time for getting to spend the money on yourself. If I want to drink today, I do have night shift today. If I drink at morning time, I can't, because I have night shift, I can't drive. I can't come here to the program, there is norms everywhere!

There is a restriction everywhere. You can't drink at home; that is abuse to your wife; she makes a call and it's like he is drinking at home and it's like a psychological pressure on my son. The State visitors say; why have you done that? Come to the

court! Last night I have done the night shift and we just want to enjoy; and these things are a smoke screen for them, they don't want to listen.

Even in the class, no one wants to attend this class, honestly. Because they spend one hour on things that you already know. And after that, if you want to say something, that we are not the bad people; because you can see that everyone is very educated, some of them students, some of the people that came by BMW; like these are the smoke privileges for them, these are the smoke screens. Nobody give us a room.

A.5.1.2.3 Turning point in career (resumption)
Brought back to the issue by the interviewer I applied for the passport and I got the visa for Russia. I went to Russia, I got the ticket, it was in business class and I'd never travel in aeroplane before! I spent seven months in Russia. When I came back it's very good memories. There was a big shopping mall we had to construct. I used to go to the place and I was thinking on that day when I was on the top of the floor, that I had something. I'm an engineer, people are looking at me. They came to the airport, they received me. I was proud of myself, proud of my parents, proud of my teachers, and then I would make a call to my parents, my teachers, my friends; thanks for your help, thanks for guiding me, because the people are watching me. So I enjoyed that part of my life when I've been to Russia, when I've been to Dubai. I stayed five months in Dubai and eight months in Afghanistan. I was alone at that time, not a friend.

After we finished the work we came back to India. My boss was still very happy with me. He said this time it's not a work permit, you go with my son and I want to spend a huge amount of money in Port, it's the top part of Australia. But you know, if the people have good money they don't want to live in the overseas, and his son, he came six months before me and he went back after three months, and he said: "no, I don't want to live there because it's a lot of restriction in this country".

Comment: The restrictions of living in Australia and having sleep problems. The people think you have much room but to me it's not like that, not much room, not much room, you don't have time to get sleep, you don't have time to get food in the proper time. It's like very hard compared to our own country. We don't have money but money is not like everything, is something.

What I've learned from my previous experience these days are a hundred times better than the time I'm spending here. Because I have problems on my sleep. This thing needs psychiatrist. I've been to the psychiatrist a number of times here in Australia just to get the sleep because, if I drink, frustrations come out sometimes, so that affects my family. I live with my children. My wife says you are very good man, I can always say you are my role model but after drinking I don't know what happens to you; it's our fault that something wrong happened in your life? See? You are crying in front of my son! So this thing is not good, so I have chosen to go like take pills.

If you are living in Australia; if I want to spend time with you, so if you want to get off morning time early in the morning, so there is no time. There is no even the people from India, they don't have much time because the people they drive taxis, so taxi drivers they don't drink, they don't drink because if you drink with your friends

at seven in the evening, so definitely for next twelve hours you can't drive. I drove taxi for three months, but it's a very, very bad life. No, life in Australia, according to me is very harsh.

A.5.1.2.3 Back to career: coming to Australia (resumption)
Brought back to the issue by the interviewer I came to Australia as a permanent resident. My boss said; it is goal to settle down yourself; my son went to Australia, he came back but you go as your own, we are not responsible for your job because my son is not working there anymore, but it is good for you, you are not from a rich family, so focus on your career, just make money and come back. We used you a lot for five years, I'm very happy to pay the amount to go to Australia by my own pocket; you go there, earn money and return that money to me.

He gave me not for the ticket; there are 295 dollars that I have to deposit as a fee for the immigration and there are a few more charges as well, so he gave me, according to Australian, 25 hundred dollars, it was a big amount. And finally I got the permanent residency and I came here.

A.5.1.3 First years in Australia: no job, hard life

I arrived to Melbourne and there was an old work for me, I was thinking, but there was no job because of those days there was a lot of Indian moving here. I decided to go where the farms are; three hundred kilometres away from the Melbourne. I have nothing in my pocket, and I spend like nine days on the road.

No shelter for me when I was at work in the farms, but it was a very hard job for me, it's a physical work. I've never done physical work overseas, never done it as an engineer, so my hands are like very soft, so everyone noticed it, like this guy is not capable of doing this work. Even the contractor he noticed and he called me: "you are wasting our time because you are not doing the work as quick". I noticed he was right.

And by luck there is a government founded courses in Australia. But by mistake, or maybe you can say it's part of my destiny, I have chosen the security guarding because I have lots of friends in India who work in the police department. I think; I can do this one easily, I can do this one because I'm very keen observer; but in here the security guard they don't have any rights. It's a very boring job, but I'm enjoying now because it's like no politics, you work in different sites, so there is like no politics in the staff, because you are new to everywhere. You have to come and stand in the front of the gate, so I speak very less. I think I'm a very common good person.

It was a new law, just introduced in 2007, that they are not going to give the security lessons to anyone that is new to Australia (so) we need at least one year living here in Australia, then we are authorize to do the security lessons and then you need like two references from the big people, like accountant, doctors, psychiatrist; so it was a very hard time for me to spent the rest of that eight months; no shelter to live, I have no food to eat.

I was alone. It was a very bad summer, so mainly I spend my nights in the laundry shops; they open twenty four seven, so I put some clothes in the machine and use the one dollar coin and sit there going back and come back that no one notice that this

guy is coming. So those six months is very tough for me; then I got the job in the service station. I worked as a cleaner; I have to look after the service station. I have done that work for four months and I have spent them, I have saved the money and send back to my boss.

A.5.1.3.1 Job as security guard: going backwards, the feeling of being alone and the conflict with his wife

After one year I got the job in the security industry. There was a good reference given by my boss, he knew someone that owned the security company and he help me get the job. My first shift was in my city bank; that was with a full uniform; tie, everything, and I was very, very excited and very happy that this is the second part of my life. I was like; childhood, I studied hard to pursue my studies and I got engineering, after that I got the job in my field and they sent me to different parts of the world. I was alone and I killed myself to settle down, and now where I'm? I'm just a guard. So I did the seven day course to get this job, so it was like going backwards. But I was happy that after fifteen days I got the money and I put the application to get the house, because we need our money to show the real state that we are earning.

I was a bit upset with my parents as well at this stage because in India the parents are greedy, honestly they are greedy. But I thought: I will fulfil the requirements of my father; of my family; and then I will focus on myself and I will stay calm. And if your family says to my wife how much I'm spending for the family, and she said you are killing yourself to send this money, then why did you get married? If I raise my voice then I'm here in the program. You're alone, no one is understanding you; no one is focusing on you.

I'm thinking that I am going to leave it to nature; because I'm blessed with a son. I don't want to lose my family because I spend seven precious years alone, just to settle myself. If my family goes; where do I stand? I come to maintain again my family in India. So I'm not sharing the things with my wife now, she thinks you are putting pressure on me on behalf of your parents. If I say: "I'm tired, just go away" she says: "you are not giving time to me, so where is our relation"? So if I'm sending money, it's again a problem.

This one is like when I get the pills from the psychiatrist; it gives me the relaxation for the five hours, but the things remain the same. I got the lesson from the people that help to stop consuming alcohol; the people said: "drinking is not a solution to anything, it's a temporary relief". I think the same way, if you are alcoholic you are enjoying, by a couple of drinks very frequent manner is good, but if you lay down then you are alcoholic.

So we don't have time to rest; the problem with us people is that we are running after the money; this is a bad thing. And the expectations of the people from you is more, and this is a bad thing at my part. I allow people to expect more if I'm the normal person, I don't think then why I came here; for me eight hundred dollars is enough because I change from unit to big house just because of my son, I pay nine hundred dollars. It's easy to pay nine hundred dollars but I have selected thirteen hundred

dollars just to get the massive house, big house to make him play; so five hundred dollars for him. So if I'm not taking responsibilities, if I'm thinking about myself then my life is easy.

A.5.1.3.2 Violence against spouse, the futility of MBCP and the sense of shame
In my class everyone is very, very educated. I think that the people that have less time for themselves, they are more sensitive, they don't have time to enjoy, very less time to spend with the family, and the family is pushing and pulling everywhere, so sometimes the people, they get violent. But they never looked like. How they become violent? I was also shocked on myself. How I have done the violence with my spouse?

I've paid a lot things, because 22 weeks I don't work on a Mondays, I'm losing money. Like it's very hard to tell the people where I'm going to during this 22 weeks. I think it's an entire bitch, it's not useful. This is not useful. You have to change yourself at your own. I think to myself that I will not be a part of this one anymore. So they called us to come here, we came here, they told us the different parts, smoke screens…not useful for us. But what I've discussed with you it's not a smoke screen, it's real life, it's like a big, big journey, but a big journey is a smoke screen for them.

The useful thing in this course is we feel shame, we feel embarrassed, and they tell us; in the future you don't do this and these things, otherwise you'll lose your family. Even I got the notice from my company that I will lose my job if it is done in the future (the violence). Everyone in the class wants to finish ASAP (the program); they don't want to spend court orders. Some people are sad but some people are happy that they are involved in this, and they are paying whatever they have done. The good thing I have noticed, that now in the future, if we feel some problem we will go for a divorce, not to say to anyone don't do this, don't do this; I'm getting rid of this. Why are you doing this to me? Why are you saying my house is not good, the fridge is not good? What I earned I'm spending; what else can I do?

A.5.1.3.3 The need for alcohol and tension with wife
So coming here it's thinking all the time about what changes we have made. And after this one I have been to fourteen session to psychiatrist, so I kept going with the psychiatrist as well. But I have noticed the psychiatrist, when I've said I have problems with the sleep, she said: "what did you use to do to get a sleep"? I said alcohol. And she said: "so you are not using alcohol"? "No I quit that one because my wife gets upset, because she said: when you came home I want to share the feelings with you, but you go to the kitchen quickly and take three packs. You're alright, but I was not alright with you because I think you are not here with me".

So if I quit the drinking, how I recover myself from all the stress I have got because it's a ten hours standing job? For me the alcohol is just how we men switch off. But my wife says: "you also disconnect from me, you wait for the sleep and then you have to go back to work". You can't make everyone happy in this world! But that tells me from her point of view, if I put my foot in her shoes; but from my point of view so rest, sleep, not like a permanent job.

A.5.1.4 Future life chapter

Next chapter. I'm thinking after I have had problems in my life but not much, I leave it to the Nature!

You are not authorized to say anything to anyone, not to your parents; you have to listen and obey them; for the wife as well, because it's your destiny; no one is perfect in this life, we have a lot of short comings, this is adjustment things in the busy life, adjustment is very less, so we don't complain, we can't change the world according to you.

Doing meditation I have learned one thing which I want to put in my life as well, they said: "if you are in the problem there is two ways to solve the problem; one participating to solve the problem, the second one is run away".

You are not part of this one it is beyond your brain. You can't understand the people you look after, the people you love more. I love my family, that's why I choose to do the 22 week program, otherwise my marriage is finished, so it's hard for me, there is no criminal record against me and they said: "okay go". I want to change myself, that's why I accepted this program. So I'm now like second part of things, I'm running away. The thing I've learned in this course as well is if you want to look after your family, you have be careful to yourself as well. So I'm thinking focusing in the future on myself better; leave it to the nature, the nature will allow me to spend more healthy time with my family.

A.5.1.4.1 Better to go to the psychiatrist
That's why I'm not saying: "oh my god, this is because of this person, oh my god, she is the master mind behind that or my mother in law". Accepting myself, the wrong thing that I have done, that I choose the violence, that the violence is not a solution to anything, it is a temporary relief; slowly, slowly your frustration sometime comes out. I'm not like cover the world with a smoke screen, like we have learned from this course. But the psychiatrist is someone good for the domestic violence, the psychiatrist is the cool treatment because you are talking, you can see like my eyes were red while talking with you, we are talking in a friendly manner; many times my eyes were red when I was with the psychiatrist, I have a relationship with the psychiatrist now. She is a very gently lady.

A.5.1.4.2 Following Ghandi
(Future) it's like the Mahatma Gandhi. He said not to use violence against anyone; so slowly, slowly that other people will think about you, so it will take some time. This is my gravity. What I think the world slowly, slowly gets under the track according to you. But you have to give some time to anyone.

Another thing that I think is: "oh my god, I'm not going to sleep, oh my god, I need the drugs or may I need the alcohol". I quit everything; I'm straight to the goal, that it's my destiny, so give me power to cope the things and the problems you have given me.

A.5.1.5 Effects of the interview

At the beginning I was a bit nervous the kind of questions you were putting me, and out of the way I spoke everything true and truth and everything to you, and I don't

think maybe if you pass these questions to like… (indicating with his hands at the people from the program outside of the room).

I'm not fussy about the money (referring to the offered gift voucher he asked for at the end of the interview), and don't think about the money.

APPENDIX B

Life Stories of Men desisting from Intimate Partner Violence
Simplified Transcripts

All the names of the participants, and the persons and the places they mentioned in their life stories have been replaced by alternative names.

B.1 Daniel' Life Story

B.1.1 Introduction

I'm 46. I'm not married, I'm single. I live on my own. I've never been married, but I've had some pretty long term relationships. Longest one was probably ten years, which resulted in a daughter. She is now twelve. She is living with her mother; she's 48. At the moment she's trying to get into drug and alcohol counselling, but when I met her she was working as a waitress. But I think that with the experience that she had with me and realising the problem that exist in society with mental illness and trying to get help, she's trying to do something about that, probably to better her own as well. We do have contact. We get along really well. I see my daughter as often as I can.

I've been a gardener most of my life; done it for over 25 years. I got sick of working for other people, always wanted to work for myself but never had the courage or the discipline or responsibility. In coming to the responsibility men's group I started to learn a little bit more about responsibility and became more responsible, and was able to make my dream reality; it's great, best thing I've ever done! I've been doing it for four years now, it's fantastic! It's a big change to be by your own, with your own business; there are a lot of responsibilities. I really love it. At times I have hired casual help, but I don't know, I don't really like the extra stress. And I enjoy working on my own, I know what I have to do; I've been doing it for so long that I can do it with my eyes shut pretty much. But I think, in the future I'd like to perhaps build a bit of a business up; employ some staff. Gardening is for the hard work, so I enjoy living with my hands dirty, but it's I don't think I'll be able to do it for all my life.

B.1.2 Life story chapters

B.1.2.1 Coming into the world

Vague memories of being loved as a baby because his mother loss one child before him and he was the first male child in his family.

B.1.2.2 Growing up

B.1.2.1.1 Mum bleeding from her nose
I have a few good memories but a lot of bad memories. I was in the bath with my brothers and heard mum and dad fighting, and then mum came to pick us from the bath and had blood dripping from her nose. That burned into my mind; that was quite a horrifying time in my life.

B.1.2.1.2 Grandad threatened my dad
We didn't have telephone at our place. Mum must have gone and called her dad to tell him that my dad had been violent to her. I remember my grandad walking into the house, my dad saying hi, and my grandad taking him against the wall by the neck saying: "if you touch my daughter again I will kill you".

B.1.2.1.3 Dad was a bad model
Sometimes we went camping by the river. It was a lot of fun with my siblings. Dad took us for hunting or fishing when he wasn't drunk. But it was always about what he wanted to do; he wasn't generous, he was very selfish. I was brought up to believe that a real man gets drunk and abusive. Now I know that is not like that.

B.1.2.2 The teenage years

B.1.2.2.1 I lost my eye
It was a turbulent time when I was 13. Playing with kids in the street I got hit by a rock and I lose my eye; just at the beginning of the stage when you start getting interested in girls. And I never received any type of counselling because my parents until this day believe counselling is for weak people. But I think it is beneficial. I can't imagine my life without getting help from others, talking about your problems. But I was thought to keep my feelings for myself; boys don't cry.

B.1.2.2.2 First girlfriend (first IPV episode)
I met a girl three years older than me, just before losing my eye. I don't know if it was for pity, but she became my first girlfriend. At that time I also started consuming drugs and alcohol, possibly to cope with losing my eye; before I knew it I had problems with consumption. I was with that girl for four years, and I think after the second year I started to hit her and that become more frequent.
I grew up with the idea that women were to serve men; that was what my mum did, giving up her dreams to have a family with a helping husband. We never helped her. We didn't have good role models. In my relationships I've expected my partners to be like that; looking after my emotions and spiritual wellbeing. Now I know that I got to take care of myself, I wish I have known that from early age.

B.1.2.3 Adolescence to adulthood

B.1.2.3.1 Moving out of the city with a lady

When I was about 17 or 18 my dad found out that I was growing marihuana at home and he kicked me out of home. I got a flat with a girlfriend and we had lots of pot and drugs. When I turned 20 I started a relationship with a 40 years old lady. When my mum found out this in a conversation we had in her car, she just went bizarre. I stopped the car and came back home walking because I didn't want to talk about that. By that time I was having too much pot and amphetamines; I've realized that I had a serious drug problem and I wanted to do something about it, so I moved to a small town with the lady as an attempt to stop consuming drugs and move away from my drug consumer peers.

B.1.2.3.2 Living with the lady in a small town
It's hard to fit in a small country town if you weren't born there. I was pretty much on my own and I started drinking a lot. I tried to cut it down, but it's hard in Australia where drinking is a very big part of the social fabric.
I remember one night started arguing with the lady and I punched in her face, causing her a serious cut underneath her eye. It happened so quickly that I hardly knew that I've done it. She was very forgiving, she was religious. I also remember one night after attacking her I cower under the table and started to cry because I was sick of my behaviour, saying: "help me God". She came, put her hand on my shoulder and said: "if you really want it he will help you". It was a revelation for me. I retrieve the bible that my grandmother gave me for my 13th birthday and read it from cover to cover. That gave me an understanding about forgiveness and love, which helped me to change a bit my ideas about deceptions of life, and got me started in trying to change my life to make it better.

My relationship with that lady didn't go well. I realized that I was in a pretty useless relationship, and we went in separated ways.

B.1.2.3.3 The police man's step daughter
By that time I've got a job as a gardener in a local big food industry. I started playing darts to have a bit of social life; I enjoyed the social part, especially the drinking. There was a policeman in my team who introduced me to his stepdaughter. We started a relationship and got along very well. But I started being violent to her as well. I hit her once and she warned me that she would report me if I'll do that again, so I kept in check for quite some time.

I was trying to quit from alcohol and cigarettes, and one day, going to work I discovered a cigarette box in our car. But she had told me before that she stopped smoking. And at that time I wasn't very good at been lied to. I took great offence to it, rang her up at work and told her that she was in trouble. I was shaking, I was so angry. When she came home I beat her up quite badly. It didn't take me long to get to court and being charged with assault and fined about $2000. That was the first time I've been made accountable for my violence. Made me see it up and look at it. So I contacted someone from another town and got into an anger management group, and I did the course and I thought I was cured. I also attended AA and I managed to stay sober for 14 months.

I was really ashamed and guilty; I sort of self-imposed of not getting into another relationship for a time as a punishment. I think I was trying to do something about myself not knowing what to do because I didn't really understand what my problem was.

B.1.2.3.4 Melbournian girlfriend in Perth
The company where I was working was sold and I received about $12.000 payout. I didn't know what to do; my brother was living in Perth and I had lot of old friends living there by that time, so I decided to go there. Obviously when I arrived to Perth with all my old friends I went hard, nose dive, into alcohol and drugs. But I wasn't confident in myself so I never pursue women, because of the fear that violence coming back again.

I met a girl in a party over there that was actually from Melbourne herself. We started a relationship, and she was heavily into drugs, so we supported each other's bad habits. We were together for seven years in a very bad relationship with lots of drugs, alcohol and violence. I don't remember how, but we decided to have a baby. We managed to stop consuming to get some clarity. We saved some money and went for holidays up to Bali to conceive. She was fantastic; she stopped smoking, everything, because she wanted the baby to be healthy. I was grateful for that, and still am.

After we had the baby my selfish side came up and I started worrying about not having sex. I was smoking lots of pot and that affected my moods. My partner ended up leaving. I never felt so alone in my life. It really made me think a lot. I was happy being a father, even when I didn't have a good model. I realized that I had screwed up and loss an opportunity; that made me try to straighten a bit. My partner ended up coming back, and I said we'd move back to Melbourne because she wanted some family support with the child.

B.1.2.3.5 Back in Melbourne
We came back to Melbourne and I got a job in a golf course. One day we had an argument and I pushed my partner through a mirror while she was with our daughter in her arms. She said: "I don't want you here anymore, I had enough". And I didn't want to put my daughter through that, because I know the effect that my father's violence had on mem, so I left all my stuff for them and got out to a small single bedroom unit nearby. I hanged around a bit and tried to smooth thing over with my daughter's mum. When I left we made an agreement to have a friendly relationship for our daughter's sake. I've been trying to be a parent and ended up getting a not bad job as a gardener. I had a few relationships, I met a girl, but she had children to another guy and drunk quite a bit. I didn't want to get in a relationship with so much negative things.

B.1.2.3.6 Back with first girlfriend
Unexpectedly I received a call saying that it was someone from my past. It ended up being my first girlfriend. We met and ended up getting back together again. She was a very attractive woman and being first love it was still lots of feelings there. She had been involved in an emotionally abusive relationship with a man, and was carrying a lot of damage, so I tried to help her.

One day we had an argument and I grabbed her by her throat, and I thought; shit this thing keeps going on, I have to do something about it. I didn't want to hurt this girl. After a while I saw the Men's referral ad on TV, and every time that I saw it I thought I should ring, I got problems, but it didn't happen straight away. Then we went to Tasmania. We had an argument there and I hit her and she got a black eye. I was worried that the people would notice this. I told her if I ever hit her to report me to the police, hoping that it would be a deter for me to hit her. But it became obvious to me that she had always been involved in violent relationships. I tried to help her to move out of that and get some counselling, but maybe some people are realise to believe that is their lot in life, and they put up with abuse. I was able to work all over her, and I didn't want to have a girlfriend like that. She even said to me that she will get help, and she would have gone one or two times, and that was it.

I guess I was starting to get a bit of self-esteem. Previously I've stayed in really toxic relationships because I didn't think I could do better. But I started to get the feeling that this was not what I wanted and what I needed, so I told her I'm out of here, I can't do this anymore. Since then I've been without a partner, celibate like a monk.

I think for the first time in my life I've felt comfortable being by my own. I'd always thought that I'd have to be in a relationship. I'm trying to do something about me now, making myself better so the next relationship I'll have is going to be a good one. In the past it was a need, whether physical or emotional, but now I've learned to look after myself. My next relationship is going to be to share, not to have someone to be my mother or my caretaker.

B.1.2.4 Learning to help myself

As I had experienced this cycle so many times in my life I could see that it was building up again, so after splitting up with my first girlfriend I eventually rang Men's referral service. They referred me to a MBCP and started attending a responsibility group and I thought this is really good, and I started learning more about violence and how the whole thing works; how men can be violent in relationships and different types of violence. Then I started to really work on the responsibility, because all my life I've tried to avoid responsibility, so I started to get involved in the responsibility side of it and after twelve months I just kept coming because I didn't want to stop coming. I've found the group environment helped me a lot with other guys that understood the problem of violence as well.

I have done four courses before. Each time I did a group I thought I was better, for some reason I thought there was a cure for violence. Now I understand that it is something you have to maintain. Thinking that I was better and then being violent again showed me that I still had that problem. Men's behavioural change group has taught me ways to modify my own beliefs and change the way I respond to things. In the past I blamed everybody else and everything for my anger and violence, but that doesn't fix anything. By coming to the group I've learned to look at myself and start sorting out my beliefs, like men should do things for women and what it means to be a man, because even in society today is still a big gender inequality where men have so many rights and women are quite limited, so I want to do what I can to try to the balance happening.

I'm interested also in helping others, that's the main reason I still come to the group, because I'm now in a stage where I can give a bit back to other people that come here. I've been able to help myself in ways that I was unable before, to change my beliefs, to be more open and accountable, and able to understand where somebody else is coming from. In the past I just wanted to tell someone how I felt and if they don't wanted to hear I'd either bit them or walk away. Now I know that if you want to have a good relationship with anybody, you need to be able to talk and it has to be two ways, you got to be able to understand and listen. Talking about other centeredness in the group, trying to understand how other people feel, for me has been probably the biggest revelation, because I was never taught that.

B.1.2.5 Next chapter in life

B.1.2.5.1 A house to spend more time with my daughter
I'd like to imagine a house, but I cannot afford it. I'd like to get a house closer to my daughter's school, so she doesn't have to travel so far and can spend more time with her. Now I see her every four days, but I'd like to have week on week off; especially now that she is becoming a teenager.

I would say that a huge desire of mine is to help other men engage in a journey away from violence. I need to learn to be more understanding, that's why I still come to the group. I've heard that some people in the group ask about me when I don't come. I hope one day to write a book about domestic violence and how to deal with that. I've been thinking a lot on that; how I should put it forward and in what context.

B.1.2.5.1 Next project
At the moment my project is my business. I have to take a decision on expanding it, because I've reached the point where the opportunity is there. But I'm not ready for that; I need my own house with a garage, a proper office, not like a desk where I eat my meal as well.

B.1.3 Key Scenes

B.1.3.1 Highest point in live

B.1.3.1.1 The birth of my daughter
I was in Perth by that time. It was a birthing centre, and as my daughter's mother is semi hippy she didn't want to go to the hospital and the cleanliness and the doctors, she wanted a midwife, something more natural. She wanted a water birth and the midwife helped with this. So we had our daughter in a bath. I remember her popping out, the shock of seeing that, and watching my partner going through the labour and how she dealt with that, it is full time pain. When our daughter came the midwife gave her to me and I just started howling and feeling so happy and relieved.

During the labour I tried to be supportive, but I hate to say that I had the gas that my partner didn't want. I just tried to be as supportive as I could, not that a man is very helpful in a birth, but be there and help her with pushing and breathing, because I did a prenatal course.

For someone who was always so selfish and self-absorbed, I think that was my first ever eye opener experience, an awakening finding out that the world didn't revolved around me. Like wow! There's something else in the world; something beautiful, something that is good. I still feel that.

B.1.3.2 Lower point in life

B.1.3.2.1 My partner left with my daughter
When my partner left with my daughter my whole life just unravelled. As a result I lost my job because I went off the rails smoking too much marihuana and I ended up in a mental institution; I just went downhill.

I was at work and she went to stay at a friend's place. I got back from work and she called me and said: "I'm leaving you, I can't stand it anymore". I asked to talk so we met at a restaurant in public. She had our baby there and I remember looking at my daughter and the pain that I was feeling that she would go. I tried to work something out but she said: "I can't do this anymore". It was very painful. She left the restaurant and the following day she went back to Melbourne. I just went back home and got horribly stoned, because at that stage of my life that was how I dealt with my emotions.

After two weeks I couldn't stand it anymore; I quit my job and moved back to Melbourne. This was the point in my life when it was like the whole bottom had been taken away, everything just fell. It was a difficult time, becoming a dad and then loosing that; I didn't want to lose my daughter. When I arrived to Melbourne my partner said okay, will try again. I guess she was trying to give me a big shake to make me stop being an asshole.

B.1.3.3 Turning point

B.1.3.3.1 Coming to the responsibility group
It hasn't been pleasant, but has been a big turning point; everything I've learned from the group and trying to change myself. I just got sick of being violent and hurting people. I had thought about it before, but never had the courage to do something about it. It wasn't until I got back with my first girlfriend, after I was violent towards her that I realized that my violence was a cycle. I wasn't just wanting to change, it became a need; I had had enough.
I made the call to men's referral service, was quite a long phone call, and the guy at the phone was really good and helpful. He referred to the responsibility group that I attended. It wasn't a turning point; it was more that I got the desire to find the opportunity to change, like a plant to seed instead of watering it.

B.1.3.3.2 Taking distance from my family
But something else happened with my family recently. I've changed my beliefs and tried to turn my life around, but I don't have the support from my family. Every time I've tried to talk to them they change the subject straight away. It's painfully obvious for me that they couldn't care less about me changing, my mother and brothers. My dad passed away and that's the best thing that has ever happened because I don't have to worry about him anymore; he was such a disappointment.

I feel my mother, my brothers and their families have tried to pull me back into the old way. I don't want to go there anymore. I've tried to be nice with them, but they are not nice with me. When I came back to Melbourne I used to visit all the time my brother who lives at the other side of the city, but in twelve years he had visited me just three times. He is selfish like my father; he doesn't care about anybody except for himself. I've tried to be nice but so much has happened that I couldn't be bothered with him anymore. I've been through so much pain trying to distance myself from them, but I have to be with positive people now; people who understand me and are also better people. I'm starting to work on that. Like from my business I have many good relationships where you have to talk and negotiate, I love it. I never used to do that before.

B.1.3.4 Spiritual experience

I don't think that for me there has been any like flash of light moment, it has been a gradual spiritual awakening. When I was having a bad time in Perth I came across the book *"The debate book of living and dying"* that introduced me into Buddhism. I'm not Buddhist but I believe in Buddhist philosophy. I meditate daily and I find that it helps me immensely. I didn't learn this in the group; it's just something that I do. I love the peace and tranquillity that I get, and when I don't do it I feel a bit uneasy. I also like to be in touch with nature.

I have had some experiences with magic mushrooms where I felt so much in touch with life. I tried them because of my desire for drugs. I have had good and bad trips. I remember having a very bad trip in Bali, became almost suicidal just thinking of everything bad I've done, feeling bad about myself, so I started to shy away from psychedelic drugs.

B.1.3.5 Wise episode

B.1.3.5.1 The conflict with my brother
I'm not a reactive person. I don't know if it is wisdom, but I usually think before acting; obviously not when I'm angry, then I'm quite reactive.

One year ago, my brother who lives in Perth, and who I had not seen for two years, came to Melbourne with his new partner and stayed in my other brother's place, the one that never visits me. My mum was there, it was like the family get together, and I got there around five. My brother from Perth was already drunk, and my other brother said that he had been drinking non-stop. The day before I took the day off and I invited my bother from Perth to have lunch together, but he said that he didn't like going out for meals; I felt pretty upset. So when I went there the next day he was pretty drunk. I tried to talk with him the whole night, but he just continued drinking hard spirits. He was with his girlfriend. I wasn't impressed by her because the way she spoke and acted; she seemed like a drug taking and alcoholic. I went outside and she said: "do you have any good drugs"? I couldn't believe she asked me that the first time I met her.

My brother went worse with the drinking while we were watching football in the TV. Then a jiujutsu program started and my brother started saying that he knew karate and started throwing punches at me one inch from my nose. I told him I don't need you throwing punches in my face, and walked away in disgust; I just got in my car and left. My brother went home the next day; I texted him saying that I was disappointed after not seeing him for two years and saw him drinking silly and acting like that. Then I got a text back saying: "okay you looser, you're a wife beater". I just wrote back saying: "okay". In the past I would've been straight back in there telling him all this stuff, and now I just said okay, fair enough, if that's how you want to be.

In the past I was taught to deal with disappointment with anger. When I was about three or four, I was on my tricycle going down the street when a boy older than me pushed me off my bike and took it. I ran home crying. My father was there drinking with his friends and told me: "what's wrong with you sissy boy, go and beat him on". So I ran back and hit him, and came back with my bike. But then the boy's dad came and nearly had a fight with my dad. That's how I was taught to deal with things; if someone upsets you, you punch him out, and hate costed me so much trouble in my life.

I've tried to bring wisdom to my life. I know getting angry just doesn't solve anything, it makes things worse. So even when I get upset I've tried to allow myself that feeling but don't act on it; be calm, get through this, wait till you feel better. I've learned from a university lecturer that if you get upset, you need to wait 24 hours and then do something. There is another thing that I've learned from here that I said to the new guys: "if something upsets you, ask yourself how important it is, because anger doesn't last, and takes a lot of our energy". I used to be so run down because I was always anxious and angry that it would put me in an early grave.

B.1.3.6 Greatest challenge

B.1.3.6.1 Keep on trying to readjust
I'd say losing my eye. I didn't have any support from my family; I used drugs and alcohol to deal with it at that age when men get interested in women. It was like a disfiguration; I felt like a monster, unlovable. I had to readjust after losing 3D vision; learn to judge distances all over again. I remember lying down on my back for hours practicing chucking things in the air and catching them, even in sports. I had no help at all. I got sick of being ridiculed at school for not being able to catch balls.

I don't think this affected my relation with girls because I never had the confidence to pick up a girl. I've had always such a low self-esteem. Most of my girlfriends picked me up. That's probably all tied in with losing my eye and then becoming a violent person towards women, the whole vicious cycle of violence, and then the stuff that drugs and alcohol takes away from you.

B.1.3.6.2 Keeping the changes
One of the biggest challenges in my life has been trying to accept and live with the changes I've put into my life; and try to move away from my old habits and ways of being, my thought processes. It's been very challenging moving away from that and not falling back but to keep walking in the right direction, and thinking the right thoughts and just heading in the way that I want to go, which is to be a better person.

My help on this is coming to the group, especially when a new guy comes and I see that person walking with all the denial and blaming other people, and I say: "shit that's what I was". It's pretty hard looking at yourself.

After we were together for about two years with my first girlfriend, she came around one night; and at the time I was starting attending a course to become a phone operator for the Men's Referral Service; I wanted to help other guys. Something happened and we had a big argument, and I ended up heating her, and that just smashed all of those dreams. I thought: how can I be so hypocritical trying to be a Men's Referral counsellor and I'm still violent? So I stopped doing that. That's why I still come to the group, because I get so much from helping the other people. That helps me to stay on track, and just the feedback that I get from the facilitators of the group. I don't come and they call me saying: "what's wrong"? "Why aren't you coming"? It's good, it's really good.

B.1.3.7 Greatest loss

I think western society tends to shy away from the natural part of life which is death and I try to protect people from it, but when it comes nocking you can't ignore it. When I was 13 my grandmother died and was my first real exposure to death, but didn't know anything about it. Then my dad died two years ago from cancer while I was sitting by his side and watched him passed away. And the whole time I was waiting to get some sort of apology, which was never coming. I was hoping, I wasn't expecting because I didn't think it would come. I was hoping that on his last breath he might say I'm sorry for how bad I was as a father. When he died, even as sad it was, it was also a huge relief because the man caused me nothing but grave. I loved him because he was my father but, the shit that he taught me just caused me so much trouble. He was so wrong. But I guess a man from his era; he didn't know how to show his feelings.

B.1.3.8 Greatest regret/failure

I think I sabotage myself; all my life I've tried to be a better person, become a better person or do better things and it's like I'll get to the point where I'm ready to achieve that and I do just something to blow it all up. I've done that too many times to remember. I've caused most of my own failures, there hasn't been anything external that I could say, this happened and I'd learn this. It's been my own foolishness, and I guess learning gradually that's up to me if I want to do that or not. I've always thought that I'm a bit slow when it comes to learning, because it seems to take me a lot of repetitions.

B.1.3.9 Central theme in life

Don't give up; keep trying. You just learn or keep on making the same mistake. I just had so much anger. What makes a difference is how we deal with things. If we become angry or if we accept and try to learn.

B.1.3.10 Effects of the interview

It helped me to remind that I have to keep on learning, keep on trying.

B.2 Harry's Life Story

B.2.1 Introduction

I'm 41. I'm a little bit of a gardener now. My occupation is father; stay at home dad a bit, just doing renovation on our own home at the moment; that's been going for about a year and a half. My gardener business has slowed down a lot. I've had plenty of time to be a dad and to fix our house, that's been my major focus; and trying to be calm and trying to be good for my daughter. I have a partner; de facto; we've been together for eight years now. I have a daughter who turned 2 at the end of January. Recently I've suffered with worry about my financial contribution to our family, that's just one thing that I worry about.

I have consumed just drugs, just marijuana. Not just! It was marijuana.

B.2.1.1 Getting into last MBCP
I was getting frustrated and I didn't like the heat in the head, I just wanted some help; I knew that I could get some help, so I made a phone call to MBCP where I had gone to a night chat for men. So I rang MBCP and I said: "I want to re-enrol in something, I want some help". "No worries, but we are very busy". "Okay, can you put my name on the list"? "Yeah, we'll do that but we are very busy". Then I rung another place up in Epping, and they said we're doing the "keeping a cool day, you can come and do that". So I went and sat down in a room and did the "keeping the cool"; time out basically. That was okay, it was referred to by the court; a lot of the people there were referred and they don't want to be there; it's not very deep, it's not very good, it's not very honest, and the facilitators have to battle with that; so it's not a great learning.

I rang back MBCP; I got angry on the phone, I probably swore and I got: "okay, yes there is a program starting and we will send you a letter to get enrolled". I was really disappointed that I rang up and asked for help and rang up and asked for help, rang up and got angry on the phone and I got help! I've got to get angry to get what I want. I finally enrolled and finished the program seven months ago.

B.2.1.2 Previous Group
I've attended other similar programs before, probably four, five or six years ago. My father got a restraining order put against him from home, he got referred to a chat group; he might have been going to a behavioural man's group program, but also going another night to a man's chat group and sit down and: "how is your week"? He said: "come along". So eventually I ended up going, sitting with all these blokes, and I thought; this is magic, I really enjoyed it man. With these blokes we had a chat; booted out home, back in home, how much do the kids meant to them, how good wife was, how bad wife was. That was gold for me; you'll be good; family is important. You don't hear that from your father.

B.2.1.3 Things I've realized and learned through last MBCP
I came to this program looking for an outlet; saving out to my partner. This is how my days have been, this is how my weeks have been, this is giving me the shits. She is tired from work; she doesn't want to hear. I don't have a big social circle; I have to work on that, I didn't know it was important. I get stuff out, I talk; I work it out. Now I'm allowed to work it out in here.

I wasn't reported, I'm not a bad man. I just get frustrated; I'm just annoyed, two days later I'm still annoyed, and things frustrate me when they are not going so well. And then it's: "fuck"! When something will happen at home and I'm pissed off about this, this, and this; and I'll stand up and I'll say it. And then you just feel shit to stand up and do that to somebody. That's not good communication, is not nice, it's not what I want to have as a partnership. I didn't know the effect I had on my partner, I only learned it here. I didn't know about empathy, I didn't know, I didn't look, I didn't step in her shoes, nor I knew what was going on for her mate, nothing!

I was selfish. I didn't want to cook relationships; I didn't want to cook jobs. I look back and I go: "U-huh"! That's why I've had so many jobs; black and white for me.

B.2.1.3 Change in progress (current life)
Interviewer note: While he was finishing the writing of his life chapters he was speaking out loud about some details of his current situation. He spontaneously mentioned that making the change is hard for him.

It's hard making the change. It's hard; you got to let down a lot of rules. It's about being vulnerable so people can say: "get out of here", and you're not always saying: "don't talk to me; I'm not happy with my story or I'm not happy with your answer, don't talk to me, don't ask me questions"; I still live like that. The renovation doesn't go fast enough. I go to social things: "don't talk to me, don't ask me that question; I don't like it"; I'll play with the kids.

I don't want to feel like I'm being judged. It's hard coming up with a new technic of communication.

B.2.2 Life Story chapters

B.2.2.1 Mum and dad split

This chapter is about my mum looking after me; being stressed, being depressed, smoking, drinking. It's about dad taking me away for weekends, bragging about I had a girl that lived there, I had a girl here.

Then went to school; Dad came to see me, Dad argued with school. He came and ripped me out from school. Dad was not old, not as old as I'm as a parent, ten years younger than me; so yeah, not in a good place to have kids properly.

My parents didn't have a good relationship, they wouldn't talk! I had to get money from Dad. That was my job, to get the maintenance from dad and give it to mum. Mum would send me out of the house, Dad would send me home dirty, Mum would hate dad for sending me home dirty, told me off for getting dirty. I was covered in mud, and I had a good weekend with horses with my own blokes, which is on the palm of my hands.

B.2.2.2 Farm on weekends

I was going to primary school. Dad had a big farm and then he bought a little farm. It was always farms, it was always his people that worked for him, there were kids on weekends, there were horses, there were bigger kids that have motor bikes or bigger horses that we'd ride and run fast. There were cigarettes for a little while, there was horse riding down to the shops. After the shop we got fish and chips or whatever. So good fun! I loved my weekends.

As little my dad liked me a lot, I think. I couldn't complain about when I was little. He seems to have stages; when I got older, he got rougher. I thought my dad liked me a lot and was an asshole to everybody else. That's what I used to see. He was not nice to people, he would tell people off. He has a ridding school horses and if somebody was too hard on the beast, I'd seen him pull someone else off the horse, put his fingers on their head and say: "how do you like it"? Yelling at people! I got a bit older and it's like he swapped; he was an asshole to me and nice to everybody else all of a sudden!

Every weekend, or most weekends; it was kids, room, hundreds of acres, snakes, lizards, rocks. Old houses demolished, windows to brake, kids being free, on motor bikes, on horses, we could go for miles, we didn't have to come back, no one really cared, or lots of people care, we didn't know, we just had fun every weekend.

School is boring man, 'cos it's just grade five or grade six. On the weekends it was grade one to play day and night! It was everything going on and I could watch it all. And I was the boss's son, so I was allowed to do it all, I was a puckish. I remember a horse getting geld, getting his testicles taken out. I think my dad showed me a lot, involved me in a lot, and wanted me to see a lot. I do it for my daughter now: I care, I show her everything, I tell her everything. You work it out, you learn.

B.2.2.3 Working and collecting money

I went to high school and I went to live with my dad at the same time. While I was living with my dad he employed me on the school holidays. I learned to collect money; I didn't know what to do with it, I didn't need anything. I had to pay for half a motor bike. I remember when my dad made me pay for half a motor bike; if I wanted a bigger one, I had to pay for it.

I was living in the farm. It was morning feed the lambs, go to school, walk in the paddy, get wet boots, go to school, and came back home, feed the lambs. My father remarried. I went from my own mum who did everything for me, looked after me, washed my cloth, got my cloth out, made my lunch, take me to school. She was depressed, couldn't do much more than that. I went to live with my dad. I learned fast: how to wash, how to make my own bed, how to make your clothes, otherwise they weren't any.

I chose to move. My mum was devastated. She's still devastated. I never understood that. She had a few long term partnerships at that time.

B.2.2.4 Social time at school and battle with the system

So I worked during the school holidays. I had social time at school; I battled with the system, the school work. Go to high school; some teachers I didn't get on with, some I did get on with. I learned to like the harder ones; they were clearer and kept the room more organized. I wasn't good with my spelling and my reading. My math was ok, I learned to like maths.

So school was hard. I was more into the social; lunch time, after school. I learned to be social in class, that's what I'm talking about I learned a lot, but not exactly what they wanted me to learn. The homework system was a pain in the butt. "You got me here all these hours, and you want me to go home and do more"? It's stupid! It's a silly system! The effects of this battle was; I don't know, distraction, that I couldn't spell, I couldn't read and I didn't like doing the work.

I did year eleven and they started a new program called VCI and it was a bit easier. If you handled the working you pass, so I passed; I got my best marks at the end of school. Year twelve, they said: "we are going to make a more practical year twelve, better for you here, go and do this. Here's what your subject will be, here's the book you'll need". I'm a good boy, I'd done really good this year; I get the books, I go home, I look at them at least. It's sort of interesting that accorded towards a group of people that need a bit of different stuff. I get back to school: "not enough kids; you can do the mainstream"; like: "fuck! I have not studied, I'm behind already; you cannot change what I am doing now! I can't start behind 'cos I won't keep up. I'm already hard working and handling at this shit anyway". So yeah, that was the end of school.

I came home, complained about school, Dad go out and yell at the school, so I learned that it was okay not to be good at school. They had nothing on me; they couldn't ring my parents, so there was this invincibility at school, this nothing matters; I can get away with anything. With school my father didn't care, didn't seem to care. I was allowed to stay at mate's places; I played basketball after school for a year or something. I was sort of free like as I was as a small kid.

I went to study electronics, so maybe they did say: "what are you going to do"? I stuffed cushions at a furniture factory for a little while, and then I went to RMIT in the city, went to school, got behind, left. And then just did jobs.

B.2.2.5 Motorbikes, cars and little sister

B.2.2.5.1 Little Sister
I had a little sister. Sometime during high school my step mum had my little sister, 25 years ago now. It was pretty important, it was pretty nice, and she loved me a lot; it was the best thing beside sliced bread; you know what I mean? Me and her we had a lot of fun, messing with the dog, climb, run, ride motorbikes; that's what I do!

B.2.2.5.2 I got wheels
At 18 I got a motor bike, so I could ride. I could get to mum's place, I could get to dad's place, I could get to girlfriend's places, I could get around. Then I got the licence, my mum went to overseas, I got the car, I got wheels, I can drive.

You leave school, you mock around, you work, you go back to school, you study for a bit, you study electronics, you get your motor bike licence, you can go to school wearing a helmet, and you just feel a bit better again. I was working in a factory then, staying at my mum's place.

B.2.2.6 A little more study attempt to be free

This is about, you guys have been a kid, you guys have been a teenager, and then you became somebody that's supposed to work and provide, so you go and do this jobs that you can do. Provide and being manly. I grew up with my mum. I had to learn how to be more manly, I couldn't be mamma's boy; you get picked on.

B.2.2.6.1 Studying basic electronics
I studied electronics. Battling with the work, not reading, not understanding the text too well. Not confident, I can't read, I just think I couldn't. I'm not sure what happened, so yeah, I just battled with the studies. I don't study well, but I can study motorbikes.
I finished the basic pit, just to get through. I didn't finish the plan; I didn't follow it through. I got behind, the books were to fat! I read them and I learned, and learned. The teacher asked me questions, I didn't know the answers; came and do the assignment, I might get it wrong, and that was it.

B.2.2.6.2 Park Ranger part 1
I worked in a park land. I lived next to a park; the creek run through, next to the house, it was very dirty. I went and said to the park: "why don't you give me tongs, give me a bag" and they went: "great"! I was bored, I was young, I had energies. They said; cool, you have to do it as a volunteer.

Then I played with this people; they got tools, they got a big park land, they got a four wheel drive, they got creeks to cross, they got chain saws, they got pumps; they where mocking around; I like this, this is good!
They liked me: "this guy knows what he's doing! How do you know this"? Because anybody else that lives in the city doesn't know this stuff. So they gave me the job, so I worked there for a year or two.

When I first went to the park they said: "go to school". So I went to school. Something wasn't right. I told the teacher: "you can't say 'biological', you're an Indian descent and you're not saying it well; can't spell if you can't say it well; how am I supposed to write it down"? "This is not working". I left school.

B.2.2.6.3 Met Anthony and Emma
I met Anthony. I was at the train; he caught the same train going home from school. Inspectors got on to take the tickets; I went: "fuck, not enough"! He said: "how much you need"? "Five cents"; he through it to me I think. We talked; I would say things. I thought; I want to get to know this person; so we got to know each other. He's got history in psychology or something. Not that that makes any difference; he's pretty good, he's good at staying calmed, he's pretty little headed; he's an interesting person. We became friends.

He lived in a shared house. I went: "wow, a shared house". I was living at mum's again. He invited me up. They cooked, and they ate good food; I'm still eating that food now; that food is good, I like lentils, I like curries, I like this food.

I met his house mates; he lived with Emma, Lynn and Albert; they are all just individual people. And that's my partner and that's whom I have my two years old daughter with, that's how that story paints out a little bit. I sat down and got to know Emma eventually, and attempted to be friends; started a relationship and eight years later had a daughter. And yesterday I found out that at the end of August we are having a little boy!

Comment children and politics. I wasn't having kids; I wasn't putting another human being through this shit, through school, no way. Life is hard. That was my feeling as young man. I used to feel about politicians too, they're bigger, they do stupid comments, and a friend said to me the other day he feels like the Tony Abbott is a dangerous man; and I feel like Tony Abbott should be the most scared person. I couldn't believe he could do things to this community and nobody goes pop. I couldn't understand how he could do this shit and nobody just kill him. He insists changing the whole community housing or disability care, and somebody doesn't, you know, kill this dick head. That's how I grew up looking at politicians.

I met Emma and the neighbours of that shared house; they got away. "Come and look after the house"; Emma says. "Yeah! We can live together in that house for four weeks; we can live in this house together and see how it goes".

So that happened. I'm still friends with that man from next door, the man who went on holidays. I just made a friendship with him. Part due to the men's behavioural program, like, I learned to talk, I like this one, I think he likes me; we'll give it a go. He's strong on his family, he's strong on community. The people from the shared house, they all moved out. So I built a relationship with John. I'd been to too late nights after my daughter is in bed, and we just sit there and talk. I've learned to shut up a little bit.

B.2.2.6.4 Sharing house feeling bad
After living together with Emma we went back to our own houses. I got into a shared house and that was a bit of fun. I lived with Tim and somebody else and I've learned a lot about shared houses and people again. I started realizing that people were important; the different people, how interesting and novel and new. Always not very good to live with, and I shared wasn't too bad.

But I had all this black and white going and when things wouldn't go right I would get frustrated and wouldn't say anything. I'd just be around the place tense, up tight, uncomfortable in myself, not feeling good about myself; maybe depression, maybe angry, maybe sad, maybe frustrated, maybe anxious. All this shit going on and no way of managing it, no way of knowing what was going on, no terms to call it, didn't have any names for it, didn't know what it was.

I've learned from these blokes in this men's chat on a Thursday night a long time ago, that I can, that you can change! You can develop, you can be better.

B.2.2.6.5 Child care worker
Then I got a job as child care worker. First we go to different agencies and then job in a centre and then head hunted, and then a job in another centre. The people who trained me wanted me from this job, and they said they wanted me to go and work for them. I went and saw a psych, you know, because around that time I suffered tremendous anxiety. I sat down at lunch time and said: "I want to work for you guys". I also have bone disease, an overreact of my immune system that fights up my joints, and some days I suffer from really bad back pain and my body just plays games with me. So I sat down with these guys at lunch time, I said: "I want to be your handyman, I want to be a child care worker". And that was a new centre. I was having troubles with the girl in the room, I was getting frustrated, it wasn't good for the kids, it wasn't good for me, so I went and come home anyway.

B.2.2.6.6 Firefighting: a man's work
Ten years ago I went to the bush and studied Natural Resource Management. I worked for two years summer as a fire fighter. I got involved into firefighting, which is a good fight. I got involved in that to be a mate, to do man's work, to work with men. I was sick of feeling sissy. I didn't want to feel like I was brought up by my mum, and I wasn't a city kid anymore. I wanted to work, I wanted to work firefighting; it's tough. I got hanging out of helicopters, out of the door. I thought it was the best ever, ever!

I studied, studied, studied. I'm on the Dole a lot through all of this, and I learn the Dole, and they studied me too. I learned that if I needed something I'd go and get a couple of tickets; the government would help me. So I learned that system so I'd go and get some help. So I get this job with the government 'cos I thought it would be a great job.

It wasn't too bad, except for the bullies. There was an asshole there; I'm doing something mundane and he comes over; he's older; and he comes over and blah, blah, blah; yelling and getting me in trouble, and demining and just being a fucking prick; if as he was the boss, he was not the boss; he was an employee, side by side. He might have had twenty years on me, but he was grumpy. And I believed I was wrong, that I deserved to be picked on by this bastard; he's fucking wrong; it was his behaviour, his choice, and his picking on me, and I'm angry with that. I quit at the end of the season and moved back to Melbourne.

B.2.2.6.7 Park Ranger part 2
Back in Melbourne, I went to the park saying: "G'day; are you still looking for a ranger"? "Yep". "I'll do it". The community got to know me, and they got to like me and I was going alright. This was before becoming a dad and that stuff. They gave me the job back 'cos then I had experience! The chainsaw; I've got trained, I can drive a full drive, I've got the ticket, I've got the chain saw, I've got fire management, I've got map reading, I've got all that shit.

B.2.2.6.8 The house renovation
I was living with my mother in law and I wasn't being nice. It was the start of the renovation; it was the planning processes so, all excuses; my behaviour wasn't good, so I rang up and asked for help.

We started the renovation with my partner's mother. Just shortly before that, the renovation blew out and got bigger and bigger, but I wanted to do it. I had a lot of cars and I sold them. I also know a lot of people who do renovations and they sell the house. So, no, I got to do this different; so we're moving, we'll fix the house. They were living there for fifteen years, it's a nice house.

The planning with Emma was a test in our communication skills. It was bad. I was a bad communicator, I wasn't clear. Living with Emma's mum I wasn't a good communicator again. I'd get frustrated, I wouldn't know what it was; I'd get verbally derogative or verbally short; so I just wasn't behaving well with this people. It's a big task to change.

B.2.2.7 Next life chapter

B.2.2.7.1 Feel better myself
The next chapter? It's still calming down, it's still respect, it's still respect for every woman that I look at, it's still this delight, still this desire, this inner chase thing that I've got; it's just crap, I don't know where it came from. Probably my Dad telling me that he had partners, I don't know, that it was good having so many partners. I've had a lot of partners, I've had too many and I don't want any more. But there's still this oh! [Making a gesture of looking with lascivious attitude]. And I've learned here in the program that it's not so good. So I just got to stop because it's not respectful, it's not nice. This is to feel better in myself.

B.2.2.7.2 Better with my daughter
I got to use my words with my daughter; I've got to tell her how I feel. I got to price her for the good things she does because she does ninety nine good things a day, she does one wrong thing and when I'm sick, when I'm down, I start jumping on her for that one thing she did wrong, that's just (gesture of something he rejects). She's probably doing it because I'm not talking to her. I'll get that, I rub my hands, I'll do something. I don't mind her, she didn't do anything wrong; she's a terrific person.

But when I'm with her, its best I can be or more: "are you having fun or are you drawing"? "I love you; we'll go to the park after dinner". I'm cooking dinner; even if I just tell her I'm chopping the carrots and I'm doing the onion, and I'm just talking to her, she is just telling me stuff; It's better than me being a little frustrated. If I got frustrated and I haven't deal with it then I stop talking. It's important to me, and then should do something. I don't do anything violent, I may use some emotional a little bit, but I'm not too bad. It's just learning to do that and keeping it up, and it´s just talking about me. It's ok to be frustrated; I just have to realize what it is.

I want to lay off with my looking around and thinking women are gorgeous in shorts and the blah, blah, blah. I want to evolve a bit, just within myself. I'm sure my kid knows more about me than I want her to know; I don't want her to know that shit about me, I want her to know better stuff, that I want to become better. And now a got a little man coming up too.

B.2.2.7.3 Better with my partner
Partner? Good question, good question. Respect, respect for my daughter the current time 'cos that damages my partner if I'm not being good with my daughter; that's just

indirect. That's part of continuing, learning, remembering, keeping cool, being respectful, letting people do whatever they like; and that includes my daughter and my partner. I can still see my partner saying things in a way that won't offend me, and I know that used to offend me. She is trying to say something but she twists it so it doesn't offend me. So, I wish she just said it, I wish she had the confidence. I think she's a little bit afraid because I can get grumpy.

My partner is not a big talker. I want more communication, that's gonna take me to be in a better place more often, a place conversations happen; and it's happening more and more. I've learned that it's important to stop, shut up and listen in the conversation. And now I've got more brain power to know that that will wait, or that this is important to me; I can let other things wait from here. Yeah, that's important to me. And now it's more my partner speaking and keeps on happening. And I don't keep the things done I used to get done; the renovation have nearly stopped, I get frustrated about that but that's fine. I'm accepting that people get frustrated. I just got to remember it and practice it. I've got lots of little tips, whether is breathing.

B.2.3 Key Scenes

B.2.3.1 High point in life

B.2.3.1.1 Getting a proper job
I'm thinking of the good bits. One of the big achievements was getting the job as a firefighter, it was like getting into the government and seemed like a real proper job, seemed like a very manly job, a proper job for me, yep, indeed, according to my perceived definition of bloke, of man; yeah, I grew up under mum's shadow, have to try to become a man.

B.2.3.1.2 Little sister: now worried about her
Probably my sister and my kid. My sister was my first brand new person in the world; I learned that new kids are important and someway I like them; that can be misunderstood because men are not supposed to say that, but I like little kids from my heart.
My sister got bigger and bigger, had eyes for me and played with me. I'd get a lot of love, a lot of openness and freeness. You got somebody alike, you got no argument, no shit going on and it's just, it's good; it's still good with her. She wobbles, and when I'm there; you fucking don't do that, you don't take speed, you know what I mean? Like, don't take speed, you look after yourself; fuck! Life is long, be good!

She's got a partner who got a really good core, he's being hurt. I even know what hurt him a bit. And now he takes steroids, he goes to the gym; he works with boys every day. I think of him more worried because of my sister and his kids; I worried about him, worried about his kids. I'm like; mate you gotta be honest with your kids and you gotta be fucking nice to her mum, because that's being nice to the kid. There are hard rules on this shit and I will tell you, this is what I do; I learn the rules and I'll tell you, 'cos I know the rules.

Yeah, and my sister is got with this fella and they got a little boy. And I've seen his dad being rough. I want his dad to come here to the program. I could've told his dad: "you can't tell them what you want 'cos they won't support you, it's not the place to

come for support; it's fucking good to learn about what's wrong and then you have to try and figure out what's the opposite a bit". Maybe from the blokes from the room there is support. It feels like it's okay and you learn that having a restraint order, going to jail, having your family blue, hitting your missis, all this kind of shit is not good; you learn all that and use that to go home and be good.

He worries me. He is a big man and he likes to intimidate. I can see why my sister loves him, he was just moved out recently, he's being good and now he needs to talk. He is seeing somebody, sort of; goes occasionally. And he's coming to see me today.

B.2.3.1.3 The birth of my daughter

My cousin was the first baby in my world, and then came my sister and then my daughter that was the best thing by far. Go to the hospital and I remember that her shoulders were a bit stuck, and I saw her; I thought it's fucking small spot to get out of! I'm lying in bed last night thinking about the moment she came out, this much I could see, this much of this kid, the top of her head was coming!

B.2.3.2 Lowest point

B.2.3.2.1 Dad embarrassed me in front of others

I moved to my dad's place, I was in high school I think, might have been late in primary school. I had a friend from primary school, come with me to my dad's place. I might have been with a running nose or something and he said; blow your nose with your tee shirt; I said no, and he got angry and made me blow my nose with my tee shirt, I think that my friend was there; I remember that, he was not nice to me in front of my friends. I remember him being an asshole, making me do shit, being real prick in front of other people.

B.2.3.2.2 Denigrated by a beggar

Another one was when this beggar yelled at me when I was firefighting and denigrated me in front of people, again; I won't forget that.

B.2.3.2.3 Followed with his partner by a man with psychiatric problems

Another one; I was walking down the road one day, late at night. I had nice shoes on, nice cloth on and a man came out and looked at me; he was mocking around in the front yard, and he came out and he followed me down the street and he was being abusive; he had psychiatric problems, saying the worse things he could think to say, spitting. And we went in the house and my partner turned around and told him to fuck off. And he didn't do anything; he just kept there. He didn't touch her or do anything. That really affected my psyche; I've been at work, I'm supposed to fight, I'm supposed to be a good partner; like I was scared, that was deep on my manliness, deep on my feeling of insecurity in community. That hit me hard; I didn't handle it well, I didn't know how to handle it, I didn't know how to feel about it afterwards and that hit me hard.

B.2.3.3 Turning point

B.2.3.3.1 Becoming gardener

Getting the job in the park lands, the attempt to get to study and moving to Gippsland; more study; the job in firefighting and returning to the parks lands. And now I'm gardening. That was all gardening, it was all trees, it was all management, it was all

outdoor management. And now I'm not anymore gardener, and I'm using the skills I learned to fix our house.

Interviewer checked if there was a radical change in his life. He responded with another more recent story.

B.2.3.3.2 Preserving my relationship
There is a switch recently; of trying to hold relationships, the longest one record that's probably the biggest turning point, that's the biggest desire to hold, to not throw it away, to not get so frustrated, to not get so angry, to not fuck it up. To not be so anxious about it, to learn not to worry about it, not to worry about what other people are thinking so much; so yeah, a whole heap of shit has to be unpacked to be where I'm at the moment.

That turning point is meeting Emma, getting into a relationship with Emma, going through hard times, when her grandfather died, just when I was meeting her. Her father died since we've met, my father died since we've met; we've gone through a lot of shit. We got a kid together I'm fucking sure how I don't want Emma to have to bring up our daughter by herself. I'm sure how I don't want to come in and just to look after my daughter occasionally and shit like that. I don't want that to happen to me, I don't want to do that to Emma. It's just a fuck to have a kid with a partner and then have to do it yourself. I've watched my mum do it hard; she still tells me how hard she did it.

Comment on the relevance of being mentally healthy. I'm doing very well. My problems are nothing compared with the problems of hunger and danger in other places in the world. It doesn't matter who you are, where you are, or if you're wealthy; what matters is how you're doing mentally, how people perceive and enjoy themselves right now.

B.2.3.4 Wisdom event

B.2.3.4.1 Counselling my sister
My sister has been feeling grumpy with her partner. He has moved out and she is feeling lonely and sad missing him and the help with her son and crying and stuff. I invited her to have a social but she said she is lonely, but she is doing nothing and getting online talking to the boys. I told her that it is normal to feel lonely after many years of being partnered. She said he was an asshole and don't want him to come back. You are not to deny yourself the lonely feelings, the sadness about the good times and those feelings; you let her cry, you let her feel shit about it; that's fine as long as you know what you are feeling shit about. And she took that as gold, because I'm allowing her to be pissed off and happy and sad and all these things and it's not just trying to keep it good. Giving herself permission, yeah; don't deny yourself, don't deny yourself.

B.2.3.4.2 Counselling an unknown woman
One more thing; I was recently walking in a park and then got in my car I started moving. Some lady came to the car's door and she said: "can I get in"? She was shaking; I saw the fear. I thought you cannot replicate that. She said: "can I hop in the car"? "I just walked out of my boyfriend's and I'm scared that he is going to come for

me". I said: "cool; I have a partner, I have a kid; I'm not going to try to head on you. Do you want to talk"? She said: "yeah; can you drive me to the train station"? I said: "yes".

I drove her to the train station, she told me she left the boy, she told me the boy had been cheating, darah, darah, dah. I told her that I've received help, I've had some counselling, I had not been such a good partner in the past myself, that he probably won't change without some help; he can say stuff but he probably won't change in a hurry. She said: "I don't know why I go back"?. I said: "probably you feel a bit like it's your fault; probably he's able to make you feel that way". She said: "yeah, I feel like I'm the fault". I said: "you can receive some counselling, you could ask for help, there are MBCP, there are numbers, you can ask, you can look it up. You don't go back" I said to her; "you respect yourself enough, you get the support you need".

I saw her a month ago. I was walking home with my daughter from the park and she pull out of this toilet. She said: "I'm just getting my stuff, I'm seeing a psychologist, I'm getting help". She said she was a little bit thankfully, and I said: "no, you don't, you don't be afraid, you don't think you are any less of a person for getting help, it makes you a bigger person a better person".

Comment reflecting on his masculine identity. That is coming from somebody who would have got on her by saying you are vulnerable; let's have some fun. So that's a bit more respectful, a bit more insightful, a bit more understanding of what happened and how she is feeling, and to see that terror and felt that terror that she got into the car with.

B.2.3.5 Future plan

B.2.3.5.1 Helping others
I like helping people. It's a plan that I aim.

B.2.3.5.2 Being family
I have the plan of my children and my partner as a family; respectful will be my core and give lots of experiences to my kids like zoos, beaches, outdoors, school, social and to play a lot, because they learn through play.

B.2.3.5.3 Being partner
(With my partner) Holidays, time together. I have turned home in and that's a bit of discomfort for me. I want to get out of the house and have adventures. I want to do what dad did; go motorcycling or kayaking; I want to do things with the men. But I have to be gentle with it and do it occasionally.

B.2.3.6 Regret

Bullying my step mum, I regret that fight with her. We still talk, we are still friends. I was 22 and I was verbally abusing and yelling at my father, telling him how helpless he was and that he ripped me off.

B.2.3.7 Causes he support

Sustainability is one, environmental sustainability. It is hard to say because I use a lot of resources. Emma is good at sustainability with food.

Current government is not supporting sustainability and I feel frustrated about that; pissed off. I can't believe they want to build more roads while having such a shitty train system. Emma is more politically aware and she has educated me. She's a doctor, a scientist.

B.2.3.8 Important value

Equality; equality is ethical. For men and women. And refugees. Refugees should be allowed to live here. Ethical is something that I've learned here at the MBCP.

B.2.3.9 Life theme

To learn and to keep my learnings sharped; to be better person, better dad and better partner. If I can get out of that anxiety and fear, I could solve the things that worry me and I'd be more at home.

B.2.3.10 Effects of the interview

To talk about all of these is going to leave me with a lot of learnings about myself; it's going to leave me a lot of thought. I'm going to go home and lay on the bed for a while and it' going to open up a bit more, unpacked, opened up.

B.2.3.10.1 Stopping the intergenerational transmission of violence
Harry ended the interview commenting on his interest in helping other men and the importance of MBCPs in helping more men to become aware of their beliefs and behaviour.

This program, the facilitators, and the education they provide, the community service; many men come and walked out having change one or two things, maybe ten, maybe hundred; they go out with the knowledge that there is support out there.

It's hard for people to change those habits and long term beliefs. I don't believe many men out there are aware of why they are saying what they say, or why they grew the way they grew up. Some of my friends are afraid of their son not growing rough because they live only with women. So this culture of bringing the kids up tough is not bringing up perspectives, is not bringing up future worlds, is not bringing up how to communicate when they don't like something or they are feeling sad. It has to be a cultural change. I'm worried about it because I have seen children doing horrible things, I watch them say shit things in the park because they had that said to them; they didn't make it up, they didn't get born and say I make it up, I'm going to be a little shit, I'm going to learn how to be hard, it's because we are hard on them, they turn to be hard on the next kid down and that never stops.

<center>**B.3 Mason's Life Story**</center>

B.3.1 Introduction

I'm 41. I was born in South Africa and I migrated to Australia in the early 80s whit my parents when he I was 9. I'm working as a law officer at a city council and I'm studying a diploma in local government. I got in this diploma because I wanted to better understand the legislation and also to be able to better support and guide the staff that I'm responsible for. I'm happy with my job. Studying the diploma is just for doing my work better. Is not intended for a promotion.

I'm living with my wife and children. She's 46. She has an Italian background. My older son is 11 and my youngest is 9. This is my second marriage.

I was court ordered to attend the program. Two years ago. I also attended psychotherapy at that time.

B.3.2 Life story chapters

B.3.2.1 Youth up to the age of nine

B.3.2.1.1 Wanting to leave South Africa
I was born in South Africa; I'm my parent's only child. I was born in Cape Town, but I was raised in Port Elizabeth. My father moved to Port Elizabeth for work purposes. My father's desire to leave South Africa was always a huge thing in the political nature of South Africa due to the apartheid. He felt that he wanted a better future for me and for my mum.

My father is considered to be a coloured person in South Africa, so therefore, depending on what colour you were, they gave you certain privileges. My father through his educational pro west managed to get himself in a led position within a manufacturing. We never owned any properties up until the age of 9, because my father was of the mindset that we will never going to be setting roots in that country. He always wanted to come to Australia; he spoke of Australia with such love and affection.

B.3.2.1.2 My nanny
The only way he could provide the opportunity for us was that he worked night shifts. So, from birth to 9 I don't recall him being around me in the course during the day. It was always my mum or my nanny. We had an African nanny that looked after us; her name was Irene. All of my youth and my younger years she virtually raised me from the time we grown-up in Port Elizabeth until we left, so she was with me the whole time. Unfortunately I don't have contact with her, and it kills me till this day.

B.3.2.1.3 Bittersweet departure from South Africa
My mum worked, she did a lot of things. I would say that we probably be classified as upper middle class. Both of my parents were considered coloured people, but because of the position which my father held and the income he produced he could be considered upper middle class. During that time we were there, his main focus was to save, because back then you needed about twenty thousand Australian dollars in order

to come across. My father was put himself into such a position that he became one of only a handful of people who could put together a specific type of machine that printing, and they brought that machine to Australia and my father was selected to come with that machine and install that machine in Australia. So that was his visa opportunity right there for him to come across; it happened so quickly, within probably a year and all of a sudden we were selling everything and saying goodbye to everybody.

For me was sort a bittersweet moment; at that time my parents explained to me we are going on holidays. I didn't really have the proper closure that I probably could I have if they had told me we're not coming back, I didn't have the opportunity to say goodbye properly to Irene. So for me that is something that I, until this day still pounds me, because all of my nurturing, all of my mothering, all of the caring-loving elements of who I am today I believe I gained from her. I don't believe that I have any other elements from my mum. I believe that my mother gave birth to me, but she was not my mum. Even until this day my relationship with my mum, there is no connection between her and myself. My dad and I we are very close. I'm respectful of her, but I don't feel that connection.

B.3.2.1.4 Childhood in South Africa
Before coming to Australia my life was all about Irene she used to take me to parks and to the zoo, all those fantastic memories that I have of Port Elizabeth. I was on the bus heading to the city and doing all those wonderful things that I would do with her. I wouldn't be able to tell you what my mum was doing; I got no idea whether she was working or whether she was doing whatever. That's why I said a lot of the empathy and the caring nature that I believe I possess today is because of the way in which Irene conducted herself around me.

The aggression and the anger that came later on in my life is simply because I've always struggled with, with that process and there've been a number of contributing factors that just keep on adding to it. And I did not know how to communicate it, respond to it, express it in a way that is non aggressive. I must admit that during that younger years that I didn't see my dad, I think maybe because of the work, I don't know whether was sleep deprivation or whatever, but he was very short sharped; my experiences with my dad where I had of lot of fun with him where quite small. I pretty much felt like I had a single mum; at that time that was Irene.

Although there's these other two people in my life, they were transient through that process; so all of my happy memories are around Irene. During that time my dad also was abusive to my mum, and I saw that occurring up as well. He was physical with her, he was verbally abusive with her, and it was always around financial aspects of things. I think my dad was trying to save all of his money but my mum was living as if don't even care about the world and everything, still today she's still has that same mindset; the money is always gonna be there, and is not quite right, but my mum tends to live in this fantasy world.

At that time I didn't feel fearful for my mum, but I fell fearful for Irene. And Irene would always protect me. She would pick me up and remove me from the situation, so I wouldn't be exposed to that. I would hear the commotions in the background

being in Irene's arms while she was singing to me. That was pretty much my 0 to 9 memories.

B.3.2.2 *Youth up to the age of eighteen*

B.3.2.2.1 Betrayed by parents
We landed in Sydney. My dad told me we're gonna be staying here for a little while, I got to do a little bit of training for my work. I got out into schooling in Sydney, and actually I went to school there for three months. After of the third month I said to my mum and dad; when are we going back? And my dad said; what do you mean? I said: oh, we just came for a holiday, when are we going back? And that's when he said; I'm sorry, no, we're not going back. That's when I think I pained for a long time for Irene. I had sleep problems, I had bed wetting and that sort of stuff. I was very, very angry with my parents for that.

B.3.2.2.2 Communal home in Melbourne
Probably one of the best things that happened is that dad was transferred to Melbourne. I really couldn't cope in Sydney, is a totally different climate, totally different; even how the people drive in Sydney is even today very aggressive. My mum's older sister lived in Melbourne and also a brother. They said to my mum; came for holiday whilst your husband is doing his course, come down to Melbourne for a holiday. My aunt got four sons and for me being a 9 years old having four boys it was like a pig in mud, it was fantastic!

I would've been the youngest. My cousins would've gone from 11 up to probably 18 at the time. There was always great stuff going on. It was in the eighties; footie was Carlton and Collinwood. So it was whole new experience for me and I think the way in which those four boys just sort of pick me up and wrapped me; I forgot about my issues and my stuff, and I wasn't so directly having to deal with my mum or my dad. My dad was out of the picture, so it was sort of like a reprieve for me. And also my aunt had very similar characteristics to Irene, so there was that part of me was being now nurtured. And my uncle padded too; he's an absolutely fabulous man, my mum's brother. So we ended up actually sharing a house in Melbourne. And my grandmother was also part of the house, so with an extended family which I don't experienced before; very much an Italian type of thing.

And next thing I know, my mum says to my dad I'm not going back to Sydney, we feel more comfortable here. So he transferred to Melbourne with his work and I ended up going to the primary school, and then to college. I started to discover who I was, where I fitting in, in the world. Still couldn't pin point why I had this issues with my mum. It's only through this course that I've done now, I mean two years ago, that I understood why I've got these issues, but until then it was just an unanswered thing. It was fun that through my early youth I'd seen guys talking about their mums and I couldn't understand how they could do that; it was something that it was just missing from me throughout that period.

I must submit my dad's aggressive tendencies during that 9 to 18 started to take it off, and through a lot of things that he started to implement within his own, so is not that my dad went off and did a course or anything like that, it's just things that he felt that what he was doing wasn't right and he made considerable efforts to change his

responses. Because my dad and I talk quite regularly, at that time not so much. At that time I didn't understand what was going on. The common denominator is that my mum has always maintained that she is always right, she almost talks down to my father and treats him like an inferior person. And my father used to react violently, he used to throw plates and smash furniture, but now he doesn't react anymore. I've seen the behaviour has increased on her behalf, and he has decreased on his behalf. Dad never showed any sort of real aggression while we were at the communal home.

B.3.2.2.3 Being at our own house: getting closer to my dad
When I was about year seven we moved into a first rental property and we were on our own. Dad was working night shifts, so I never really sort to see him. When we moved he stopped working at that place and went to another company in which dad worked days now, so I started to see more of my dad; and that's when my relationship with my father started to progress. I was playing cricket with him; we started to connect. I think that probably renovated the symptom, his aggression also started to take off. But he never really spoke to me about why he did and why he was doing those things until later on, mum kind of did. My dad was never, showed aggression towards me. I could see that it was focused on my mum, and again, because of that lack of connection it was like nothing for me to say: dad what are you doing? That's not right. If that was Irene, oh yes, I would've step in and hey! I was more sided with my dad. I had more empathy for what my dad was going through than for what my mum was going through. I was programming myself to say: what she is doing is disrespectful, so therefore he is now responding; you deserved that, and all that stuff that we learned through the course.

B.3.2.2.4 Enforcing justice though violence at school
In year seven I went to a boys school, and that probably also helped strengthen that ethos within myself that, if you get pushed by someone, you have to push back harder, so they don't take advantage of you. At school I had a terrible, terrible temper, but not at home. I was 12 years. I was never disrespectful to teachers, but you crossed me as another student, it doesn't matter you're big, whatever you were, I will come after you.

I was actually in year seven, and we had queues to go to for the tuck shop, and we have year seven to year ten in one side of the doorway, and at the other side were the years eleven and twelve, so they were bigger boys. A year ten boy pushed in, and I said; what are you doing? And he said; what're you gonna do about it? What I'm going to do about it? I broke his nose. And the thing went around the school; don't fuck with Mason because you're gonna cop it. I didn't know what I was doing at the time; it's just the rage, pure rage that came out.

All the other kids in year seven said this guy was doing the wrong thing, and he actually instigated it, so because he was an older boy I kind of got away with it. But there were a couple of incidents where I actually put two kids in hospital; broken sternum and a broken arm. My dad taught me how to look after myself. But I also saw when my dad was exhibiting his anger, so that was sort of imprinted in me as well.

I was always that sort of person that protected the nerds. At school I was very good at athletics, so I was almost like the captain of the school, so other kids look after me.

When they used to get into trouble with other kids they came to speak to me. And then I go and enforce on their behalf; and even the teachers used to say I know what you're trying to do, but you can't do that, you know; yes, the kid is an idiot and yes they're bla-bla-bla, so in a roundabout way I got away with my behaviour because the teachers wanted to smack that kid, but they couldn't because they could get in trouble, and because I was protecting another child from a bully. I was a really popular person at the school for boys. Even today I'm in an enforcement role, I'm local laws officer; I enforce the law.

It's funny to look at it, I got a kind of misguided understanding of justice. I'm starting to appreciate, maybe with the age, the way in which I did go about that in the wrong way. But when you're at that age you don't really understand. That sort of formulated a lot of my characteristics that I have today.

B.3.2.3 Life between the ages of eighteen to twenty

B.3.2.3.1 First marriage: broken dreams, miscarriage and initial violence
At 18 I met my wife. She was probably my third of fourth girlfriend. I was 18 she was 21 at that time. And Jane felt pregnant at the time when I was 18, and was like, oh my goodness, this is a big responsibility. I've just finished year twelve. Unfortunately we ended up losing that child through the preeclampsia, which in a side was a blessing in disguised. I needed to go to work to support my future bride. When I finished school I wanted to become an architect. I did quite well at school, I actually got accepted into the architecture course; and then Jane felt pregnant and; oh shit! I managed to get a job at Australia Post and then I made my way to the postal officer position and I ended up staying at the Aussie post for about nine years.

Jane worked with my mum, so my mum knew Jane through her work. I met Jane picking up my mum from work one day. I gave her my number and it just sort of went off from there and we started dating. It was maybe a year into it, that she sort of felt pregnant. We decided to do the right thing: we gonna get married. My mum was happy with that, they got along well and my dad was pleased. Her parents were happy. She was a Slovenian background and got three older brothers.

It was quite a tough period for me. All of my dreams and aspirations almost went to a halt because Jane-we falling pregnant; and then going through the loss of the pregnancy as well because we made all the changes; we got married because I felt it was the right thing to do. This is probably the time of my life where a lot of my initial violence came out into our marriage, after the miscarriage.

We were renting at that time. She worked in a bank and I was working part time at Australia Post. We were trying to get out our lives back together again and to live the loss, and I think for me; not understanding what I understand today, being such a macho, school captain and all that sort of stuff, to end up losing a child, it didn't make much sense. I was struggling with that internally and then a lot of her stresses that she was currently going through; I didn't know how to respond to her needs. We only knew each other for a short period of time and it was a massive combination of emotions and mixed messages and misunderstandings; a lot of things that terminated in us fighting quite a bit. Me reacting violently, using physical violence; to a point whereby she said: "enough; I can't deal with it". So when I was 20 I was divorced.

It wasn't a shared decision. She did it, and to this day I don't blame her, because the person I was at 18 to 20 years old; if I was to put myself in her shoes during that period, I don't know how she managed to stay with me for as long as she did. I was extremely aggressive, very angry. It was all about me. Thinking back the stuff that I was aggressive and angry about is absolutely trivial crap; it was things that in scheme of life and scheme of things so mundane, irrelevant; now that I understand what I understand. But at the time it was about me; why this taste shit and what you're fucking doing? Why did you speak to that guy like that? Why were you looking at him for? And all of that, that stupid, stupid stuff.

She was a very, she's still today a very strong woman; and I absolutely applaud her for the two years that she had to put up with my shit. She moved to Sydney and ended up as a successful yoga teacher. She has her own academy over there. She was always doing into dance, so she followed her dream and aspirations into doing that. I believe she has a partner there and she's doing quite good for herself with her own yoga. Because what she had put up with me I think she deserves better.
And at the time when all it happened I had been through thoughts and anger, and I had it for many years after that because I couldn't understand why she walked away from me. Is only too later on that I started to, maybe I got a few issues that I need to sort out, I need to get myself right before I get into a relationship and get things started.

B.3.2.3.2 Dad tried to help, but mum didn't
After the divorce my dad became a very instrumental in supporting me. I was starting put fighting in what I was doing and then I think he started to realize what the impact was in what I was doing and he started telling me that's not right, you shouldn't be doing that. But at that stage the whole set was already bolted, it was too late for me to repair anything.

Prior to us moving together we lived with my parents for a little while and my mum became very jealous of Jane, because all of my affection was on Jane. And my mum started spreading the rumours within the family that my dad was having an affair with her. And when our relationship started to go sour, my dad was giving a lot of positive encouragement to try to fix marriage, but my mum; oh, she's hopeless, she's shit, she's this and she's that, whereas the truth was I was the one who actually has all the issues, she wasn't in any way shape or form to blamed for any of that stuff.

This just added more to my inability to get closer to my mum. Probably would've been a great opportunity to show that mothering nurturing, but that was never forthcoming. I suppose my reactions that I was always taking that on Jane, if you look at my mum as an individual, I was doing exactly the same thing that she has been doing all of these years; the one thing that I hated from my mum, was the thing that I was actually doing and that's hurting upon Jane.

B.3.2.3.3 Devoted to work after divorce
So at 20 I was separated and between 20 to 23 I just really devoted myself to my work in Australia Post and progressed up through the rank in Aussie Post. I supposed my life moved and back then in 1999 we had a recession, so I couldn't self-fund the University, I was happy at Aussie Post; got good friends, I was getting back into

catching up with my school mates, they were at Uni. It didn't seem that important to me at the time and I think for me going through all that stress I just needed just one little thing to concentrate on; and that was just work.

I moved back with my parents because, again, my dad very much is the glue that holds our family together he's an amazing person. And through all his faults, maybe that's where I get that balance in what I'm, in sense of right and wrong. He said: "you're still my son, you're still my only child, I can't let you out in the world by yourself. We got a room here, you got a roof over your head, come home"; she was at work at the time, so I didn't really get to see her much during the time I was there I really only went home to sleep; that was pretty much.

B.3.2.4 Life from 21 up until today

B.3.2.4.1 Francesca and her family
When I was single for about a year or two I met Francesca. I meet her in a night club. One of my best friends since year seven has a cousin that owned a night club and he asked me to go on a Sunday evening. I accepted this invitation and went to this night club and I met Francesca with one of her girlfriends. My friend knew Francesca because he worked in a restaurant where Francesca's mum was head chef. He was actually training under Francesca's mum at that time. He said she's Francesca, Carla's daughter; because I actually waitress at that restaurant a couple of times, and Jane used to go to this restaurant, so Carla met me with my wife. After we separated I started working at that restaurant, so Carla knew that I was separated. She actually, in the meantime, was trying to set me up with her younger daughter.

So when I met Francesca that night we just ordered a drink and started talking, we started chatting and this girl was no frills, no full of self-importance. She was finishing studies as a primary school teacher and getting her placement into a local primary school to teach Italian. We actually worked out that we've met before and Jane used to work at a restaurant at the reception on the weekend, and my ex-wife and Francesca went to school together. She asked me where you with Jane? I said yes, I was, and we are now separated. And she said I never liked her. That night heading home I said to my best man; where does she live? He said I'll show you where she lives, but don't fuck with her 'cos she's Italian and could shop your balls off.

The next day I went to her house with a bunch of flowers. Francesca answered the door in bloody punky pants, looking totally different to what she looked the night before; she went oh!! And then her mum stuck out her head over the corner and said Mason, come here! And I never left. I was welcomed in that family from day one. Francesca's mum is everything that I would love my mum to be and even her dad; I call Francesca's mum and dad, mum and dad. They're an amazing family; they understand family values, they live and breathe the family unit. And even her brother and sister; even understanding sibling love. I've never experienced that in the way that this family does it; they are there for each other no matter what. And that support and love that they share amongst each other, it's just absolutely amazing.

So at 23 we dated for about a year and then we got married. I married her because I felt in love with the person that she is; she is an amazing spirituality, she's funny, she just has this bubbly vibe around her. Whenever I'm around her I feel good, even

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today, she makes me feel better about who I am as a person, and she's just an amazing mum.

B.3.2.4.2 Live turned difficult after second child
But for me things started to change after we had our second child, Darren. Things became stressful between us after we had Darren. Before that, things were fine, work was good and I've progressed through a number of different job changes, but nothing dramatic, I was not violent.

In 1995 we got married and my in laws gave us one of their properties; they lent it to us for a couple of years so we can save enough money for bottom, for a house. Financially we had no issues and we remained single for seven years before we had Milton. But for me things started to change after we had Darren. He was diagnosed at the age of 5 by having heavy autism, and prior to that we didn't know what was wrong with him, he never speaked. Now he's 9 years old and still doesn't speak. Milton was just a fantastic kid; perfect baby; didn't cry, he was just a text book kid, even today he is the most loving, caring young men you never going to meet. But with Darren it was just the total opposite; he cried for almost a year, he put a lot of stress on Francesca at that time because she couldn't work, there were stress on us financially.

I was working in two jobs; cleaning job in the morning and then doing my other work as a parking officer, so we never really saw each other for almost a year and a half. We never really communicate properly and through that a wall started to build between the two of us. I was able to get myself into a nightshift position at the Melbourne council that was a relief. Then we were able to sort out what was wrong with Darren through the children's hospital, and we started to understand what autism is. By that stage another three years have passed and I've been in Melbourne council almost eight years, but I've been working this nightshift for eight years, and I was on permanent weekends. Francesca worked three days a week; when I was home, she was at work and vice versa.

B.3.2.4.3 Violence against Darren and Francesca, and attempt to commit suicide
When Darren was 8 years of age he was becoming more and more aggressive and Francesca was finding very hard to control and to deal him. That burden I was feeling because she was expressing in the only way she could communicate with me, crying for help. I didn't know how to interpret that. My previous interpretation was; how bloody ungrateful are you, can't you see I'm providing? I'm here only three days and also dealing with him. Really not having that empathy for her requirements.

I think I felt into a similar type phase of what I felt into when I lost my first child; a sense of loss, a sense of self-pity, because I felt like I was losing another child again when all of this stuff was happening with Darren. And the macho thing: why did I have a kid that's got issues? We have perfect health. Where the hell did this comes from? And not really understanding what autism was. I just felt that Francesca wasn't doing, I started blaming her and becoming very judgemental. This started to build and build and build. Even our sexual activity was almost come to a complete halt.

It got to a point during this time I started then showing aggression, verbally, not physical towards her but physical towards objects and things like that. I was giving

me permission to react in this way. Milton would've been five years old when I became that aggressive that he would even cower in the corner and started to cry. I remember that vividly. I started to become a big monster.

Two years ago, by the time I reacted against Darren, I went to hit him and Francesca saw me; she jumped in front of me and said: "what are you doing"? "Get out of the way"! And I punched her in a rib cage and I punched her in an ear. And Milton was: "dad what are you doing"?! And I stopped. And my hands were shaking. She looked at me and her ear was all blood red, she just looked at me and said: "I can't do this anymore". And when she said those words it was like what Jane had said to me all those years ago. It just fell apart. I just spiralled to appoint that two days later I tried to commit suicide. I put up a hose in my car, and I woke up at the hospital. Francesca had seen it and pulled me out, and this is where my journey sort of changed.

This is where everything sort of started to change for me. I would've felt was rock bottom. The person that I felt I could only communicate with was Francesca was now saying: "I can't do this anymore". I felt I had nowhere else to go and I headed to phone my dad to say it's happening again.

When I woke up the person who was there was Francesca, and then my parents came, and my dad said to me: "I love you, there's no need for you to do any of this stuff, we're here, we'll work again through this".

B.3.2.4.4 Getting assistance from work, psychologist, program, partner, and family
Francesca through her own honesty explained all and that we had a fight, and he punched me, and she showed her to the nurse her side. Then a lady came in and did an assessment with Francesca. I was in the hospital for maybe two hours; they give all these tests and say: "you are okay to go home". As soon as I walk out from hospital two police officers where there, waiting for me. This is the first time that I was made accountable for my actions. I had no fight in me, I didn't resist. At the police station the female police officer served me with and intervention order saying that I couldn't get near Francesca or the kids. I appeared in court on Monday and for me, the fact that another human being could instruct me not to see my wife or my children... I was stripped of all humanity, all dignity. At that time I didn't think about Francesca, I only thought about myself. I wasn't upset with Francesca, I was more disappointed with myself.

The intervention order was lifted on the provisory that I did this eight week course, and the eight week course came within a month. But in the meantime I've taken a month off work off at the council and the council had an assistance program. Obviously I had to be honest with them and told them that I attempt to suicide. They immediately started to play some assistance, I went to see a clinical psychologist; I was going once a week as part of my rehabilitation, that was fantastic. I had to come to the program during that period as well to do an assessment. I think that helped me, and also didn't have to worry about work because I've got a sick leave. I was getting a really good assistance because I was talking for the first time. The only person I was talking to was my dad, I've never swept my friends into that.

The thing about my mum was part of those stages that I was working through with my psychologist; this anger is coming from somewhere, it's manifested from

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something and you need to start forgiving yourself for some of the things that you've done, and start repairing some of those hurts. I needed to get myself right so that I could re-enter into the home to be able to facilitate those things, and the only one way that I was ever going to rekindle my marriage is by me; through my actions, words and deeds. Prove that I've changed, and understand new techniques, understand new ways in which to respond to situations that doesn't involve a violent reaction.

It was very simple for me; I have a child with special needs, a child that can't speak, a child that can't express love or emotion. And here I am, a grown men who has the ability to control how that happens, but I chose to do it in a manner that hurts the people that I said I love and I have chosen that. If I'm put into a position where I feel certain things happening within me, physically, and that was also part of the puzzle of the program that we did, it's understanding the circle of violence, understanding the recognition of signals that are triggering certain chemical changes within my body to understand how, through mental choice, I can influence that response. I learned this through both psychotherapy and the program, because the same message was coming though all directions.

To Francesca's credit she was always asking how was the therapy today, what did you discuss. I went back to the family home because Francesca didn't press any charges against me. She didn't feel that that was going to be the answer, of not being a systematic violent person throughout her marriage; she'd seen the better part of me throughout our marriage. I'm a very blessed man, and again it comes back to my mum and dad, her mum and dad, and her brother; that whole family unit whilst I was going through what I was going through not only supported Francesca and the kids, but then also still welcomed me with open arms. To this day they've never make me feel inadequate, they've never brought back things in conversation. It's almost like it just did happened; but that's not you, this is you.

B.3.2.4.5 Preserving changes after intervention
Francesca made it through this tragedy and I've learn to appreciate who she is more as an individual. I think also I got caught up in the property type thing: "she's mine". I was also going through that; oh, look at me all my hurts all my problems and not really caring about her. I forgot about the person that I fell in love with. I've learnt through this course that it is that individual that you need to find again, that you fell in love with, because that is the individual that makes you feel better within yourself. Once I start to respect her again as an individual, I started to find that joy.

Once every alternate week she will go out with her friends and have a night out because she needs still to be that Francesca, she's still needs to be that bubbly, friendly, effervescent person. And when she recharges her battery, when she comes back home she's just even more full of that, even with the boys. It's just that joy, we talk about things, we put things into perspective now. Whereas when we were going through that phase I couldn't really see anything because I was so involved developing my own self-pity, my own self-indulgence.

I'm now very much aware of my children and Francesca's needs. There is a very part of the course that they do in making us talk about the kids and how the kids see these things, and how they interpret these things, and how they are affected throughout their lives. I didn't have that opportunity to speak to my dad about what he was doing,

I do that with Milton. My son communicates with me about all of his issues, and with his mum about all of his concerns with his girlfriends and how he's feeling.

We have a family values on our fridge; the first one is respect one another; the second is that we will talk to each other in a respectful manner; the third is that we don't raise our voices; the forth is we will give each other time and space to go away and think about our situation, and the fifth is that we will always talk to each other in a loving and respectful way. We're still individuals, we still have the right to get upset and get angry, we need to express that emotion; it's an important emotion, but its how we deliver it. That is something that I've explained to Milton, that I didn't know how to do that properly, and unfortunately I did it in a way that was totally disrespectful towards mum and towards him. And I asked him for forgiveness for all of the stuff that I have done. He just stroked my head and said: "that's alright dad, I forgive you dad". And I cried like a bloody baby.

For me with him is all about correcting the wrongs. This is what Jim, one of the peer that runs here, said and that sticks with me when we did the children session: "for the one wrong that we've done, you've got almost up to seven years of rights to correct that wrong". That's my mission with the kids; is to exemplify through my actions, words and deeds what it is to be a respectful men, a respectful father, and a respectful person. I'm finding it easy because I know what the other pathway ends up with; it's filled with nothing but pain and agony.

B.3.2.4.6 Francesca's contribution to my change
Francesca also started with the women's group that was done at this centre as well. She said I'd like to also learn some of the stuff that you were doing. Whilst I was also doing the course, every time when I came back home and show all the stuff that we spoke about, for me was, really iterated to what was learned, it was helping me to also imprint it in my psyche, and it was also an ability for her to say: "hold on a minute, didn't you speak about that last week? Oh yeah! That's right. So, what do you think"? So she was also that gentle reminder. That was also helping me to absorb. I felt I needed to empower her with that ability to say to me: "hey mate, you're doing something wrong, without having her to fear that I'm going go ballistic". And I think that's where our marriage was also breaking down, as she felt she couldn't say anything to me without fear of me getting angry. I didn't want that anymore, that's why I felt that by empowering her with an ability to say what's on her mind, as I would expect myself to be able to be free and say whatever is on my mind.

These days we enjoy a very amicable relationship; even our sex life is a little bit better, our love for each other is so much stronger. At the start of this process there was a little bit of jealous streak in me. Now when she goes out with her friends for the night it doesn't, because I trust her, and it's liberating, it's fantastic. Now when she comes home and she starts talking about what they were up to I'm laughing in my head of some of the things, some of these guys are trying to pick her up and she's so nervous. I'm flattered because she also feels like a woman, that sensuality comes back and she feels appreciated. All the ladies say I love the fact that she has found herself again. I love the fact that she, through this journey, has felt that she can do it without me having to inhibit her.

<u>B.3.2.4.7 Job change: more time to be family</u>
And one of the other contributing factors towards this process is that I changed my job. I got out of that weekend work; I thought it was a very important decision. The permanent weekends were playing heavy cons in my relation; the three days that I was home she was never at home, so there was no family. So I worked up that balance in our relationship. After completing the eight week course, and also with the assistance of one of the psychologist that I did work with through my work, we approached my work and said he can't, it's driven this guy to this point it's heavily impacting on their family, you need to change it; so they brought up a third officer and they started rotating us, so we actually only work one week.

Then I started putting in place a lot of time with the kids, giving time for Francesca, which is just setting in place really positive things within ourselves. For those eight years that I was working in shift work we never went out on the weekends. I'm working Monday to Friday, and I get more weekends off, so we replan things away, we go and do stuff. And I'm earning the same money! It ended up in a really good thing. And I actually moved closer to home, now I'm working in the council where I live, so I'm five minutes from home.

B.3.2.5 Looking at the future

<u>B.3.2.5.1 Open communication: understanding the other's emotions and intentions</u>
It's more for me building on the experience that we've learnt on having an open communication. I've found that by talking about how we feel it's a release, it doesn't allow for any build-up, it doesn't allow for misunderstandings. We often ask the question of each other: "what do you mean by that"? "Can you please explain a little bit more"? Or: "I don't understand, because I have the impression from what you've said that this is what you're saying". So, we're seeking clarification more in our interpretation of what we were saying to each other. I've found that because we're doing that, and we are doing it now quicker, we're not allowing any emotion to sort of take over and misunderstandings to walk away.

We've still our moments. The other day Milton got upset with his mum because Francesca was asking him to do something, and might she was quite repetitive on it, and he did answer her, but I don't think she heard, and he: "MUM I ANSWERED YOU"! And I said: "Milton", you just point to the fridge: "sorry mum"! "What else mate"? And he walked to give her a hug and says: "I'm sorry mum". And the she said: "oh, I'm sorry Milton". We set the boundaries where the empathy is huge now in our family. Actually with Darren too; Darren is a constant test for us. And I think that's another reason why I'm progressing so well through this process, I'm forging to say: 'okay, he's done this, but I react in this way and you couldn't speak; how would you feel if someone shouted at you, how would you feel if, if you're shown aggression"?.

And it's floats into my work as well, because as being team leader; I got a staff of eight; and have to deal with many problems; complains are coming from everywhere, and I'm constantly tested on those boundaries as well.

B.3.2.6 Next chapter

B.3.2.6.1 Practicing self-control through being vulnerable
I don't know, for me I find that it's almost like a new drug. In the past the drug was, control, power, aggression. The drug for me now is; if I'm in control and I'm peaceful, and I'm caring I get more joy out of it. It's almost like things are moving in slow motion, I can actually compute what it has been delivered, give a considered response with the person's thoughts, feelings and situation in mind, and then come up with a solution or a possible outcome that is amicable for both parties. I'm resolving more high issues by taking that stance.

I think a lot of that comes from my dad's own expressions of these situations and his ability to be vulnerable as well with me, explaining his understandings, his experiences. I think that that vulnerability, although some people could say: "must be a big sissy boy", but that vulnerability is a very important element of being a man. I feel that I'm in more control of who I am as a person because I'm able to be vulnerable, able to be compassionate, able to be nurturing in a situation, and yet still be a man.

When I'm faced with those aggressive situations, I take on that stance that I'm making decisions to take on that process where I'm not going to allow the emotions to dictate how I'm going to respond, but I still listen to what they're saying. That constant fact that I'm practicing that all the time, so when I go home, and it's happening again, I've found that I'm more in control, I'm more in at easy and I'm able to look again at things in slow motion, it doesn't feel like I'm personally attacked or accused. This course has been a huge, huge change for me.

B.3.3 Key Scenes

B.3.3.1 High point

My wedding to Francesca, is eighteen years ago, but it's like it was yesterday. She looked absolutely gorgeous on our wedding day. Francesca has been an amazing positive influence in my life and she still continues to be that amazing positive influence in my life.

There're two pictures in my mind, one was actually at the altar when I turned and I saw her walking down, and this was like the first time that I've seen her and I was out of breath. The second scene is when we went to the park to take photographs; there is actually one of those photos in our bedroom. When that was taken I remember the feeling and the euphoria, there's nothing else in the world that matters but her. From what I've been through before, it almost was like a new beginning for me.

B.3.3.2 Lowest point

I got that angry with Darren one day that I actually lashed out at him to the point where, a child who has no ability to speak, no ability to explain or express how they are felling. That's the reason why that empowers me to do what I need to do so I never have to see that child's face look back at you with that look of not understanding. If you put yourself in his shoes I can imagine what he'd been thinking.

It's something I carry with me every day, because I need to constantly remind myself that this feeling that I have is a feeling of shame, is a feeling of regret; immense, immense, immense regret. Just that look on his face that day, he just sort of looked at me and started to cry. I've never seen him crying before; it's that, just hard.

B.3.3.3 Turning point

I think that my life from 21 to current day has been the best part of my life. But I also have regrets in that part. It's also a part of my life that I'm very thankful for, because now the future looks so much better and brighter. I'm seeing the fruit of my changes now; I see how Milton is with me now, I see how Darren is with me now, I see how Francesca is with me and how we interact as a family unit, there is a lot of love in our family, there is care and empathy, there is a lot of communication. And even with Darren without him having verbal communication, he communicates in the way in which he can. If I had a big day of work and I'm so famine, he will come up and just put his chine on my forehead, and just gently rub backwards and forth, and then he sort of looks at you and then he walks away. It's almost like: "that's alright dad".

He grounds me; he makes me a better person because, despite his inability to speak, he makes me look at the world though his eyes. I say, we are in harmony he is calm, and he is peaceful. If we are tense he starts flapping, he starts tapping the wall, he exhibits anxiety almost immediately. So, us, as a family, we're becoming more in tune with our own physical reactions and responses.

B.3.3.4 Wisdom

Just recently one of my staff members; she's a 21 years of age young lady; she confided in me that she's been experiencing family violence at home from her father. I explained to her that whilst I'm her boss, it's not much advice that I can give her with regards to what I understand, but there are fantastic buddies out there that can help her. I took her out of work in my car, we went to visit a MBCP centre where they then referred us here. I brought her here and we sat with one of the staff members here and she, my staff member, felt comfortable enough to explain and express all of her concerns and issues with me being present. And that's something that I'm very proud of, and also very grateful for that experience. This young lady, her mum has been the main victim in this process. And then from that encounter that we have on Monday, on the Tuesday her and her mum remove themselves from their family home and sought safety refugee. One comment that this staff member said to me was that if it wasn't for the fact that I am the person that I am, she would've assume that all men are assholes.

B.3.3.5 Dreams and hopes for the future

Is not singular, it involves Francesca and Darren. I have come to accept that my future will have some elements of us needing to provide care for Darren, so my future plans is that the property that we currently own, we have to sort of tear it down to put three units up. One unit for Milton, one unit for Darren, and one unit for Francesca and I. Darren will still have his individual space, but mum and dad will be sort of nearby for assisting him. Milton is welcome to use the rent from that property to further on for himself if he wants to get married, but the house is never to be sold,

because the ideal is that, should Francesca and I passed, then those homes should be able to provide to Darren's housekeep and security. Milton understands this; we've spoken this quite honestly with him.

B.3.3.6 Life theme

I think that for me the common denominator tends to be that throughout my school life with my friends, with my family with my current work is that I've always tried to do it right by everybody, it sort of be a protector of injustice, although I inflicted injustice myself, but the common denominator of probably who I am is doing good, and more so towards the end because I'm getting the philosophy and the ethos behind my madness. I feel really good about who I am as a person, I feel empowered as to how I am. I've found that I'm not reacting anymore; I feel that I need to be another person that is, caring, listening, that I get more joy out of doing that than taking that other path. It's a choice.

I say that to everybody that I meet now: "you reacted that way, but you chose to react that way". And even with my friends, now I'm challenging my own friends: "Oh! She pushed my buttons. Show me where your buttons are, I wanna push them, I wanna see what that does. Can you show me where that physical buttons is on you"? Then they: "that's just a saying; no, you are actually putting into words an excuse for you to give yourself permission to respond in a way".

I now challenge those people all the time; I feel that it is my duty to start doing that because unless that change starts happening, as guys we are going to keep going on that terrible path.

B.3.3.7 Effects of the interview

I think you understand my mindset; it's in giving that you receive. I've found through the journey that in by talking about these experiences it's little gifts that I'm giving up myself to others, so that they can learn from my mistakes, and hence why with my friends or anybody I found that their behaviour or their response is not right, I challenge it in a respectful way; in the same way that James did it. James was a fantastic mentor for me when we went through this process.

It must be a balance, there must be a male and female in these programs, because when you're confronted with it initially, you're still in that mindset of me, me, me; and then to have a female run the program is very easy to switch off and not open, and not that it was just a bunch of, excuse my French, a bunch of lesbians trying to give you a bloody whatever. But when you have someone like James, who exemplifies and lives, breaths, speaks respectfully about his experiences, and challenges you as a man about your thought processes and challenges why are you taking those paths, and then giving you alternatives to those paths, you sort of sit back and go: "you know what, okay, I'm listening". That was a very important element for me.

So with this conversation that we're having today, you exemplify that similar type of welcoming, opening environment to be able to speak openly and honestly about my experiences without me feeling that I'm going to be judged, ridiculed or make me feel

any lesser as a person. And that is what I ultimately think humanity is all about. It is about having an ability to communicate openly and honestly with each other without fear of any reprimand. If the world could start having more of this conversations, I think we're gonna be alright.

B.4 Neil' Life Story

B.4.1 Introduction

I'm 45. My occupation is, well I care for my two children. I have my 9 year old daughter in my care ninety percent of the time. And 3 years old son fifty percent of the time, so one week he is with his mother and one week with me; so my occupation, I must say, is looking after my children. Secondly, sometimes a build furniture and buy and sell collectibles, records, furniture and things like that.

Previous to that I can't say I had a regular occupation. Before I became a father I was a criminal, drugs, crime, that's what I was doing. But I'm done with my occupation; I call it a style of life because I've never aspired to be a criminal, I felt that I was a bit lost.

I'm single, absolutely. My children have two different mothers, they don't know each other. I do see both of them when I pick up or drop off my children. I don't have a very good relationship with either of them, we don't communicate very well; I think there's going to be an animosity there. Things are much better now, that what they use to be, that's the truth. It's just funny things were really good with one and really bad with the other, and now they flipped, it's gone the other way. At times I think it's up to me; I've got issues going on for me as well, so, my issues absolutely came into play in to how I interact with them.

Regarding future job plans I enjoy this collectables, and I'm out every day looking for things and finding things and stuff, so I'd like to make that bigger, sell through internet and stuff like that.

I'm not religious, I was brought up in a Christian home, but my growing up my parents weren't overly religious. I have a Greek background, they´re both orthodox. I was born in Greece; I came to Australia when I was 1. I grew up here in Melbourne, but I went to Greece when I was around 17 and I stayed there for about twelve years, mostly in Greece and Germany. I came back to Australia because I got a girlfriend, that's the truth; but also my brother lives here and my mother lives here.

B.4.1.1 History with MBCP and other interventions

My first program was with MBCP in a different area. It was around the time that I went to the family court for having access to my daughter. I was getting very anxious, very angry, I was just up and down, and my emotions were all over the place. I made a phone call, or reading something in the paper somewhere, I think it was; I think that was possibly my first contact with Men's Referral Service. Calling and just feeling, oh my God, a negative experience, so I didn't call them again and I went to MBCP and I sat to expect one of the facilitators, and I started the group therapy.

After finishing that twelve week program I attended another twelve week program because I felt it was doing me some good, I was feeling a lot better, I wasn't as angry, I was dealing with my anxiousness in a much better way. And not just in the family environment, but I noticed things for example, such as, I used to be very angry on the road, driving. But then, after the program, I found myself more relaxed; people blood me, I just wave and smile and say okay.

I was getting counselling before through the welfare system. I was attending once a month, but the focus wasn't on violence and anger, the focus was on, why I wasn't getting into the workforce at the time. Before going to MBCP that first time I had some sessions with a counsellor, but it was one on one, not in a group context, because of my problems with methamphetamines.

B.4.2 Life story chapters

B.4.2.1 Birth of my father

I think that my father was very angry. My grandfather was very angry; I've heard some stories of the violence that my grandfather used on my father, horrific violence, tied by the hands when he was a young boy behind his back and hang from a tree!

The reason I put the birth of my father is to give some historical context. So we have this man here, who was born into his own violent environment, and who then had a Child, which is me. So he hasn´t received any support around and help around his own experiences, he is carrying stuff with him. And then he has a little boy so, what's he gonna give this guy, what he is gonna give the boy?

Then he moved to Australia. I think he just wanted to get away, I'm not sure. My mum says we were doing alright in Greece. He had a job, they had their own home, they didn´t need to, but he wanted to get away, he wanted to separate himself from his family or from her family possibly. I can only assume from my mother's side of the story. I think my mum had a little of traumatic experience around that time with my birth, with my father, with the marriage. With my birth she thought that she miscarriage, I don't know, I can't say the little bits and bits.

B.4.2.2 From my birth to 8-9 years old

B.4.2.2.1 Dad's violence against me and my mum
My experience of my father is that he was very angry, very violent man. I have a brother, I'm the oldest. I don't think he was violent with him as with me. But look, everyone sees things and they take their own perception.

I come from my father and I, and I acknowledge that he experienced a lot of violence in his life. My mother is not violent, but my mother experienced violence at the hands of my father; when we're younger she went into hospital, she was beaten many times.

I don´t have many childhood memories. I know my father took me away from my mother when I was very young and gone to Sydney, I'm not sure, just stories that I´ve heard. But I remember my parents fighting, I remember often being hit by my father; he was very controlling. He used to do things like, for example, get very hammered during summer, and he would make me go buy his cigarettes, he used to give me the money and spite on the concrete and say: "you better be back before the spit dries". Or I remember never leaving the house further than where I could hear his whistling.

I have vague memories of my mother leaving my father. Once she took us, myself and my brother, and she left him. That was a very traumatic part of my life because I

couldn´t understand it. I wanted to go back, I missed him, he was my father. I don't blame her for that, he was a very violent man, he put her in hospital a few times before that. When we moved into this new place I remember walking into a shop and the guy asked me where do you live, where is your father? And I remember saying to him my father's dead, he died in the war. So it was easier for me to say my father has died in the war rather than to say my parents have split up. I remember putting a lot of pressure on my mum to return to my father. And after a few months she ended coming back.

B.4.2.2.2 First time in Greece with dad
When I was 8, I remember my father took me to Greece for a holiday. We got to Athens to visit my family; they were like strangers to me, it was the first time I met them. When we were there it was all good, and then suddenly my father turns to me very angry and he says to me in English: "do you think you were fucking smart then, leaving me with your mum, weren't you? You'll never gonna fucking see your mother again", and then he left. He went away for about a week and left me there with my grandmother. That was very hurtful. I remember he came back, obviously. I think maybe that was the birth of my anxiety.

But also there are a couple of things I remember of my father that made me really proud, and one of them was around this time in Greece. We were sitting with my uncle at an outdoor cafe, it was summer, and a gipsy boy was coming to us to ask for money. The waiter sees him and gets a glass of water and throws it at the boy. And my father stood up and said: "stop! What are you doing?" And said to the boy: "come here, what do you want?" The boy said: "I want some money". And my uncle Timothy said: "don't give him money, he'll just buy cigarettes". So my father asked him "what do you want the money for?" He said: "I want to buy some food". "So then come and sit down with us". He said to the waiter: "you get the boy whatever he wants". He said: "what do you want?" And he wanted some cake. That made me really proud.

B.4.2.3 Teenager: Running away from home

I think as a teenager I wanted to be wild. I started running away from home. Before that I think I was very reserved and very quiet as the child that lives in violent houses. But I think getting into a teenage I sort of started to, you know, the hormones, I started leaving home and running away from home. I was living on the streets for a long time and I hitchhiked and went to Queensland for some time. My mother found me through my friends, and she was crying and begged me to come home saying everything will be okay. I remember coming home after some months, and I remember my father sitting on the couch and he asked me to show him my arms. I remember refusing. I couldn't believe that he thought that the reason I was living home was because I'm doing drugs, I couldn't believe that he was bringing back on me, that's what happened.

So as a teenager I started doing a bit of crime, I was robbing places with friends and alone. I was caught by the police, no big deal, I didn't go to jail or anything like that, but I did get to court a couple of times. I bet my parents didn't like it, they weren't criminals, they weren't proud of me.

B.4.2.4 European family

When I was about seventeen I went to Greece, I think my parents tried to push me to go to, my mother, after having troubles with the police. I initially went to Greece but then I travelled, I went to Germany and then met my other family, so I did a little bit of travelling around Europe. It was a really nice feeling, and then I met my grandparents, my uncles, aunties and cousins. We have a really big family, and that was really nice for me too. I spend nearly twelve or thirteen years there living in Athens. I was an English teacher while I was in Greece. I had one girlfriend and I really loved this girl and blah, blah, blah.

B.4.2.5 Lost weekend

John Lennon has a period of his life that he called it the 'lost weekend' where he was just taking drugs, and that, and this, and that.

I came back to Australia just for holidays because I met this girl and she was living here, and she came to Greece before. So, I came back here and I did the last long work out, you know robbing. My parents had divorced then and my brother was living in Geelong and had his own life. I was living on my own, but I wasn't staying here, I was back and forth for about five or six years. I was six month, going there for eight months and then coming back here. I came here to do some robberies, and take the money, and go on holidays there. I spend the money there, and then when the money was finished I came back here do a robbery and get back there. I did that for five or six years.

It didn't last long with the girl; I'm not sure how long it lasted. I was consuming ecstasy, partying; I was doing a lot. I can't say it was a good moment of my life, it doesn't work that way unfortunately. If you have a conscience you know that it's not right. Your conscience doesn´t let you enjoy in the way that you could. I felt really alone.

Early one morning, after being up two or three days partying, I met my daughter's mother. It was Sunday morning, and we had, you know, Vicky was, when Vicky came into my life.

B.4.2.6 Vicstar (daughter)

<u>B.4.2.6.1 Pure love</u>
I met Cristina when the lost weekend was coming to the end. When Vicstar was born, I was still using drugs and stuff like that, but I'd slow that down a bit. I was still doing a bit of crime, but much less. When Vicstar was born I remember saying: "from now on I'm going to wear a suit and tie", I was very happy. It was metaphorical; I needed to make changes.

I'm not sure I was in love with Cristina; it was a very tumultuous relationship, but I fell in love with my girl! When Vicstar came into my life I felt like I had this love,

this pure love. Then it got, I had a court battle trying to keep her in my life, I had to fight. The relationship with her mother I don´t know, I'm not sure. It's like a blur to me; we're both using drugs and stuff, fighting. And just having to fight to the keep her in my life, and not only having to fight, but then also wanting to protect her, wanting to love her, wanting to give her good things. I started revaluating; I started thinking what am I doing? Where is my life going? Is this what I want? Do I want to hang out with this guy and have my daughter there or? In that lifestyle you can´t trust anyone, you know, you can't.

I decided not using drugs; I got some help around that. I've been taking drugs since I was fourteen, the honest thing is even until today that hasn't stopped now. I won't use meth, I might have a joint once a month or something, and even when I do that I still, at times thinks what the fuck am I doing? I have regrets about it. After the fact I always think, I do my head in; why the fuck did I do that? That was stupid!

Vicstar's mother didn't want to share the parenting at all. There was a time that I wasn't seeing Vicstar at all; I didn't know where she was. I think it was just a control thing from her mother, that's how I see it. She has her history too; before Vicstar she' got another three children from three different fathers, two of them were born in Cyprus, and have no contact with their fathers, she took them from their fathers and changed their names. I don't know exactly what her issue is. At that time of course I took it personally, because I was affected by it personally. I'm not sure why she chose to do that, I don´t know.

B.4.2.6.2 Challenging the modern tradition of parenting

That part; the fight, the courts, that was a very stressful time in my life, going through courts to have access to my daughter, and that dragged on for a few years, and it sucked me financially, emotionally, psychologically. That was just very draining, but in the end it was good. Up to that point I had to fight within myself the idea that the child needs to be with their mother. I had to fight within myself to change to not have only contact with my daughter, but to be there, to be able to protect her and nurture her.

Even now, at times if I am out with one of my children people would say, like people that don't know me, they might say things like: "are you babysitting today"? And that used to get me very angry, but my response to that is that where I came from we call it parenting. Babysitting is when you get paid to look after someone else's children; that's what babysitting is. Parenting is when you are with your own children; that's called being a parent. And I see it very angry, but now I just see it as an opportunity to have a discussion, maybe I can shift someone's view.

When Vicky was very little I'd like to read books to her, and I still do. I read books to my children and I'd go out and look for books. You know how difficult it is to find a children's book where the father plays a major role? It´s the little baby bird with the mother bird, the little elephant with the mother elephant, there are many, but 'Spot', you know those books? Spot is a little dog, it's a series and his father plays a major role. So when the kids go to kindergarten it's all about the mother nurturing and the father working. Where these ideas came from? I don't know man, but it's everywhere. It really troubled me and I had to change my own perception to be affective as a parent to Vicstar, and my conclusion is that industrial revolution; that's were all started. Before that there was that saying; it takes a village to raise a child. We had

these communities where everyone participated in bringing up kids in a way; they had their own input in participation, men and women.

B.4.2.7 Ari (son)

Ari is my son's name. I met his mother Fiona and we got together. Ari it's something that we'd spoken about, having a baby. We were living together, she got pregnant really quickly. Ari was born at twenty four weeks of gestation, so he was born very small, was just 600 grs. He spent the first year of his life in intensive care; that was pretty hard for all of us. We were living in the hospital for a year and all of this. There was tension with his mother again; I think there was violence both ways! I feel bad, I can take responsibility only for what I, for myself. So we ended up breaking up about two years ago, around when Ari was one year old. And just ended that's it.

It was stressful, I was more worried about Ari and trying to keep the family together, and Vicstar obviously, how this was affecting her as well. But we started arguing; we weren't arguing about Ari, when it came to Ari we were fine. Things were falling apart, and Fiorina started undermining my relationship with Vicstar and putting Vicstar down, and stuff like that, and that put me in a difficult position, because I felt that I had to protect her; that´s what happened. And possibly some cultural differences, because Fiorina comes from Samoan background, where it's like a tribe mentality, it's not a family, so I think we had clashes there, around that. But we agreed on my access to Ari.

B.4.2.8 Accelerated change

B.4.2.8.1 Self-talking
I just felt that all of a sudden things were happening very quickly. I was in the group again, being hesitant at times. I was coming to this group for many weeks. Quite often driving here I'd get really angry and I would leave here quite angry at times; stuff like I was saying to you before, the bullshit; I thought what the fuck with this bullshit. I suppose in a way that was helping me; I was still not ready to face my responsibility. But then, what happened while back, the midway through the group, I was reading all the stuff and my own stuff as well at home and I had this epiphany; and the epiphany was, if I take responsibility for my life I'm empowered, gives me power, if a blame others it disempowers me! And that was a powerful thought for me, and I thought about that for some time. Then that helped me think about being responsible for my own behaviour, for my own life, even for my day to day things.

And I also started doing things that many would laugh at me because I'd do it in front of my kids. It just came to me one day; I was driving in the car with the kids and I stopped at the red light. I was feeling a little bit agitated and I slowed myself down and I said; I'm gonna give good and I'm gonna take good, and that just felt good for me doing that, actually doing it and saying it. So I did it a few more times and then I said: "hey baby let's do it together". And she's like: "are you crazy dad"? And then I started doing other silly things, and other which aren't so silly. Every morning I look at myself in the mirror when I wash my face, in front of my kids, and then I just tell myself: "I'm happy, I'm good, I got a good heart, I'm strong, I'm doing okay". And that was making me feel really good, straight away I started to feel the difference, I almost took myself out of it!

Another thing that I use to tell the guys of the group too is that for a long time I'd been getting out of bed angry, waking up angry. I started thinking what I'm grateful for in my life? And the first I went to bed and I was trying to think what I'm grateful for and all that I could say was, I'm grateful for my kids. The next day I said I'm grateful for Vicstar, and when I said Vicstar I smiled. And then I thought I'm grateful that Ari is in my life; again I smiled. I said, I'm grateful I got a roof over my head, made a good dinner, my mother came and asked if I was okay, we had a nice drive, everyone is healthy. So, what happened after a little while doing this, I had to stop from saying everything that I'm grateful for in my life, because there was too many things that I didn't realized! So I changed; I'm not going to say anything I'm grateful in my life, I'm going to only say the things I'm grateful for this day, the good things that happened. I think that was just a follow through of the give good and take good, they just came to me out of the blue.

I've noticed when I did that, give good at the light that day, I had a great day! All my interactions that day were great! It's kind of funny, 'cos people can read your face and I noticed that. When I was going angry and all that shit, I'd see why people didn't want to look at me. So when I'm feeling good now, all these women smiling at me, and there you go, you know what I mean?

B.4.2.8.2 Neural paths

In one of the early groups that I went we had this very interesting exercise. They made all the guys stand at one side of the wall and he brought up some scenarios. He said: "your wife forgot your birthday", for example. "Now you are on this side of the wall, this side of the wall is 0 and that side of the wall is 10". "How angry are you, from 0 to 10"? And he pulled all these questions, but at the end of it the exercise was, in that example, was are you angry or are you disappointed? So what I'm trying to say is that I've found that within myself. And I imagine that with a lot of the guys that have the violence it's the neural pathways, it's straight to violence, it is automatic!

In every group I tell the story about the pathways. It's how I came to understand it, and the facilitator always makes me say it. So my thing is that, in my grandfather's village, his house was up here and the village was down there, and there were three paths you could take to go there. There was the left one and this one I'd take because he was proud, he'd build some wells and he'd like to show the well. There was the middle one that hardly anyone used, so rocks had fallen, someone had thrown dumps of cars and shrubs have grown; and there was the right one which was paid and was a little bit longer. So we used to use this one because it's easy to use. Maybe the grass doesn't grow because we use it, it's clean, and this other one is overgrown with shrubs and stuff like that. So it's the same as the neural pathways, because the one that we use more frequently becomes our first of all, automatic, you didn't have to think which path to use; it's stronger, it's deeper.

I could still use this second path but it will take more work. I'll have to get in there, move the rocks, move the car, take some scissors with me and cut the shrubs and stop myself from taking the easy way, the one I am so used to, so it's more of a conscious effort.

I also put "remembering" because it feels to me at times, even though I'm changing, sometimes it feels I'm just going back to my natural state, I'm just remembering. So am I changing something or am I just cutting the bullshit that I've learned out of my life and going backwards? Going back to my natural state as a human being? That's what I'm trying to do; go backwards, not forward, backwards.

And I'll tell you another little thing that I did this last week; it was a bit emotional for me. I was doing my gratitude stuff, sitting on the bed thinking what I was grateful for. But then I was looking at myself in the mirror and I touched my head and I said to myself: "you're a good boy mate, you're a good boy"; talking to the little boy inside me: "you've made mistakes, it doesn't matter, we all make mistakes". I was thinking about this stuff that maybe I didn't hear as a boy. Now I've got certain tools and I can say those things to myself. I'm in that stage where now that I can say that things that maybe I wanted my father to say as a boy, maybe he didn't have the tools either. But now that I'm starting to have a bigger tools box with more tools I'm going to fucking do it to myself.

Interviewer note: At this point Neil asked for a pause to go to the toilet. When he returned, he sat down and commenced to express criticism about the way in which men are treated within the program. According to his point of view, facilitators are judgemental and negative biased toward the men attending the program. He stated that men are not allowed to explain their position and their theories about their couple conflicts and use of violence because they are immediately interrupted and reprimanded by the facilitators who consider these attempts as manoeuvres to avoid responsibility.
Neil argued that facilitators are not empathetic enough to promote the engagement of the men into the process, and maintains that this negative bias toward men who have used violence against women is limiting the access of other men to this service. Neil also referred to his difficulties in having access to the program. He rang many times and was told that there were no vacant for him; until he lost his temper in the phone. He held that this was completely paradoxical, because if men ask for help in this program in a gentle way they receive nothing, but if they get angry with them, they give what they were asking for. They reinforce bad manners- he said.

B.4.2.9 Future chapter

I'd like to, my expectations are, I want to be, I'd like to be happy; happier! I want to remain happy, stay happy in regard with less stress with financials. I struggle at times with my financial stuff, so I want to work harder, hopefully to have my own home, provide for my children; having a bit more security and stability.

At times in regards with using violence and anger and stuff like that, even now I worry about that, I'm scared about it. I catch myself saying; look, nearly we're down that road there's always the temptation to take the short route. So I worry at times about how I speak to my children and how I speak to myself. So I just want to keep on working like that; I feel I need to keep on working like that. If I have negative thoughts, for example, or angry stuff going on for me, because I still do at times. I

want to stop that, and I want to stop thinking about that; and not only with myself but with others too.

So maybe my next chapter is just strength. Is not the stress, because it does nothing but make things more difficult. It's that negative self-talk man.

B.4.3 Key scenes

B.4.3.1 High point

The birth of my daughter; that was the highest (point).

B.4.3.2 Low point

I think around that same time also, when I was fighting for Vicstar. And it wasn't just the fight, it was a specific time that I wasn't seeing her, I didn't know where she was.

B.4.3.3 Turning point

I think possibly one of the biggest, not that long ago, that thing that I thought, I have to take responsibility. The thought that once I do that I will be more powerful, I'll empower myself; the thought that I can change, the thought that it's not out of my hands, it's not something that's impossible, it's not my destiny.

B.4.3.4 Wise episode

Often people say to me: "oh, you're so wise and thank you for that". And I have a number of conversations with my family members. Even last night with my aunty in Greece; I was speaking over Skype and she's going through some reverse stuff, and I tried to support her and I just said what I think, and I´ll make that very clear, what I think and what I feel. And she will say thank you for that, and to me it's so basic, so simple; follow your own heart, do what you feel is right, your own soul will guide you.

B.4.3.5 Regret

Wow! I have a lot. I couldn't say just one, I couldn't. I have many. I think that my biggest one is that I hurt people, that I did crime, that I hurt myself, that's why I can't pick just one. It's about all that stuff, the crime, the drugs.

B.4.3.6 Social causes he support

At the moment I am doing some work with asylum seeker and refugees. I'm visiting them in detention centres and doing picnics and barbeques for them, trying to get other people, build connections.

4.3.6 Life theme

Is change, that's the only thing I can see, but I'm not sure.

B.4.3.7 Effects of the interview

I feel positive, thank you for the opportunity, thank you for listening to me, for showing interest and listen to my story. At times I felt a bit emotional; I recall certain things, certain aspects, when I said to you the time my father in Greece, when I have to recall this things sometimes I feel a little bit emotional, but I felt okay.

B.5 Steve's Life Story

B.5.1 Introduction

Interviewer's note: Before commencing the interview, once the facilitator who introduced Steve and the interviewer, Steve mentioned that he has been diagnosed with bipolar depression and that he is receiving medication, asking if he was still a good participant for the research having this condition. The interviewer answered saying that the interest of the research is in the person's life story independent of their condition.

I've been married for fifteen years. Thank God for that! I live with my wife and children. I have two children; one 13 years old daughter and 11 years old son. My job is stay at home father, home baker, home duties; it's a job, but it's not sort of paid. My wife is studying, community welfare, something like that. She is 47, I'm 50. Most people say I look ten years younger. In a way I feel young mentally 'cos I had a gambling, compulsive gambling issue for eighteen years so, you tend to lose lot out of life, 'cos you're not living, you're just escaping. I was just isolating; you lose a lot of social skills and maturity.

B.5.1.1 Left school and started a work history
Interviewer's note: During the writing of the chapter titles that wasn't audio recorded he spontaneously started talking about a disruption in his life when he was discovered cheating in an exam and failed year 11, so he left school.

I'm the one that failed and my mates got past through. Just out of anger and resentment I left school, just got any sort of job and started the potato manufacturing inflating, the hardest job in my life unloading heavy sacks of potatoes. That's where my back problems started.

I've had fifteen, twenty jobs; shop assistant… My preferred one has been probably the gardening, but unfortunately it included some heavy lifting. I've worked as gardener because I didn't have a lot of social skills; even though I did lots of sales. I was pretty quiet and shy sort of guy, so I didn't have to interact so much in the gardening

B.5.1.2 Left home
I moved out of home when I was 18 to live with my brother in Gippsland. I wasn't getting along too well with my mum. We sort of had a love hate affair. She is very stubborn and strong personality and sensitive and I was the same. Quite often we

picked people similar to our mum and dad. Maria (wife) is similar. It's hard work.

B.5.2 Life story chapters

B.5.2.1 Fun times and troubles of being the youngest of eleven

We were eleven siblings. The fun was my mum takes us to the beach, to every park around Melbourne. Good times with my brothers and sisters, we didn't really need extended friends as much. Getting fish and ships on Saturday nights, we wait for the sunset and then have ice cream on the way back. That was great, that time that really stick in your mind, simple things mean the most, just playing at the beach with my sisters, playing football with my brother; we loved AFL. And troubles, being teased, because I was the youngest I didn't feel Iike I was taken seriously. Not being able to do things with my brother, with his mates.

B.5.2.2 Craving for attention

I didn't feel like I was important enough. Then I started to be mum's little boy, telling on my brothers and sisters on a few things like smoke and drugs and cigarettes. I was just wanting more attention because I didn't feel like; I didn't think they thought I was important enough.
Something very important happened; my dad died when I was six month old, so I didn't get that emotional support from my mum 'cos she was grieving. And I lost my sister when I was a year and a half, so my mum lost her husband and daughter within two years and she was grieving and had a break down. She had to get to the hospital at that stage when my dad died. That's why I was craving for the attention. I'm pretty sure that that was when my anxiety and depression started.

B.5.2.3 Extreme sadness

I'm pretty sure that I blocked it out a lot of it subconscious. I would've been about 10 or 11, grade five or six, primary school. My mum (had) extreme severe depression; not being able to stand and get up, couldn't make lunch, so my older sisters took up.

Because of this special connection we had, this co-dependen(cy) I could go and lay with mum thinking that's going to help her, and then I'd be very upset and sad, crying, thinking that I could help her being sad as well as taking on her sadness. Unfortunately I went to school with that and not being comforted around with people that were having fun and seemed happy. I would be thinking of my mum back at home in the bed thinking in my mind that that was still helping her by being sad at school, taking on that burden thinking it's going to help her, but looking back it didn't help anyone, I'm sure.

B.5.2.4 Abuse and violence and how it affected me

I would've been around 10, 11, 12, I guess. Just lots of screaming, seeing my mum and my sisters fighting, pooling each other's hair around eventually, hearing it, hiding under the bed, scared. Seeing it and hearing it is suffering it also, I guess. I heard my brother, 'cos he's got a bad temper, his ten years older, he used to scare me.

I remember I got to about 14 or 15 and I finally faced it, came in between my sister and my mum and separated them, because previously I would've been so scared that I'd hide under the covers or under the bed. I would start yelling stop, stop it, as loud as I could, because I was a bit bigger then and I got them separated. I remember I was so happy that I actually did that, like empowerment. Before that I just felt so helpless, hopeless and weak.

Criticism impacted in my life a lot, criticism coming from my mum, sisters, very cynical and critical about people, drivers. When you are in the car my mum sort of shooting: "you stupid, idiot, what are you doing". And then in a way you became cynical of people, you lose value of people and respect. Maybe made me very withdrawn and not trusting of people. I still have issues, always thinking the worse of people. I'm starting to mature now and giving them well beneficent of the doubt, being more compassioned through my Christianity.

B.5.2.5 Start of my sexual problems

B.5.2.5.1 Escaping through sex and gambling
It all started when I was 13 and discovered a book under my brother's bed, a pornographic book. I was eager, because of my past I was looking for some way to escape from my sadness. That was the start of my huge problems in my life. You tend to copy your siblings, you think; oh, Jack is looking at it; I'm going to copy, like my brother started gambling when he was 15. That's another huge issue of my life; I started watching horse racing on TV Sunday mornings. I said: "Why are you watching this? It's boring!" But he was betting on it. I thought how could you ever do this? And two years later I started.

Getting back to sexual problems, probably from that time on I started to have one track mind, thinking of women as objects. You see them in the magazines treated as sexual objects and no respect. Took me away from my sadness I guess, it was a bit of escape from my mum. I think I bought magazines; that started when I was 15. And then the actual acting out, going out, and meeting women and one night stand and all that rubbish; that started when I was 18 when I moved down with my three year older brother.

I moved out of home when I was 18 'cos I wasn't getting on well with mum and treating her with respect. This is the weird thing, I ended up blaming her 'cos my mum protected me and moulded me in different ways, and tried to solve my problems when I got older where I could've handled the issues by myself and have my own independence and sense of empowerment, self-empowerment. So I then started blaming my mum, maybe also because going to the room when I was young trying to take on the burden of the sadness caused me to escape to this addictions; and I blamed her and I treated her terrible, with disrespected. She used to say: "you're being so nice and then all of a sudden all you can work you just spoil it".

B.5.2.5.2 The AFL dream
So the gambling started when I was 15 but the sexual problems started when I was 13. Then had one track mind that affected my… and my mum's depression affected my ability to concentrate in school I believe as well. But I do admit at the same time I had a life of football, and I had a dream of playing for Hawthorn, AFL. I had the ability

but unfortunately I fell through when I was 18, I didn't apply myself; the lack of discipline. At the same time met a coach that I didn't like, 'cos young and sensitive, not having a father a role model of toughening you up. Some guys might think that I'm going to try harder, but hearing all the way he went on and I just didn't like it, and I rebelled and I just didn't go back; didn't try my hardest, didn't like it.

B.5.2.6 Intimidation

B.5.2.6.1 My brother forced me to give him my money
I was living in the house with mum, I was 15. My three year older brother and I were both in the back room. I was getting money from my job and he was right into his gambling. And he went: "I want money, I need it, give me the money", so it came to a bit of pushing and he was stronger. He wanted money for gambling, I said no at the start but because I felt intimidated I gave it to him. I didn't tell anyone, I just didn't want to bother my mum; she had enough already. I didn't feel like I could open up for some reason to my older brother; my old brother had a temper I didn't want that sort of fighting. So I had a lot of stuff in my mind.

B.5.2.6.2 Gambling against my brother in golf
I was also a good golfer and he was a golfer because he had three years of experience. My ego wanted to gamble against him in golf. I lost thousands of money; I got more angry and upset with him losing all that money and made me played worse because I'd be more angry and the fact that he was taking money and he's my brother, he's supposed to love me and he's taking this money every week from me losing this golf. But that was my choice, I was stubborn and I wouldn't admit that I wasn't good enough, and it cost me a lot of money.

B.5.2.7 Lacking direction

B.5.2.7.1 Like a little helpless child
Believe it or not all this is caused, like maybe fifty percent at least, for not having a father, a good role model, loving role model. I had my father living my mum's depression wouldn't have impacted me as much, that extra support. In a way I still feel like that helpless little child. I still feel pretty insecure in my life and, I feel pretty hard to trust people and feel safe in society, especially when I'm around aggressive people. Fortunately I'm getting better, lot better lately.

B.5.2.7.2 I repeated things that I didn't want to do
I repeat, after the six years of letting Maria just have that control in bring up the children to keep the peace, not wanting fights and yelling because I knew how it had impacted me, stressed me, made me anxious, scared; I didn't want that for my children. But unfortunately, like I picked up after six year, I just didn't like the way Maria was bringing up the children and I started to have my say but Maria sort of had that control for the five or six years of the children, so she obviously didn't like a lot of my comments and the way I wanted to bring up the children, so that caused friction

which accentuated, sort of repeated stuff that I really didn't want to do. So I suppressed it which caused the pressure to build up.

B.5.2.7.3 Lack of direction
The lack of direction was not having anyone sort of interested in my career. It would've helped some encouragement. Well, my mum and my older sister said; repeat, repeat. But my pride wouldn't allow, and my anger; so I just went out and got a job, I just wanted to get some money. But I didn't really get into the gambling compulsive till I was 18, so I saved money for a car.

B.5.2.7.4 Why gambling
The gambling was just very sly at the time. I won initially, which kept feeding my ego; maybe one day I'm going to be a big time gambler, a very important person, to be noticed; I wanted to be noticed, 'cos I've low self-esteem. It's amazing how the devil causes you, to people that are vulnerable, that are susceptible to have a personality, addictive personality. When I went to GA meeting nearly every person said they got a win that kick them off, gave them that extra self-esteem, whatever they were after.

B.5.2.8 Wanting to be important

Wanting to be important as in achieving something because I felt I didn't have my ambitions… Low self-esteem in a crazy way, I fell through these addictions; I was good at picking up women and having this crazy one night stand, going out talk to them and then have sex. I'd do it because I was drinking, had lots of courage because I was very shy. And the gambling; I started winning at the start, I felt important because it deceives you, in your mind you think this is going to continue, trying to feed your pride and your ego to make up from all this deficits and insecurities you have.

B.5.2.9 The joy of fatherhood

B.5.2.9.1 God spoked to me
I'm Christian, so I'm going to say prize God and Jesus 'cos from 18 to 33 I was a prisoner to gambling and sex addiction. I was just walking home from the casino when I was 32 and crossing a bridge, I didn't ever leave enough money to take public transport, I've lost everything, I think because I was really deeply depressed and I didn't want to get any of my flat, I had my own flat, I was a prisoner in my own flat. I was coming out of the casino and something just spoke, I believed it was the Holy Spirit. He said: "Stephen you must give up this, you must give up". I was over like a bridge. I've never had suicidal thoughts 'cos my mum always brought me up in the faith that there is always hope, my mum left the legacy that she left; the hope and faith.

B.5.2.9.2 Anyone can end up in jail because of gambling
Two weeks later I came across someone who introduced me to GA meetings. I heard terrible stories, like one lady was a bank teller and investing in old ladies account, taking money out of her account. And then in the papers, the same lady she stabbed this old lady to death because this old lady apparently found out, told someone. And

she went to prison; the bank teller went to prison. And it can happen to anyone. I was robbing my mum when my mum was deeply depressed, to get money for gambling.

<u>B.5.2.9.3 I met my wife</u>
I believe God also…you wouldn't believe were I met Maria. In the casino! She came for holidays from Chile with a friend. She didn't speak English but her friend interpreted. I just sat down with them and said; I just got a break, I am losing my money. Do you mind if I sit down? And it all started from there.

Not long after I gave up. I went to the GA meeting and just gave up through being healed by God or Jesus. I've never been tempted to since, never for sex, gambling, smoking or drinking, so I believe in the total healing. Lot of people say otherwise: "once you're an addict you'll always be an addict", but I believe I'll never go back to it. Through Gods strength, not my own strength, so if I move away from my relationship with God and Jesus there's a good chance that I might relapse.

Maria was a good influence; didn't smoke, drink or gamble. I was at the end of it, probably at the worse when I met her. She was suddenly saying you don't want to lose all your money; can you please not go to the ATM again? You don't want to give all your money to this people, make this people rich. And she even knew; I told her my pass, how I'd been with a lot of women, I wanted to be straight up front. I even had an AID test to be sure, because I did a lot of unprotected sex, I didn't want to infect any other women. I believed for some reason something is going to happen, and she just stayed, she never went back. She had an extension, another extension and then, even though we got married, my mum had to verify that we spend a lot of time together so it's not a sham marriage.

<u>B.5.2.9.4 The joy of fatherhood</u>
Fatherhood, yeah! Just holding a beautiful baby, the joy of feeling close with Maria, bringing this through God as well, bringing this beautiful child into the world. The closeness with the fatherhood obviously, and the closeness you feel with your wife; just loving unconditionally the baby when she came, and then my son. Probably because I've worked through the issues I had, like a huge burden came off of me that I could enjoy he birth of my child more. I could concentrate in being a good father a loving father and husband.

B.5.2.10 Grief, faith and sadness

<u>B.5.2.10.1 Mum passed away</u>
Grief as in my mum passing away in 2003. We came back from Chile; that very night we came back a message jumping on the phone saying my mum had an accident. She was on a machine with brain injury; I think the family waited us to come back. She had a fall and hit her brain. She could only breathe artificially. I was waiting there, I was angry; I said to the doctors: "are you sure? This is my mother, my love; I want you to spend extra time checking". They reassured me that nothing could be done.

Faith for the legacy that my mum left me; made it a lot easier to go through the grieving processes, just that hope of Jesus returning and seeing, it's Gods tool to see my mum again, resurrection.

And sadness also called because my children missing up. Because not having a grandfather and not having a grandmother to spend some loving time with them; they're missing out on their grandparents. It's just Maria and I. And just the sadness because Maria's parents are overseas and they don't really see them too much. So there's a lot of sadness for the children.

B.5.2.11 Finding how to express love for God, Jesus and humanity

This is starting to be now, but I want to find this more in the future, not too distant in the future; finding how to find and express my love for God and Jesus in humanity. Because I think that if you don't love God and Jesus it's too hard to love humanity. I believe that if I love God and Jesus I will find peace and love for myself.

I'm a Seventh Day Adventist; Maria is as well. We worship on the seventh day, every Saturday. And that gives a lot of peace and sense of belonging and security, worshiping and fellowship. We visit our brother and sisters sometimes, not too much. I don't have many friends outside of the church I probably feel more comfortable being around my Christian friends. I guess probably this is probably getting back to that trust issue, not trusting people, not having that security when I was young, that emotional support. I did blame my mum when I was young, and more immature, but I do realise now she did the best she could, and it's not her fault she had a breakdown. Any psycho normal person probably would have a break down after two deaths. And she was also suffering depression; I mean the chemical imbalance and bipolar.

B.5.2.12 Next chapter in life

B.5.2.12.1 More loving
I want to be loving, contributing; even more loving because there's always things we can get better, more loving father, husband, more contention, peaceful and contributing to helping people to find God given direction.

Loving as experience first and act; the act, not just keep it inside. I believe that it comes from God and Jesus first. I can only do it through their love to unconditionally love others, 'cos I think there is always selfishness within my heart, so I'm through more study and prayer. I would give it to my wife and children, and people; show respect to people, not raising voices, not repaying psycho evil with evil; when someone is angry and aggressive with me just stay calm and try to have some empathy to realize they have huge issues probably, and not take it so personally.

B.5.2.12.2 Change would be easy with two pushing in the same direction
It hasn't been an easy marriage and things are still pretty tough. I still believe that I'm a loving father to my children, even though I discipline them sometimes and give them consequences, but that's true love, that's the duty of a father, especially if you are brought up in a Christian home.

It's hard, it's hard, it's really hard for us guys to admit that we are the ones that got to change because at the same time we know that if the wife pushes, pushes for change as well, things are going to be a little bit easier on us to change. It's so much harder if you don't see changes for a while. I know I'm not here to mention what I think Maria

needs to do, but I know what she needs to do that would help my mental state as well and my anxiety, but I'm not here to… because I've got a huge part to play in it as well with the stress. I'd say, the shape of love is continue getting better; lowering my tone of voice, less criticism; I'm learning to shut my mouth and walk away, be more calm and respectful in my talk.

Interviewer asked for a concrete example.
Instead of saying: "Maria I'm sick of you just answering for the children, they are old enough, they can answer for them self, I don't like you to interrupt", I'd say: "Maria can you please, just frustrates me when you answer for the children all the time, and you don't allow them to make up their own minds. Is it possible you just let them answer for themselves? I would really appreciate it".

But Maria is… I think there is hope, but at times I've felt like going away for a bit because I see we are stuck in a little bit of cycle. We'd come home from outside where there's been a little stress but we came home and all the sudden, quite often, the kids will raise their voice and I'll raise my voice and say to calm down and sometimes is hard to handle the stress even though the kids are kids.

B.5.2.12.3 Bipolar medication is hampering my efforts
Oh man, you'll probably think I'm making an excuse under the sun. Is a fact that this anxiety in the bipolar have taking me on tablets, this undermines my confidence. I would like to go off these medications and just trust God totally, but it's hard because my psychiatrist tells me don't go off. Maria panics when I say I'll even thinking of cutting down. I'm not going to be irresponsible and just go straight off because I'm just going to have a high period and end up in the hospital, like I had. But at the same time I want to cut down slowly; I feel like it undermines my ability to become a better person and more loving because I have this medication.

It's just dispiriting when you get it from your psychiatrist and Maria panics. She rang the psychiatrist saying: "have you told him to cut down?" There was one time that I did cut down and I had a stressful court case with someone and stress can make levels go up again, you know, the mania, the cycle goes up sort of. Because of that one occasion I think Maria and my psychiatrist are saying I think it's not a good idea for you to try to cut down. Hopefully I might be healed, because I do believe God and Jesus can heal all diseases, but sometimes maybe it's not their will I don't… I am very confused about this. Maybe for some reason God do leave some people with disabilities to help others.

I know you shouldn't use your mental illness as an excuse, but there are ways that you can get better through your diet and environment. But if you're susceptible to getting worse, medication it's vital; does take away your emotions though. I don't know if you know much about being a bipolar but the medication I'm on can take away your…it can make you a bit cold and hard and direct.

B.5.2.12.4 Future direction
I just want to be more loving, caring, to bring out that with my wife and children and people. And also I believe I've got a lot of things to offer, I'm just going to pray and find the right area in which to enter and hopefully my past won't discriminate against that. Mostly becoming more forgiving, not expect so much from humans. In the past I

would resent and hold it, which I think would cause me more depression; just more peaceful, content and loving; caring constructive person instead of disruptive; learn to respect, respect myself by showing respect to others and respect to myself, to put myself into others people's situation as well and to realize that I've done a lot of bad things, and when people do it to me there's a reason, and don't take it personal.

Sometimes I feel like I'm hitting a brick wall because it's always hard to push forward, it's not easy.

B.5.3 Key Scenes

B.5.3.1 High point

Easy, easy: the birth of my first child. It's such a beautiful, emotional feeling. Just being supportive with Maria, helping her through her labour, seeing her come out very healthy through a miracle of God.

Maria said that morning she has some pain, I said: "is there any contractions?" She said: "a little bit;" I said: "it's alright". Half an hour later, she had pain again and she sort of wincing. I said: "is it more than the first one?" And she says: "a little bit", I said: "I think we still should wait a bit". I said: "we don't want to go a long way away for false alarm". I didn't understand I guess, and then the third and fourth time it started to get more frequent. And then she had to practically yell at me: "we got to go!" Because I was just stubborn, didn't think she was ready to go yet. She had everything ready anyway.

I drove down to the Hospital trying to calm her down with relaxing music, which we played when Ann was born. Then we were expecting that Ann would come pretty quickly, but she is pretty stubborn too. Ann didn't come until about three thirty, even though it took a while, all of a sudden she came down on a slide straight out. It's amazing just seeing her cry, there was no complications, just an incredible feeling. It's not just Anna, it's just the feeling of closeness with Maria; the fact that your wife is put up with this pain and produced this beautiful baby, just feeling you're floating, like the best natural feeling you never want to get.

This is important because it gives us hope, it gives me hope that through God you can produce this sort of unconditional love and contentment and peace. This says that deep down there is a lot of love in my heart and there's a lot of love to give out, it's the journey I'm on. I have seen myself show glimpses of that to my wife and always have love for my children. I sometimes don't love what they do, I don't like what my wife does, just like God and Jesus would say he loves the person but doesn't love what they are doing. (This story means) the potential is there, and the hope.

B.5.3.2 Lowest point

I was obviously more immature at the time, but seeing my mum suffering. Because it wasn't just once or twice, seeing expressionless sort of emotions in my mum's face; made just sort of rolling over and kissing her, giving her a hug. I just said love you so much mum, please don't cry, please don't be sad but she just couldn't change her expression.

This scene is relevant because it confirms the strange way I thought I was helping her. I felt so hopeless and helpless which I think just contributed to the impact of my insecurity and threat my life. But I felt at least pro-active in my mind, doing something. Looking back I can see there is caring and compassionate inside me, it's there but it's just untapped.

B.5.3.3 Turning point

B.5.3.3.1 God spoked to me to change
The time when I was a compulsive gambler; 18 to 33 and I was right at the worse of it. I'd just met Maria, we saw each other occasionally and that was when I was walking home from the city. I didn't give myself enough money, lost all my money once again. I was walking over a bridge, looking down below where the train goes; no thoughts of suicidal. It was a balmy night and this voice audibly came into my mind: "Stephen you've got to give up". For some reason I just looked over the edge of the bridge, but no thoughts of doing any harm, just this voice: "Stephen you got to give up, you got to stop this", 'cos that was the time I was robbing my mother. That's how crazy it was and this voice from the Holly Spirit through God of Jesus I definitely hundred percent believe said: "you got to give up, you got to stop this". So that was the most amazing turning point.

B.5.3.3.2 God guided me into GA
Not long after, within two weeks, I came across to some organization or person that introduced me to GA, so I believe God works through humans as well for sure. And I reckon the second or third night I heard this story about the lady who was thinking of investing, she work as a bank teller, she was thinking of investing in the old ladies account, tempted to do it because of the addiction of the gambling, and two or three weeks later it was in the news, in the newspapers; she stabbed this old lady to death on her way to work. She thought she was about to find out which is a life in placement, and she went to the women's prison, so that was like a confirmation.

B.5.3.3.3 God put my wife on my way
Maria was also in the process of that. I met her before, when I was in the worse of it; she was a good influence for sure, so I think that Maria had same impact. I believe God got us together as well. I mean, what's the chance of seeing people strike up relationships. She was just on her holidays, she didn't speak a word of English, and then we started. So she was a good influence as well, not smoking, drinking, gambling. It's just hard to explain, but I just knew that God has worked out this relationship for us. I wasn't, I wouldn't say sexual, it wasn't a sexual thing, but it was good. Previously I was just having sexual thoughts all the time with women. I remember just concentrating on just her beautiful features instead of sexual, just like her smile or the way she talked.

This was important because it was a time that I was always thinking about having children; I wanted to be a father, and I just had that feeling that with Maria and I we could work things, we could have a good life and have children would be good too. After we got married we just lift it up to God to work it out. I was 36 and Maria was 34 when we had our Ann. We started late but I was so glad to work out all the issues and be healed of all those addictions before the children came, get rid of all that rubbish. I don't mean to undersell what I have been through, I'm not underselling it because it has been very important, it hasn't been easy in my life, but I'm learning; lots of learnings.

This story represents that I'm willing to change. I want a better life for myself and my children. I'm not saying that change is easy, but things are getting away sometimes; it's a journey definitely. At times I feel like there's no hope in my marriage, at times, 'cos it hasn't been easy; but I thank God for that we haven't given up because marriage shouldn't be given up on easy.

B.5.3.4 Wisdom event

B.5.3.4.1 Following God's invitation
Even though I thank God glory and Jesus for healing me but the wisdom to take those choices is also within myself because you have to work yourself as well; so actually listen to that voice, the Holly Spirit telling me to give up, taking the steps to go to that meeting were I could've easily walked away from God and Jesus. That's the wisest choice I've made.

B.5.3.4.2 Keeping voices lower at home
Also lately just trying to keep calmness in the house, keep the voices down, 'cos initially that's why the police were called, because my tone of voice went sky high and the police were called out. Maria called; she admitted she panicked because she thought… Because I was disciplining my children in a controlled way, slap on the wrist and Joshua didn't want to go to sleep, so he hid under the bed and then the police came. The police were given wrong information and a special squad came; they said that I was going to harm the children. Lately I've been telling, suggesting, please keep the voices down because it stresses me as well, hear high pitch voices coming from Maria and the children; when rushing to get the kids to school; can you please try to keep your voices down and then things will get along better. Because I know it does stress me when the voices are raised and I realize the impact that in the past… what I've done when I've raised my voice in front of my children, so I didn't want to repeat, but unfortunately sometimes we do repeat, quite often, but I'm aware of it.

That attributing to the wisdom of God and Jesus and also the group, what I've learned in the group, God and Jesus give me the wisdom to act as well but, to hear it from a lot of the testimonies, tone of voice is a big thing. Not what you say, the way you say it too get people of guard, you know; you've came across the wrong way; so it's the way you say it too sometimes.

B.5.3.4.3 Not judging by appearances
Also nature, I feel just a peace and connection with my maker God and Jesus in nature. Every day I hear the birds and I feed them with bird seeds. Hear this most

beautiful voice you think those birds must be so beautiful looking, you go out and they are just simple, not usually attractive. And it gives me hope to think not to judge humans 'cos humans can be just as beautiful; they might not look outwards, 'cos God goes on the inward appearance not the outwards; they might look so beautiful and attractive on the outside but the inside. Not to be judgmental by its cover; give people a chance to show this beauty.

B.5.3.4.4 No swearing on MBCP's premises
In the past I've always judged too much. I would see a guy with tats and rough, and maybe looks a bit angry, and I felt intimidated, probably just not being used to be around a lot of men because I've been pretty much alone. I try hard not to judge but I'm not that type to mix with that rough, swearing kind of guy. As a Christian also I don't particularly want to be around it. That's why sometimes I have trouble with the group, 'cos with the swearing, especially if there's woman and kids around, particularly it makes me pretty frustrated. I have said in the group that any swear words can foster feelings aggression and violence. If we're trying to overcome this I think they shouldn't be allowed; it should be one of the rules no swearing on the premises, because I think it's contributing maybe to "stay in the stay" when they are trying to overcome.

B.5.3.5 Greatest challenge

Probably overcoming sadness and feeling of guilt is the biggest challenge; I'm still working on that. This is important because it's stopping me from achieving these feelings of love and joy and respect for my fellow humans, and obviously for my wife and children.

Whether it's just standing back from my mum or it's also a genetic predisposition I have for depression and anxiety and bipolar, I think God has giving me the strength to not show as much in front of my children; well, with this little bit of medication as well, but the medication is not supposed to stop me from getting depressed, it's supposed to stop you from getting maniac. I'm sort of proud of not to show this sadness, although it's still there deep down. In my spiritual journey I got to learn to give it over.

B.5.3.6 Life theme

There's a negative and a positive. I'll star with the negative I guess. I'm trying to think of the word where you are always sort of kicking yourself in the foot…

Interviewer invited to look at a single life theme instead
One common thing, consistent theme; hope, yeah, hope. I won't worry about thinking about that negative. Even I did say hope I'm thinking it's hard to be positive, it's a rule of challenge for me to be positive especially when there's been so many negatives… I just believe through the strength of my saver Jesus and the father, God I will continue to have the strength and the hope.

B.6 Matt's Life Story

B.6.1 Introduction

I'm 35, Australian. Married; my wife does (have) two children; nine and sixteen, but I do have four children to another lady. I haven't seen them in a few years. Worked at the meat works, the abattoir over 10 years, (I'm) working in bottle water company.

B.6.1.1 Getting into MBCPs
I came here to the program because I wanted to do me-self. I knew I was going in a bad way. I didn't know about no program, I came in here and asked for help, to speak to somebody. And I met Sue who is a social worker, facilitator. She listens to you and talks. Sue was the one that directed me to the Men's Behavioural Group, and rehab of alcohol course that I completed as well. I know I'm better than that and I've also seen what the alcohol's done to my step dad and the relationship my step dad and my mum had; because of that reason I saw what he's done and I swore I would never go down that path. Then I saw me-self in that position, I know it was only minor but it's enough for me. So, that was it.

I've got everything. I want me wife, I had never been married before and I will never marry again. I got two great kids; they love me as their own father.

B.6.1.2 Current situation with his wife
We had a break there for a while, which is understandable, we went separate ways and which we still do, but we see each other on a regular basis, I see the children, we socialize and things are looking good.

B.6.2 Life story chapters

B.6.2.1 Living with me real dad
Of my real Dad I have just an image of him in me head, getting hit by him with a ruler, he'd buy me a bike and then taken it off me because I've done something; little things, just vague. I don't remember where we were living.

Mum told me one story about an old lady, mum must have been doing gardening or something, just a vague memory, and I was in a pram and an old lady walked past and said: "what a lovely child" and I said something like: "stick it up your nose and rub hands" or something.

B.6.2.2 Darnum: living with mum and step dad and his troubles with the law
The main thing that I remember more was growing up with me step dad and mum in Darnum, little country town. There was myself; I'm the oldest of eight. And then there was me real two sisters, us three were from our real dad and then the following five from this other dad.
My life has been pretty rough, all my life. Just grew up rough. Like no running water, especially later on in life, I mean, we didn't own a house, no electricity, no windows, no running water to wash our self, and get picked on at school because you stink. We only eat what we chopped of the land. I would get up early before school, shoot

rabbits, duck or go fishing whatever so there is food there for mum to cook during the day while we were at school so we would have tea.

We thought it was normal until when you get picked on it: "why do they pick on it"? "This is normal", but it's not normal. I attended school, but more helping dad. At that stage he worked in a knackery, and that's why he ended up pulling me out of school to work in a knackery with him, so I didn't do my full school. Dad did give me the choice, I chose I would help dad, I felt I had to, you know, it's me dad. Then he got in trouble with the law. We moved around because we followed him, we had no choice.

B.6.2.3 Tasmania: adventure, fun, footy, family violence and alcohol

B.6.2.3.1 Fleeing to Tasi
I remember packing up, some bloke come and take all of dad's guns so the cops wouldn't take them, and then going to Tasi. It was that much of a rush we left all our belongings, everything, the bags, left the car. Next thing I knew we were in Tasmania.

B.6.2.3.2 Farm life in Tasi
I was around twelve. I remember rocking up to an old farm house that dad had tidied up, that's when I saw the farmer side of life in dad; dairying cows and the beef cattle and that sort of staff. Dad was a stockman, always had grew up on a raunchy farm, he always had his horses. I've done every job dad done, milking and beef.

B.6.2.3.3 Family violence and alcohol
I have memories of us kids standing around mum, screaming our head off, mum lying on the floor, blood all over her, thinking she was dead; I have lots of those memories, we all do. So that's the main thing. Have good memories of mum trying to stick up for us but that made the situation worse. It's hard to try to find a good memory in life. There were good memories that you can think of in the house in the wheat, all jump over the Land Rover, in the river for a swim, great; but alcohol was involved, so in the way back it was violence involved, always. Poor mum, she is tiny, tiny, skinny. Dad, he's six foot man, this wide, with a cowboy hat. I couldn't, we couldn't, we were helpless. We were just a little takers, I am a little taker to him now. Alcohol involved, something would happen, guarantied, we knew it. Dad drunk everywhere he went; along in the highway, I can remember cars: "dad, dad!"; dad seating there with his stubby trying to keep on the road, slap on the back, rifle behind us; that was our life, that was it, that was dad.

B.6.2.3.4 Adventure
It was an adventure to me; I went out on me own a lot, to be honest that's actually when I started smoking a bit of marihuana over there. Prior, living in the middle of nowhere; where we went in Tasi was a little more of a community sort of thing. I joined the footy club, I did footy for a while; loved playing a little bit of footy until I was permanently injured in my leg and I got an operation.

I bought me self an old car 'cos I was working on a dairy farm helping dad, and plus working in the bee farm, plus I'd skin all the cows from the farmers; get the dead cows that would come out, cows that would just die of any cause and I would skin them; I was meant to get the money for that. I didn't want to be home, that's why I

get busy, got up before mum and dad would and I'd flee, didn't want to get back. Dad had been drinking; I would just sneak into bed.

B.6.2.3.5 Back to Victoria
I was getting depressed. A couple of mates I used to hang out moved, knee broke to the hospital, no more footy. And I had a little car there, a little Suzuki hatch, and dad took me Suzuki off me because it was better than his car to get to work; took the run bottom out of it so I couldn't drive.
I met up with my step brother from dad's side. I was good with the law at that stage, hadn't been in trouble and me step brother came over to visit, and probably took me into a bit let's get back to Victoria. I went along with it, so I grabbed me dog I had at that stage, put it in my little Suzuki, packed as much as things I could and pushed it, because I had no run bottom in it; me and me brother pushed me car, half a night to the next town because I knew that in Danny Creek there was another white Suzuki hatch, the same as mine. So we pushed it and I snacked it the key, fit beautiful, took it back to my car, popped it in, first kick; way we go! We travelled around quite a bit, wait until a boat come in. The police pulled us over; none of us had a licence; we explained the situation and they knew of dad and they were even scared of him, so said: "okay, make sure you get straight to the boat".

A lot of what I know now to survive in life with nothing, with no money, not even a roof over your head and I could survive; that's because of Dad. I enjoyed being brought up in the middle of nowhere, I think deep down inside I enjoyed, apart from the violent side of it.

B.6.2.4 Back to Victoria: freedom and party time

We went from the boat to his step brother mum's house. I caught out with me sister below me; cause she'd already run away as well. Had my sixteen birthdays, it was freedom, get on my piss and a little weed and life is good; drunk as much as I could, party as much as I could, meet heaps of people my brother introduced me to, and trouble with the law; it goes from driving, to assault to weapons, I ended finding me guns that me dad had left over here prior to moving over and that was big trouble too; I didn't want to sell them, I grew up with those rifles they put food on our plates.

We moved into a house of our own in Toora; myself, my step brother and my real sister with whom I finally caught up with here when she knew I was back. We didn't have a TV, so we jump into a motorbike and stole one from a caravan park so we could watch our footy. Things like that, I just didn't care.

I ended up losing the house, I got in trouble with the law; I smash up a few cars in the high way drunk, robbed cars, so I would just run and leave them in the middle of the road. I've got a little mail in the glove box and they would rock up in me door and bang! I ended up moving, I ended up with a correction order.

I was mixing with the wrong people, I was living with a drug dealer that got raided every second day, and then I left. I wouldn't have clue off taking the decision to leave, probably me sister, I don't remember really, I don't remember leaving Toora; I know that wouldn't been a part of it, but next day what I remember is living in here, Morwell.

B.6.2.5 Morwell: living with sister

I ended up in here Morwell with just me sister. I had to do work for the corrections, mowing, doing land scape for businesses. So depending on the amount of money owed it goes on the amount of days you have to do. I ended up bridging it, I ended up getting a call from mum, she was still in Tasmania; dad nearly killed her.

B.6.2.6 Rescuing mum

I bridged my community order. I waited to my next pay, jump on a plane and head back over to Tasi to save Mum. I ended up staying there. Mum wasn't too chubby, but she still wanted to stay. When she rang for me to go out and save I think she overreacted. She wasn't well, that was visible, you could tell that she wasn't well, but sixteen years in mum with dad, she was too scared to leave; simple. So well, I'm back to live back at home again. First thing, I bought a car and started a job in a dairy farm. We had to get out of the house, our rent had a problem so we moved over to a brick house and then things started getting sour again. Me and me dad stopped talking. I went into a little more weed again.

Dad was rocking up drunk to laming mum, and I went with some friends to talk to mum while dad wasn't there; and just unlucky, dad rocks up while someone was there; not good being in the house while dad is not there; so mum caught a little bit of a slap for that; dad threw my vinyls in the fire and burned; a real asshole. So we went and stayed with these people for a few nights; mum and myself and my two youngest sisters. Then mum ended up with my two sisters in a woman's shelter and I ended up in a refugee for a little while. Got mixed up with some silly blocks from the refuge and got little bit more trouble with the law and mum and I and me two little sisters ended up catching the boat over her to Victoria.

And that's where it comes over that I don't socialize to any of my brothers and sisters now or speak, as far as I know I walk out the door here and one of them may be out there and just stab me in the back I wouldn't know so. Dad passed away in his sleep, alcohol seventy four years old he was. Me step brother who was living in Tasi with him still, because Dad couldn't come to Victoria because they would lock him straight away, found him three days later in his bed. Some people said there's an effort Matt if you've only hadn't taken mum away. If only I hadn't taken mum away she'd be the one in the ground.

B.6.2.7 Back in Victoria II

Came back to Victoria and rock up at the police station and handed myself in. They set a court day, I went to court. Mum came to court with me, we explained the situation and I just got extra hours of the community work. And I ended up moving from here Morwell once me order was over, and I ended up moving to Leongatha living with mum a couple of years. Then my sister came over to visit with a friend, and that's the friend with whom I ended up with, so I ended up back in Morwell as a couple. She already had a house so I didn't have to do nothing, just move in.

B.6.2.8 Morwell: from family life to live with mum

B.6.2.8.1 Good family life
I had no job at that time, it was about raising the kids, trying to be a better parent, focus on me as a person I think, and me and me girlfriend at the time as a family. Bringing up children our way I think, seeing how we were brought up and the way mum and dad brought us up and me having the opportunity as a father to bring my children, our children, up the way I wanted, without always looking over me shoulder wondering when I'm gonna get brought up the ass, brought up in your head with a bloke; so it was a lot of family, it was a lot of family for me to. Settled down and yeah, started to get on the right track a little bit. Seven years living together.

B.6.2.8.2 Going back to work
Mum ended up getting her own place in Leongatha and ended up with a boyfriend she's still with now. Then mum come to visit one day and said your mate's wondering if you want to go out in the meats and work with them because they've got jobs out there. So I spoke to my girlfriend at the time and no, not good; she wanted me there twenty four seven with the kids and I said well, I'm a grownup, bad luck, I'm going to work, you know, being bludging on the dole for too long. I do work, imagine the benefits we're going to get and I can stay at mum's three days a week and come back on the weekends; everyone would be happy. She didn't want me to go, no, I think all those years together. But what am I going to do the rest of me life seat here raising the kids? There's got to be something more in life than that. So I ended up going and staying up with mum.

So I travel backwards and forward as much as I could, every spare moment I could, and I would work an eight or ten hour day at the meat works and still drive from Leongatha to here; to prove just because I'm over there working doesn't mean that you are pushed aside. Kept on that for a while and it just didn't happen, it just didn't work out, so I ended up moving with mum and just coming over on the weekends.

B.6.2.9 Losses

B.6.2.9.1 My best mate died
And then I moved up with a mate, the best mate I've ever had, the best mate I will have. We were having a few drinks in his place one night and he was going to get a little bit of herb and ended up smashing his car in a tree and killing himself. He had his girlfriend in the car with him; lost her child, she was pregnant. That was a big changing point thing.

I still went to work but obviously I had some time off, the boss gave me because everyone knew how close we were; stayed with mum for a bit, stuck at work and on and off; big depression, but I got through, got back on alcohol for a while for a little bit.

B.6.2.9.2 Separation with first family
I was rarely coming over to see my children and girlfriend. Went to the funeral over here and then we had drinks just across the road where me and me family lived. I went over to see them and she's got all the shit packet up, she's going so I said: "what

are you doing"? She says: "I had enough from Morwell, I don't want to bring up the kids here so I am moving down to Frankston", and I said: "well, Frankston is better than here, that's Melbourne", so couldn't change her mind, so she ended up moving down to Frankston.

B.6.2.9.3 Mum kicked me out
Christmas has passed and mum bought a big bottle of real ninety dollar whisky, and Bob kept it under his bed in his bedroom; apparently it ended up half empty and mum accused me of doing it. So I was doing the dishes by night at mum's, and his boyfriend come up behind me and he's thinking I've stolen his ninety dollar alcohol, and he comes over and he's sneaking up behind me and I turn around, he kicks and I broke his leg stopping the kick, send him off to the fucking hospital 'cos his sneaking back behind me, so mum kicks me out.

Years later Bob said: "I'm sorry for accusing you of taking that alcohol mate, because while you've not been living here under this roof my alcohol is still going missing".

B.6.2.10 Working and drinking

B.6.2.10.1 Living in Caravan Park
I had a mate living down in the caravan park; he's a bit of a piss head, so I went and stayed with him for a bit. And he works at the meat work as well, so I could still get to work with the lift he was getting, so I stayed with him for a while, didn't see much of mum. Then I got me own caravan; life was about working and drinking or both at the same time, didn't matter.

B.6.2.10.2 Jo reappeared
My mate's girlfriend, who passed, she finally got out of hospital and she rocked up in me doorstep. We had a mates relationship, we weren't a couple. We got along well, Jason and I got along, as I said, brothers; she was part of Jason. We got a house together and moved into Warrigal. It can't be wrong, I was just stuck in a little van she was living with people in Leongatha that she didn't want to live with.

B.6.2.10.3 Preventing my mate's violence against his partner
They were similar, the perfect couple, he was a grumpy bludger when he wants to be and I pull him aside; say hey Jason, you've been a bit of an ass to this girl, and I'd calm him down; she knew that, I respected her, I respected him. I was brought up through all the rubbish as you know, with this violent side of it, so I didn't agree with it, so if happened in front of me I'd think things back in me past and I'd think no, this isn't right, I can't see a great couple like this ten years, twenty years down the track and they'll end up like what I've been through; that's when I'd pull my mate aside and say come mate, look outside, we'll take the dog for a walk.

B.6.2.11 Warrigal: living with Jo

B.6.2.11.1 Jo went loopy
A couple of mates from work moved in with us, three bedroom house, and Jo ended up with a boyfriend that she made from work. She got on heavy drugs; she went a bit loopy; I was hitting the piss pretty hard. She got on some weird crap, Jason wouldn't be happy, I tried to stick up for her, she'd come back from the clubs; rubbish,

violence with boyfriend. I stood up for her as much as I could, I looked after her the best that I could, but she really didn't want to change at the time. She moved away and I stayed at the house in Warrigal 'cos it's still under my name. Got in a bit of trouble with the law again and me mate moved out. I think I got a fine, and then I kept getting in trouble, so I was looking at an imprison term; I didn't, I was lucky, I got to the stage before prison. I left the house, just left it, walked out the door, caught a bus to mum's, that was it.

B.6.2.11.2 Seeing my kids again
I forget how it comes about it, but the mother of my kids found me somehow, I don't know, I think I got a phone call and she wanted to know if I wanted to see the kids; obviously I said yes, so she got the train down every weekend for me to spend time with the kids in Warrigal. I saw me kids for a while, we went camping one weekend. I met with mates of work and got drunk and apparently missed a call; she travelled down, I forgot it was a kids weekend, she travelled down and I wasn't at the train station, so she left and never contact me again to this day.

B.6.2.12 Back to a caravan in Leongatha

B.6.2.12.1 From mum's house to caravan park
I lived with mum for a bit and was doing me corrections order going to Leongatha at that time, because of mum pinching Bob's alcohol and all that crap going on Bob moved out and he was living in the Caravan Park, and I was living at mum's trying to keep sober because that was part of the deal with the court. So I was trying to do the good things, mum said okay, I'll help, I'll do the same, I'll keep off from beer or I won't bring them to the house. I'm trying to do the right thing, back on track, and rock up and mum was full drunk again. I spoke to Bob in his next visit and I said: "in the Caravan Park you're in, is there any vacancy? Because I can't stay here"; back to the Caravan, back to Montague.

B.6.2.12.2 Meeting my wife
I was riding back my pushy bike from signing in the police station and a saw a little red car pull up on the street and all the doors open, and this little lady and the two kids stand on the footpath. She yelled out: "excuse me", and I: "yeah". "There is a huntsman in my car and I just came in to pick up me kids and there's a huntsman in the car and I can't find it". So I go and put me bike down, search around and find the huntsman and killed it. And she goes: "my name is Elizabeth", "and mine is Matt". "I have to go and work, I might come by and thank you properly; where do you live"? And I say: "actually my rest Caravan"." I live just across the road". The next day, bagging me deck, she rocks up and that's the girl I'm married to know. We started to get to know each other and all of a sudden I was helping to look after the kids; I was on me intensive correction order still but I didn't bring that up straight to her. The thing got a bit more serious and I let her know and she was fine about it. Twelve month later we got married.

B.6.2.13 Living with Elizabeth

B.6.2.13.1 Married life
I was working in the meat works in Poowong, so I was traveling back and forward from Montague; it was too much, so we decided to move to Poowong. I still didn't

drink, probably two years in our relationship I wasn't drinking. We used to joke about 'cos I told her I was ex piss head, loved me drink, used to say: "you would hate me when I was on the beer"; she'd say" "oh I don't know if I could hate you" and all this rubbish. So the boys were picking on me one day at meat, Ken had a chest infection and I said: "that's probably because you've given up the piss lately". Hadn't have said that, and what do I do after work? Go to the bloody bottle shop and four years down the drain. It's that easy to get back in that crap.

B.6.2.13.2 Warrnambool: back to drink and violence against wife
Me wife she still sticks by me, we left Poowong, we went on a holiday to Warrnambool. I had trouble with my boss and quit my job; so we're all pack up from Poowong and moved to Warrnambool and started to work in a little meat work there. Elizabeth was working somewhere, like a forty minute drive from Warrnambool. That's when the trouble started for her; I started hitting the bottle very hard. And I was going up, we both were going up to the pub every night after work, and I was spending too much on the beer and I started drinking the wine. Before I knew it, in a matter of weeks, I was going from nightly after work to daily, standing there 9 o'clock, 8:30 waiting there for the bottle shop to open. She still stood by me because she knew me, she knew how I was. I got on the wine 'cos I didn't have much money. And about half way through the day I wanted more, more alcohol, and she wouldn't get it for me, so that's when I pushed her over; unfortunately she had a fall. Next thing the cops where at my door, that was the worst day ever, they locked me up for a bit and I ended up getting back home and they, not Elizabeth, put a restrain order against me. I went to court about the restraining order; the police officer took me because I didn't have a licence, it was a forty minute drive at Warrnambool. I had a twelve months intervention order. Elizabeth moved to live back here.

I went to rehab over there for a few weeks, hooked up with St. Vincent and they used to help drive me around to shop and things like that. Packet me bag one morning and grab me push bike and St. Vincent took me to the train station and spend most of the night coming down here. I ended up getting dropped off in Moe, because originally Elizabeth was brought up here in Morwell, this is a home to her; I didn't want the authorities getting the wrong idea.

B.6.2.14 Looking for help

I moved with a mate. I remembered a phone number from me mate I used to work with. I came down here La Trobe Community Centre, look I'm in some poo, I need some help. That's when I met Sue and the counsellor and got right into being good, didn't really want to live at me mate's too much so I went into the community housing, they put me in Caravan Park, didn't want to stay there full of people that all they want is seat around, drink piss and smoke drugs, and I didn't want to be around that scene. So about six months and then saved up as much as I could.

B.6.2.14.1 Current situation with wife
I run into Eli's occasionally, briefly in the supermarket, sort of keep our distance 'cos it was on paper; I bridged, that's it, they lock me up.

The money I used to spend on beer I'd save, so I got me self a new unit, which I'm still living in now, little bit over two years in me unit. The intervention order has

passed about eight months, and me wife slowly building things back up, so I'd see the kids in a regular basis.

Got me licence back over three month but I got me car on the road for about a month. So yeah, now I'm on this stage trying to get things, keeping off the alcohol, being good, trying to keep me licence this time 'cos they won't give it back to me again.

B.6.3 Key Scenes

B.6.3.1 Higest point

Married, wife, but I think there is a more high point to come.

B.6.3.2 Lowest point

Some of my memories in my head is the low in my life; some of the things I've seen done to a lady, I wish that part of my memory could be erased.

B.6.3.3 Turning point

Marriage.

B.6.3.4 Wisdom

Pulling off me best mate from his girlfriend.

B.6.3.5 Regret

The trouble with the law; that's ruin a lot in my life and it always will, and it will always be there, that's something I think that's always gonna be with you.

B.6.3.6 Life theme

Survival.

APPENDIX C

Explanatory Statement - Men who participated in men's behaviour change programs (group 1)

Title: DESISTANCE FROM INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF MEN WITH HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR FEMALE PARTNER

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Student research project

My name is Carlos Clavijo and I am conducting a research project with Professor Thea Brown (Professor of Social Work), Dr. Catherine Flynn (Senior Lecturer), and Dr. Danielle Tyson (Lecturer) in the in the Department of Social Work, towards a PhD at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis equivalent to a short book on the findings of this study, as well as writing a number of journal articles. This study has received approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (13 September 2013)

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before making a decision.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You were selected for this study by the facilitator of the program in which you participated because of the advances you have shown during your participation in the program, and the report received from your partner / ex-partner.

The researcher has not received your contact details or any information from your partner/ex-partner.

The aim of the research

The aim of this study is to understand how men involved in domestic violence at some point in their lives understand who they are and where their life is going. For this study, I will interview people currently engaged in men's behaviour change programs and people who have participated in one of these programs some time ago.

Possible benefits

I am interested in enhancing current policies and practices of working with men involved in domestic violence in Victoria. To do so, I wish to understand the experience of men from their own perspectives. By sharing your story, you will help me to understand how to best support men in their journey out of domestic violence. Whilst participating in this study will not have immediate and direct benefits for you beyond receiving a $70 voucher, your story will be contributing to improve men's behaviour change programs.

What does the research involve?

The study involves taking part in one interview to be held at the program facilities that you attended. The interview will explore the story of your life, including parts of

the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The interview will be audio recorded.

How much time will the research take?
The interview will take between 90 to 180 minutes.
Inconvenience/discomfort
The study does not involve procedures that might cause you any harm. However, as the interview involves the telling of different passages of your life story, this could cause you some discomfort as they may evoke sad memories. If you feel upset or distressed during the interview, you are free to stop the interview, to continue it at a later time or date, or if you like, to stop your involvement in the study. If you feel upset or distressed after the interview, you may like to contact:

- Men's Referral System Phone: 1800 065 973 (free call within Victoria) or (03) 9428 2899
- Lifeline Phone: 13 11 14, or
- Your program facilitator who is available to schedule an interview with you if you think you need it. You are also free to stop your involvement in the study at any stage.

If, during the interview, you report that you have breached an intervention order, have used sexual or physical violence against your partner/ex-partner, made threats against your partner/ex-partner, or in future plan to use violence against your partner/ex-partner, other people or yourself, then I am required to inform this immediately to the program you attended.

Payment
There is no direct payment for sharing your story in this study. However, if you participate, you will receive a $70 gift card at the end of the second interview as a compensation for your time and efforts.

You can withdraw from the research
Being in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to consent to participate. If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw from further participation at any stage, but you will only be able to withdraw data prior to the completion of the thesis. Your decision to withdraw will not affect the services you receive now or in the future.

Confidentiality
Upon completion of the interviews, the data will be transcribed. Your name and the names of all persons and places you mentioned in your story will be replaced with alternative names, so that nothing will identify you in any way to anyone.
Storage of data
Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected digital storage for 5 years. Only I, Carlos Clavijo, and my supervisor, Thea Brown, will have access to them. After a period of 5 years, the information will be deleted.

Use of the research data

The study results will be written up in a thesis (a 300 pages book), and some of the results will be written as articles for publication in academic journals or presentation at conferences.

Results
If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Carlos Clavijo ███████████████████████████ The findings will be accessible on October 2016.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research CF13/1906 - 2013000984 is being conducted, please contact:
Professor Thea Brown Department of Social Work, Monash University Building C 900 Dandenong Road Caulfield VIC 3145 Australia ███████████████ ███████████████████ Carlos Clavijo █████████████ ███████████████████	Executive Officer Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 ██████████████ ████████████ ██████████████████████

APPENDIX D

Explanatory Statement–Men currently participating in men's behaviour change programs (group 2)

Title: DESISTANCE FROM INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF MEN WITH HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR FEMALE PARTNER

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Student research project
My name is Carlos Clavijo and I am conducting a research project with Professor Thea Brown (Professor of Social Work), Dr. Catherine Flynn (Senior Lecturer), and Dr. Danielle Tyson (Lecturer) in the in the Department of Social Work, towards a PhD at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis equivalent to a short book on the findings of this study, as well as writing a number of journal articles. This study has received approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (13 September 2013)

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before making a decision.

Why were you chosen for this research?
You were selected for this study by the facilitator of the program in which you are currently participating because of the advances you have shown in the program and because of the willingness to participate in this study that you expressed to the facilitator.
The researcher has not received your contact details or any information from your partner/ex-partner.

The aim of the research
The aim of this study is to understand how men involved in domestic violence at some point in their lives understand who they are and where their life is going. For this study, I will interview people currently engaged in men's behaviour change programs and people who have participated in one of these programs some time ago.

Possible benefits
I am interested in enhancing current policies and practices of working with men involved in domestic violence in Victoria. To do so, I wish to understand the experience of men from their own perspectives. By sharing your story, you will help me to understand how to best support men in their journey out of domestic violence. Whilst participating in this study will not have immediate and direct benefits for you beyond receiving a $70 voucher, your story will be contributing to improve men's behaviour change programs.

What does the research involve?

The study involves taking part in one interview to be held at the program facilities that you attended. The interview will explore the story of your life, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The interview will be audio recorded.

How much time will the research take?
The interview will take 90 to 180 minutes.
Inconvenience/discomfort
The study does not involve procedures that might cause you any harm. However, as the interview involves the telling of different passages of your life story, this could cause you some discomfort as they may evoke sad memories. If you feel upset or distressed during the interview, you are free to stop the interview, to continue it at a later time or date, or if you like, your involvement in the study. If you feel upset or distressed after the interview, you may like to contact

- Men's Referral System Phone: 1800 065 973 (free call within Victoria) or (03) 9428 2899
- Lifeline Phone: 13 11 14, or
- Your program facilitator who is available to schedule an interview with you if you think you need it. You are also free to stop your involvement in the study at any stage.

If, during the interview, you report that you have breached an intervention order, have used sexual or physical violence against your partner/ex-partner, made threats against your partner/ex-partner, or in future plan to use violence against your partner/ex-partner, other people or yourself, then I am required to inform this immediately to the Men's Behaviour Program you are attending, or that you have recently attended.

Payment
There is no direct payment for sharing your story in this study. However, if you participate, you will receive a $70 gift card at the end of the second interview as a compensation for your time and efforts.

You can withdraw from the research
Being in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to consent to participate. If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw from further participation at any stage, but you will only be able to withdraw data prior to the completion of the thesis. Your decision to withdraw will not affect the services you receive now or in the future.
Confidentiality
Upon completion of the interviews, the data will be transcribed. Your name and the names of all persons and places you mentioned in your story will be replaced with alternative names, so that nothing will identify you in any way to anyone.

Storage of data
Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected digital storage for 5 years. Only I, Carlos Clavijo, and my supervisor, Thea Brown, will have access to them. After a period of 5 years, the information will be deleted.

Use of the research data

The study results will be written up in a thesis (a 300 pages book), and some of the results will be written as articles for publication in academic journals or presentation at conferences.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Carlos Clavijo ███████████████████████████. The findings will be accessible on October 2016.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research CF13/1906 - 2013000984 is being conducted, please contact:
Professor Thea Brown Department of Social Work, Monash University Building C 900 Dandenong Road Caulfield VIC 3145 Australia ████████████████ ████████████████████ Carlos Clavijo ███████████████ ███████████████████████	Executive Officer Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 ████████████ ███████████ ██████████████████████

APPENDIX E

MONASH University
Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

Consent Form – GROUP 1 and 2
Title: DESISTANCE FROM INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF MEN WITH HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR FEMALE PARTNER

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records.

I understand I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

I understand that:	YES	NO
I will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher	☐	☐
unless I otherwise inform the researcher before the interview, I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	☐	☐
I agree to be contacted by the researcher regarding the research findings	☐	☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics without my signed consent below.

I understand that I may ask at any time prior to publication to be withdrawn from the project

I understand that no information I have provided that could lead to the identification of any other individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party

I understand that data from the interview transcript and audio recording will be kept in secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

I understand that I will remain anonymous at all times in any reports or publications from the project.

Participant's name: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX F

The Life Story Interview
Adapted from McAdams, 2008

F.1 Introduction

This is an interview about the story of your life. As a social researcher, I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life and how you imagine your life developing in the future. I will guide you through the interview so that we finish it all in about two hours or less.

Please know that my purpose in doing this interview is not to figure out what is wrong with you or to do some kind of deep clinical analysis! Nor should you think of this interview as a 'therapy session' of some kind. The interview is for research purposes only, and its main goal is simply to hear your story. As social researcher I collect people's life stories in order to understand the different ways in which people live their lives and the different ways in which they understand who they are. Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential.

I think you will enjoy the interview.
Do you have any questions?

F.2 Life chapters

Are you familiar with books? Have you noticed that most books have a table of contents?
Imagine that you have a book in your hands. This is the book about the story of your life and it has your name in the cover. Can you see the colour of the book? And the colour of the letters? Imagine that you open the book and you can see the table of contents containing the titles of the main chapters of your life story. Please, think for a moment about these chapters of your life and what their titles might be. Can you please write down the title of main chapters in the book of the story of your life? As a storyteller here, what you want to do is to give me an overall plot summary of your story, going chapter by chapter. You may have as many chapters as you want, but I would suggest having between about 2 and 7 of them.

(Once completed) Please tell me about what each chapter is about, and how we get from one chapter to the next. What is the title of the first chapter of your life? (Then continue until all chapters are covered and the expected future is also explored)

F.3 Key scenes in the life story

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your life, I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in the story. A key scene would be an event or specific incident that took place at a particular time and place.

For each of the eight key events we will consider, I ask that you describe in detail what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. In addition, I ask that you tell me why you think this particular scene is important or significant in your life. What does the scene say about you as a person? Please be specific.

F.3.1 High point. Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience.

F.3.2 Low point. The second scene is the opposite of the first. Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point, if not 'the' low point in your life story. Even though this event is unpleasant, I would appreciate your providing as much detail as you can about it.

F.3.3 Turning point. In looking back over your life, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point in your life. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your life wherein you went through an important change of some kind.

F.3.4 Wisdom event. Please describe an event in your life in which you displayed wisdom. The episode might be one in which you acted or interacted in an especially wise way or provided wise counsel or advice, made a wise decision, or otherwise behaved in a particularly wise manner.

F.3.5 Religious, spiritual, or mystical experience. Whether they are religious or not, many people report that they have had experiences in their lives where they felt a sense of the transcendent or sacred, a sense of God or some almighty or ultimate force, or a feeling of oneness with nature, the world, or the universe. Thinking back on your entire life, please identify an episode or moment in which you felt something like this.

Now, we're going to talk about the future.

F.4 Future Script

F.4.1 The next chapter. Your life story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future. Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your life.

F.4.2 Dreams, hopes, and plans for the future. What do you hope to accomplish in the future in your life story?

F.4.3 Life project. Do you have a project in life? Please describe any project that you are currently working on or plan to work on in the future. Tell me how you got involved in the project or will get involved in the project, how the project might develop, and why you think this project is important for you and/or for other people.

F.5 Challenges

This next section considers the various challenges, struggles, and problems you have encountered in your life.

F.5.1 Life challenge. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe what you now consider to be the greatest single challenge you have faced in your life. How did the challenge or problem develop? How did you address or deal with this challenge or problem? What is the significance of this challenge or problem in your own life story?

F.5.2 Loss. As people get older, they invariably suffer losses of one kind or another. By loss I am referring here to the loss of important people in your life, perhaps through death or separation. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest loss you have experienced. This could be a loss you experienced at any time in your life, going back to childhood and up to the present day. Please describe this loss and the process of the loss. How have you coped with the loss? What effect has this loss had on you and your life story?

5.3 Failure, regret. Everybody experiences failure and regrets in life, even for the happiest and luckiest lives. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest failure or regret you have experienced. How have you coped with this failure or regret? What effect has this failure or regret had on you and your life story?

F.6. Life Theme

Looking back over your entire life story with all its chapters, scenes, and challenges, and extending back into the past and ahead into the future, do you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme in your life story? Please explain.

F.7. Reflection

Thank you for this interview. I have just one more question for you. Many of the stories you have told me are about experiences that stand out from the day-to-day. For example, we talked about a high point, a turning point, a scene about your health, etc. Given that most people don't share their life stories in this way on a regular basis, I'm wondering if you might reflect for one last moment about what this interview, here today, has been like for you. What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process?

APPENDIX G

Services Sheet

This sheet has a list of services that you may wish to contact if you are feeling distressed or concerned about your emotional situation and/or couple relationship. These contacts can also refer you to services that will be suitable to your individual situation.

Men's Referral System

██ 9am to 9pm, Monday to Friday

Web: http://mrs.org.au/

Men's Referral System provides free, anonymous, and confidential guidance and support for men who are looking for help about their anger, behaviour, relationship issues or parenting.

Lifeline

████████████

Web: http://www.lifeline.org.au/

Lifeline's 24-hour telephone crisis support service connects people with trained volunteers who provide emotional support to anyone, anytime.

APPENDIX H

Ethics approval an institutional endorsement

MONASH University

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Research Office

Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

Project Number:	CF13/1906 - 2013000984
Project Title:	Biographic narratives: A case study of men with history of intimate partner violence against women
Chief Investigator:	**Prof Lenore Manderson**
Approved:	From: 16 September 2013 to 16 September 2018

Terms of approval - *Failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.*

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, *if relevant*, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Professor Nip Thomson
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Dr Cameron Duff; Mr Carlos Clavijo

Department of Human Services

Incorporating: Community Services, Housing, Women's Affairs and Youth Affairs

2 4 SEP 2013

Our Ref: ADD/13/24763
Your Ref:

Mr Carlos Clavijo
School of Psychology and Psychiatry
Monash University
PO Box 197
Caulfield East Vic 3145

Dear Mr Clavijo

RE: Application to undertake research involving the Department of Human Services

I write to you concerning your application to the Department of Human Services (DHS) Centre for Human Services Research and Evaluation (CHSRE) to undertake research entitled: "Biographic narratives: A case study of men with a history of intimate partner violence against women".

I am pleased to advise you that the Department of Human Services (DHS) CHSRE is able to support your project subject to the following conditions:

Pre-research Commencement
- The proposed research is conducted in accordance with the documentation you provided to the CHSRE.

Monitoring of Research
- The provision of milestone updates to the CHSRE on the progress of your research.
- The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter, after this time extensions can be granted by notifying the CHSRE.

Dissemination of Research Findings
- The provision of a final report to the CHSRE at the completion of the research.
- The provision of a one page summary of the outcomes of the research and how it relates to the work of DHS.
- The provision of a seminar/presentation to relevant DHS staff on the outcomes of the research – with details to be arranged with the CHSRE Secretariat.

Quality Assurance
- That you provide the CHSRE with the opportunity to review and provide comment on any materials generated from the research prior to formal publication. It is expected that if there are any differences of opinion between the CHSRE and yourself related to the research outcomes, that these differences would be acknowledged in any publications.
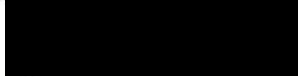
Centre for Human Services
Research and Evaluation

Victoria | State Government

447
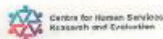
Acknowledgement of DHS Support
- That you acknowledge the support of the Department Human Services Centre for Human Services Research and Evaluation (CHSRE) in any publications arising from the research.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to email at alex.dordevic@dhs.vic.gov.au.

The CHSRE wishes you the best in your research and we look forward to seeing the results in due course.

Yours sincerely

Dr Alex Dordevic
Acting Director
Centre for Human Services Research and Evaluation

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Community Health Service
Latrobe

Professor Lenore Manderson And Mr Carlos Clavijo
School Of Psychology And Psychiatry
Monash University
Po Box 197
Caulfield East Vic 3145

Dear Professor Manderson And Mr Clavijo,

RE: Biographic narratives: A case study of men with history of intimate partner violence against women.

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from Latrobe Community Health Service for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research **"Biographic narratives: A case study of men with history of intimate partner violence against women"** and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive Officer

Gippsland Wide

449

UnitingCare

Kildonan

Making a positive difference

COPY

6 December 2013

Mr Carlos Clavijos
Office 4.43, Building F. Level 4
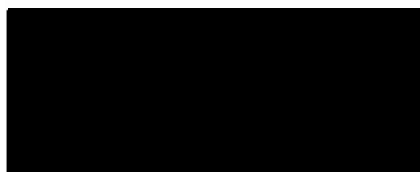900 Dandenong Road
Caulfield East, Victoria

Dear Carlos,

Re: Application to conduct a research project at Kildonan

I am writing to you in relation to your application to conduct a research project at Kildonan, specifically with our Family Violence Intervention Program.

I wish to formally advise you that Kildonan's Research Advisory Group endorsed your application.

Please note a number of queries have been raised regarding the proposed research processes for which we will seek clarification and agreement. These will be communicated to you prior to the end of the 2013 calendar year and discussed with you in a meeting to be set for January 2014.

We extend our congratualtions to you and look forward to working with you in 2014.

www.kildonan.unitingcare.org.au

MONASH University

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Research Office

Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

Project Number:	CF13/1906 - 2013000984
Project Title:	Biographic narratives: A case study of men with history of intimate partner violence against women
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Professor Nip Thomson
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Dr Cameron Duff; Mr Carlos Clavijo