



# Desistance: The Process of change.



Journeys towards non-violence  
Modena, Italy, 4 May 2017



# Theory and Methodology: Processes and Outcomes.

- ▶ **Theoretical influences:**
- ▶ Criminological research on desistance, i.e. why do people desist (stop) different types of offending behaviour?
- ▶ **Desistance theories** concerned with ‘**opening the black-box**’ (Maruna, 2001) of what enhances and restricts ‘desistance’ from offending; (behaviour change)
- ▶ **Maturation** processes; e.g. external and internal processes.
- ▶ **Social Bonds;**
- ▶ **Human capital (internal factors)** and **social capital (external factors)** (Farrall, 2002);



# Theory and Methodology: Processes and Outcomes.

- ▶ **Narrative** – making sense of past and present;
- ▶ **Finding meaning** in the change(d) identity.
- ▶ **Existential aspects of desistance:** “Practitioners tend to focus on the behaviour associated with **stopping** something, to the exclusion of identifying that behaviour which is to be **achieved**”. (Turnell and Edwards, 1999).
- ▶ We know what we hope perpetrators will stop, i.e. stop being violent and abusive. But what will they do instead? What will they **become**?
- ▶ If the process of changing oneself is a personal **journey**, what does that journey look / feel like?



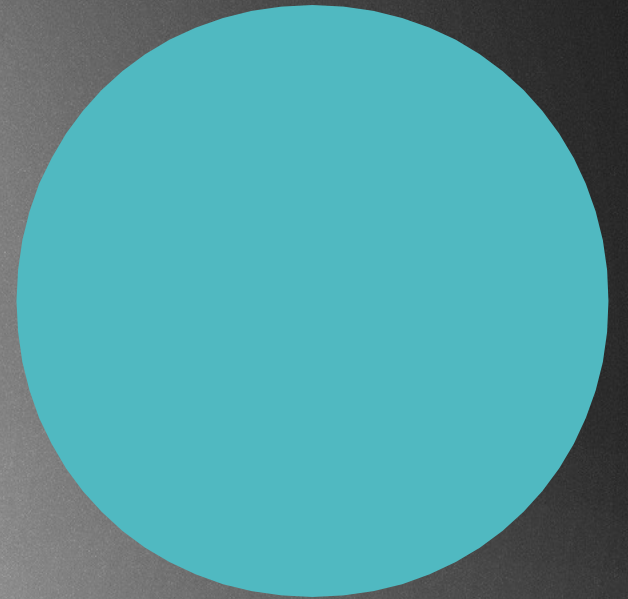
# Can we apply desistance theory to domestic abuse perpetrators?

- ▶ Qualitative in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 11 men who had '**successfully completed** programmes'
- ▶ Supportive evidence from programme staff and men's partners;
- ▶ Ages 37 – 59 years, (mostly 30's and 40's);
- ▶ One man Afro-Caribbean; remainder white;
- ▶ 'Working class'; nine in employment;
- ▶ All fathers to children in current or previous relationship;
- ▶ Two currently lived alone, the rest with partners;
- ▶ Men had 'completed programmes' between 2 – 7 years previously;
- ▶ **Five years average** since 'completion'.



# Research aims

- ▶ **Listen** to the men's perspectives;
- ▶ What men had learned from programmes;
- ▶ Why **men** thought they had been abusive;
- ▶ What was **useful** and **not useful**;
- ▶ Problems in lives, past, present and ongoing;
- ▶ How they deal with current challenges, issues, tensions etc.
- ▶ Whether priorities had changed;
- ▶ How did they '**do desistance**'?
- ▶ How did they endeavour / succeed to live lives which were non-violent, not-abusive?





# Methodological Approach

- ▶ Qualitative methodology;
- ▶ In-depth interviews;
- ▶ Ex-perpetrators a “worthy” sample; (if sometimes problematic and contested) source of knowledge.
- ▶ Study influenced by feminist approaches to methodology by giving people a **voice** and exploring sensitive themes;
- ▶ “Any analysis of women’s oppression must involve research on the part played by men in this” (Stanley and Wise,1983:18)
- ▶ “Without knowing how oppression occurs we cannot know why it occurs: and without knowing how and why it occurs we cannot find out how to avoid its occurrence and how it is that liberation might be achieved” (1983: 167).



# The Programme 'effect'

- ▶ What did the sample think about the link between the programme and how it had influenced them in desisting?
- ▶ Whether / how it had influenced their day-to-day lives?
- ▶ What 'extra-programme' factors might be important?
- ▶ What kinds of changes are we talking about and how long do they last?
- ▶ How long does change take?
- ▶ What does desistance look like?
- ▶ How is change accomplished?



# Theme: How did men make sense of why they had behaved violently and abusively in the past?

## Mick.

- ▶ (Mick: seven years off-and-on attending programme. (“I’m a lifer here”.)
- ▶ Mick: *“I think it was about ... the fact that I felt like a man had to be strong, didn’t show weaknesses, things like that, ...*
- ▶ *you know, men don’t cry ....and I think that’s what the whole issue was .... because of the friends I had, you know, the violence with the friends and that, I think... because*
- ▶ *... I can remember, I was about 14/15 maybe, and I got into a fight with a lad (guy) and .....my friends beat me up for losing. So, obviously then you learn not to give in, it was always about this **big front thing** that you had to have where weaknesses wasn’t shown.*



# How did men make sense of why they had behaved violently and abusively in the past?

## Andrew.

- ▶ **Andrew** attended programme for 16 months, Stopped about 2.5 years previously. Now training to work with young men. Active in supporting work of the programme. Made huge transformations in the process.....
- ▶ *“Yeah, **macho stereotype stuff**, ... that was the type of upbringing I had, so you know, **emotions** – what are emotions? You know, get on and deal with it and .... you know, if someone annoys you or makes you angry, basically you fight back .... But when we got down and started looking at emotions and stuff like that,*
- ▶ *.... **the sensitivity of the counsellor** in working around emotions, expressing emotions. That was such a big relief for **someone to acknowledge that ... (emotions are) ... okay** because I’d lived under this agenda that .... ‘oh it’s not okay to do that, you don’t do it’. So recognising feelings, **recognising stuff like self-talk**, certainly the negative self-talk*



# Why the need to control?

(And what meets that “need” now?)

- ▶ **Tony:** Commenced Programme seven years previously.
- ▶ (“Still comes around occasionally”)
- ▶ *“Yeah because I know that by controlling my partners I made them scared of me....and then having that person scared of you gives you power / gives you strength. In my eyes that’s what it was anyway....it was my **inner fears** I suppose, you know, ...if she went out and she was out of my sight then my control was gone.....”*
- ▶ **But looking back....** *“I was weak...I was a coward, I was a bully. It only made me feel strong....inside my own environment, I mean other than that I was a little man with a big chip on my shoulder.....it became like another person, you had to keep that image up all the time.”...*



# Self Concept and True Self

- Settimo livello struttura
- Ottavo livello struttura

## ▶ Self-Concept

- ▶ Independent
  - Primo livello struttura
- ▶ Capable
  - Secondo livello struttura
- ▶ Secure
  - Terzo livello struttura
- ▶ Dominant
  - Quarto livello struttura
- ▶ In control
  - Quinto livello struttura
- ▶ Intelligent
  - Sesto livello struttura
- ▶ Respected
  - Settimo livello struttura
- ▶ Competent
  - Ottavo livello struttura
- ▶ Successful
  - Ottavo livello struttura

## ▶ True Self

- ▶ Fearful about how others see us
  - Primo livello struttura
- ▶ Clumsy / useless
  - Secondo livello struttura
- ▶ Insecure
  - Terzo livello struttura
- ▶ Weak
  - Quarto livello struttura
- ▶ Controlled by others / no direction
  - Quinto livello struttura
- ▶ Stupid or less able
  - Sesto livello struttura
- ▶ Fear of inadequacy
  - Settimo livello struttura
- ▶ Constantly 'proving' self to others
  - Ottavo livello struttura
- ▶ A failure
  - Ottavo livello struttura



# Programme helps men question and examine their beliefs and issues they had never thought about.

- ▶ **Tony:**
- ▶ Tony makes some connection with an **'internal self'** he had not known or recognised.
- ▶ The group experience **creates a space** in which men could **drop the mask** which they felt they had to display all the time.
- ▶ *"I didn't understand 90% of my behaviour. I just thought it was the norm because that's the way I was brought up...."*
- ▶ **Turning Point or Gradual Process?**
- ▶ *"I used to sit in the group and just think 'this is crap'...I dug in, 'you're not doing that to me'... But as we kept coming back to emotions.....I think from the moment that I cried in front of other men and let my emotions go, I don't know, something happened...That was the hooking point for me, you know, because to actually show emotions as a man in front of other men I don't know what happened, something just dropped and I didn't*



# The importance of the group: Learning from other men.

- ▶ Existence of the programme **reduces isolation** (Men isolate partners and are often internally & emotionally isolated);
- ▶ Group offers different experiences for different men;
- ▶ Receiving and learning: **Alan:** *“I just need to come here to listen. To get everything back into perspective. I come here when I need to “top up”. It’s taught me it’s alright to be angry, alright to be anxious about things. It’s how you go about it that’s important.”*
- ▶ **Theme: Responsibility and choice**
- ▶ Receiving and contributing –
- ▶ **Derek:** *“Yeah, I enjoy it,... I thrive on it.....also because I want to give something back because without them I wouldn’t be where I am now...”*



# Sonya: (Alan's partner)

## Both define problem as 'anger'

- ▶ INT: *"What changes has Alan made"..... (in the past 5 years?)*
- ▶ **Sonya:** *"He is able to **empathise**. He used to act without thinking about how others might feel. He had no idea of how he might appear to others. He is **now able to see himself**, come across in a completely different way....."*
- ▶ *He now has an understanding of the effect his behaviour had on our two boys. The now refer to that as '**old dad**'. So he's now '**new dad**'. Like now, he struggles around Christmas time so he said (recently) "the reason I am going to "my" Programme is because 'old dad' is near to the surface."*



## Tina (Mick's partner) (7 years since began attending programme)

- ▶ INT: *"What, if any are the changes which (partner) has achieved in the period we're talking about?"*
- ▶ Tina: *"Now he knows what signs to look for. He knows his **triggers**. I pointed them out to him at first but he didn't believe me. He believed it though when the programme told him! Someone else before me!....He still needs to keep an eye on his trigger points.*
- ▶ *He always thought he was invincible. And **he learned that he isn't**...He also learned to **look at his family life**....*
- ▶ (The programme is).... *"Very valuable. **He is still in touch with the people** he met there. They use one another as a sort of leaning post... a kind of **support network**".*



# The desistance journey:

Stages on the journey > Primary desistance >  
Secondary Desistance > Where to? > Keep going!

- ▶ **Primary: Behaviour related:**
- ▶ Violence as **choice**: **Skills** to stop using physical violence. Interruptive techniques.. Time Outs. Noticing negative self-talk. “Making self safe”.
- ▶ Begins to see advantages to self and relationship. Reinforces usefulness of interruptive techniques. Considers impact upon partner/children.
- ▶ **Secondary: Attitudes / Identity:** Questions beliefs about himself, family history, relationships, men and women, ideas about being an “appropriate” male. Behaves more considerately in relationship. Communicates more with partner / others. Recognises benefits in other parts of life.



# The desistance journey:

Stages on the journey > Primary desistance >  
Secondary Desistance > Where to? > Keep going!

- ▶ **Secondary: Attitudes / Identity** Recognises himself as **active participant** in own life. Responsible for self. May include, more reflection on self, self-development, re-appraisal of priorities, making amends or ensuring non-repeat of past mistakes. May include ... reparation .....”giving something back”
- ▶ **Tertiary ??:** Living in the present differently, and non-violently. Still sees potential to be abusive. Probably uses interruptive techniques as part of an **automatic way of dealing with life**, seeks out different interests, peer groups.
- ▶ No final destination.
- ▶ Keep going! Receives and provides support.



# The workplace:

## Richard: “White knuckle” desistance?

- ▶ The **accomplishment of masculinity** was an ongoing issue for most of the men.
- ▶ Being “a man in the world”, particularly in the world of work was often stressed as a continual source of pressure.
- ▶ *“What I now find that I’m doing is I’m tending to **use more positive self-talk** which is something that ....When I go to work I’m now trying more positive self-talk, I’m trying to be more positive on things. Recently, I’ve been upset at work, at home, and I’m in a rut at home, we’re not getting on well, it’s reflecting in my work, my work is the world’s worst enemy to me at the moment. My home life’s the world’s worst enemy, so they’re both having a negative effect. Richard. Come around programme for years. “Struggling”.*



# Derek: “I learned pretty quick!”

- ▶ INT: OK, how long did you actually come regularly week by week and how did you get to that process?
- ▶ Derek: I learned pretty quick, **I've always been a quick learner** so I picked up **techniques and coping strategies** really, really quickly and because I wanted to change as well and ... the thing about this is— **if you don't want to change nothing's going to happen.** I wanted to change so for me ...it was easy, things seemed to slip into place rather quickly, **but it was a long process as well.** I picked it up really quick and it was like little things kept cropping up as we were going through the course. So the programme ... I did about 20 odd weeks solidly. So that helped, but about 20 weeks bang, bang, bang, bang after every other, and then I started coming every two weeks and then just gradually got less and less that I required to come.



# Other themes explored

- ▶ Continued contact with the programme (if possible);
- ▶ Encouraged to address other issues in life (e.g. alcohol);
- ▶ Men anxious about leaving the programme if no support in place;
- ▶ Negative influences of e.g. work-place countered by positive influence of the group-space.
- ▶ Men gradually develop new interests;
- ▶ Drop old networks, look to new networks;
- ▶ Giving up and giving back: wounded healer (Maruna, 2001)
- ▶ Priorities involve a greater concern for others, partners, ex-partners, children.
- ▶ What is it like to be a different man.



# “Doing the past wrong, doing the present right”.

- ▶ **What changes?**
- ▶ **Primary change** requires a recognition of guilt or shame for actions;
- ▶ Recognition that one has used choice when violent or abusive;
- ▶ Thinking and talking about relationship in a more reflective, thoughtful manner;
- ▶ Rethinking attitudes to women / partners (has to be more than only talk).
- ▶ **Secondary desistance....**
- ▶ Involves a shift from viewing oneself as an object that is acted upon, to one who is responsible for one's actions and behaviour, attitudes to others and self.
- ▶ There may however be a sense that the “**me before**” was at the mercy of external factors e.g. upbringing, alcohol, provocation etc.



# “I haven’t been to hospital and had it cut out and it’s gone....” Steve

- ▶ “I actually felt there was two of me... “I wasn’t going to back to the old me, because then everything I did here would have been a waste of time, you know, my son would have seen me out in the street fighting”
- ▶ “incidents come up all the time...”... “To be honest I don’t think I’m ever going to be Saint Steven, it’s never going to happen that way is it?”
- ▶ “It’s something you’ve got to work at, I think, every day. Every day because *it could come back* like that if I wanted to, but I don’t want it to, so I deal with it.”



Being a 'proper' man.

**“Some quite big decisions had to be made”.**

Andrew.

- ▶ Andrew didn't *understand* himself, but once he was able to understand “the theory” of why he had been as he had, and begun to “take responsibility” for his actions he began to develop some self-esteem.
- ▶ Obtaining the answers to **the puzzle of himself** was necessary for Andrew.
- ▶ Taking responsibility for how he deals with emotions and with the challenges he faces is key, particularly as responsibility has always been an important value for him.



# Priorities: Before Andrew.

- ▶ *“Previously, it was I work hard to provide for my family’, I do the house up and, you know, they don’t go without. Those really were the two main things that were driving me which was, you know, ‘I’m married, I’ve a wife and family’ and so I’d spend hundreds of hours at work and doing the house up, and not making any room really for leisure time/quality time.*
- ▶ *And if I was, if you like, forced – as I saw it then – to go to a family event or, you know, ‘let’s go for an afternoon out’ I’d be thinking about what I could be doing at home rather than my relationship with my wife and children and not nurturing/loving that sort of thing.”*



# Priorities: Now Andrew.

- ▶ Several years later Andrew's priorities are not dissimilar to what they were before. However he seems to see them in a different light.
- ▶ *"Well, I think my main focus really is the children. The children come first and, you know, about nurturing them and everything that goes with being a parent".*
- ▶ Working to provide for his children is still an important role and value. The difference lies in his recognition that process, engagement and relationship are his main values here.
- ▶ Before he was acting out a 'provider' role which he saw as prescribed.
- ▶ He felt his partner and children should respect this and resented it when they didn't.
- ▶ He still works hard (at two jobs), he still feels that it is his role to provide but also to nurture, and it is still important to distinguish and fulfil his tasks "not just as a father" but as "a person who parents"



# How can programmes encourage and support desistance?

- ▶ Programmes can provide a core space for men to think and learn;
- ▶ Men are conditioned by structural factors (gender) but also by family childhood;
- ▶ Experience of own parenting may have been abusive;
- ▶ Educational and therapeutic approaches are probably necessary;
- ▶ Men's complex lives may not just be excuses;
- ▶ Listening does not mean colluding;
- ▶ Men need to learn by looking back but they also need to be encouraged to have a vision of the future (a Good Life);



# How can programmes encourage and support desistance?

- ▶ Men may quickly learn 'interruptive techniques', other changes take longer;
- ▶ Some men may rely mostly on skills, e.g. self-talk, time-outs, 'topping up';
- ▶ Others need to reconceptualise themselves as a man;
- ▶ Men will seek longer term support (and will also continue to practise interruptive techniques);
- ▶ Men will tell contradictory stories, the I and it;
- ▶ Men won't tell the whole story (but that does not mean they are not thinking and learning).



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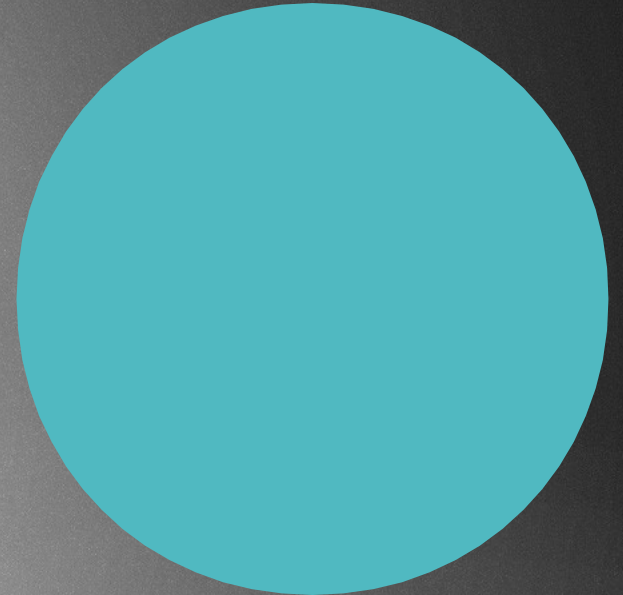
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