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Everyday peace as a theory to explain victims' peacemaking actions in intimate partner violence situations

Leanne M Kelly
Deakin University, Australia

Anthony Ware
Deakin University, Australia

Vicki-Ann Ware
Deakin University, Australia

Ellen Wachter
Deakin University, Australia

Rachel Hall
Charles Sturt University, Australia

Abstract

This paper assesses the transferability of the concept of *everyday peace*, developed in the conflict and peace studies literature, to practices utilised by people experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV). The relevance of everyday peace to IPV is assessed by mapping typologies of the concept against behaviour that victims implement to manage and survive abusive relationships. To collect these data, experienced family violence practitioners were asked to recount practice-based information about everyday strategies that victims use to avoid triggering or to de-escalate a perpetrator, thereby minimising immediate harm coming to themselves or others. Theming these behaviours against typologies of everyday peace demonstrated the significant relevance of this theory to IPV. As such, we suggest that everyday peace is a useful conceptual framework to apply to family violence. Our analysis finds that the everyday peace framework is particularly helpful for exploring victim agency in these contexts, reframing mundane and everyday strategies as agentic.

Corresponding author:
Leanne M Kelly, Deakin University, 225 Burwood Hwy, Burwood, VIC 3125, Australia.
Email: kelea@deakin.edu.au

briefly described in the literature. Everyday strategies include staying out of the perpetrator's way, avoiding arguments, obeying perpetrator's orders, and being quiet (Goodman et al., 2003; Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020; Tran, 2018). The current paper seeks to extend this literature by drawing on family violence practitioners' experience to add more qualitative detail around so-called *placating* strategies, arguing that victims implement these strategies with intent and courageous agency to help them survive, protect their children, and keep the family together in extremely complex and challenging situations (Hill, 2019; Rizo, 2016; Tran, 2018). Using these strategies gives victims time to build insight into cycles of violence and plan longer-term responses, which may or may not include escape. Furthermore, in cases where the couple is no longer together, everyday peace practices may illuminate strategies adopted to work towards positive peace, whereby ex-intimate partners can cultivate functional non-intimate relationships.

Notably, this paper does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies employed by victims, although this is an important area requiring further research (Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020; Messing et al., 2017; Parker and Gielen, 2014). The key contribution of the paper is to assess the utility of everyday peace as a framework for understanding certain actions victims use to minimise harm and avoid conflict, and potentially work towards positive peace. In the process, the paper lays a foundation for programming ideas aimed at recognition and strengthening agency.

The authors recognise that family violence comes in many forms, including between parents and children, siblings, grandparents, carers, and same sex couples; and that men, non-binary, and gender fluid people can be victims/survivors of IPV perpetrated by male, female, non-binary, or gender fluid partners. However, this paper focuses solely on IPV in which perpetrators are *men* and victim/survivors are *women*. This is deliberate, due to the expertise of the practitioners participating in the empirical component and given the fact that most IPV fits this pattern (Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020; Kelly, 2017). Moreover, we contend that using gender-neutral language in the IPV space masks the predominant oppression of women through such violence, and ignores the gendered nature of IPV (Stephens et al., 2010). Despite this, we note the importance of validating other victim/survivors' experiences and suggest that male and other victims should not be ignored in IPV research and practice. Furthermore, the findings of this paper may be transferrable beyond female victims of IPV.

Similarly, as this paper examines the agency women exercise in very difficult circumstances, the term *victim* disempowers and reinforces depictions of them being passive (Hayes, 2013), helpless (St Vil et al., 2017), and 'psychologically paralyzed' (Zakar et al., 2012: 3269). Furthermore, *survivor* suggests that the person has emerged from a difficult or dangerous situation, while this paper is located within the *heat* of that situation. Thus, while acknowledging the limitations of doing so, we use gender labels, and limit discussion to situations where men are perpetrators, and women are victims/survivors. We entreat readers to recognise that these labels are not fixed or binary, but form a useful heuristic for the purposes of this discussion. Finally, we wish to acknowledge that the everyday practices discussed throughout this paper are not restricted to violent or abusive relationships; they are utilised by people to minimise any sort of conflict and provide a basis for moving towards desired outcomes.

Everyday peace theory

Social theory has sought to incorporate the *everyday* for generations, with the concept explored by seminal thinkers including Rousseau, Durkheim, and Marx and Engels (Kalekin-Fishman, 2013).

Table 1. Aspects of everyday peace observed by Ring (2006).

Tension	Ongoing reciprocal, kin-like exchange despite social tension, to maintain connection – trying to strengthen relationships and facilitate close reading of other people and the situation, deliberately using the tension of as-yet-unreciprocated gifts or assistance as a means to build closer engagement
Anger	In a context where explosive male anger was seen to risk escalating small misunderstandings into serious ethnic violence, Ring observed women labouring to protect themselves, other women, and their own men from anything that might trigger that explosive anger. Women would quickly resolve differences with others in the apartment block or neighbourhood, to avoid their husbands getting involved. This included women diffusing fights by shouting at other men to convince their husbands that they had dealt with the situation and the matter was closed.
Intimacy	In Ring's context, she identified a longing for intimacy as motivating women to sustain the tension of reciprocal neighbourly exchange across tense ethnic boundaries. In the IPV context, it may include behaviours such as choosing to maintain close daily engagement with a perpetrator, despite the inherent tension, out of a longing for intimacy.

IPV: intimate partner violence.

Mac Ginty is perhaps the most prolific scholar on everyday peace. He describes five social practices relating to intercommunal conflict: avoidance, ambiguity, ritualised politeness, telling and blame deferring (Mac Ginty, 2014). These practices are briefly described in Table 2.

More recently, the *everyday* has emerged as an explicit concern in itself, rather than simply incorporated into the fabric of sociological and anthropological research (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1980; Goffman, 1959; Lefebvre, 2013; Mead, 1934; Simmel, 1971). The word *everyday* invokes ideas of normal, ordinary activities undertaken on a daily basis; 'the normal habitus for individuals and groups, even if what passed as 'normal' in a conflict [situation] would be abnormal elsewhere' (Mac Ginty, 2014: 550). It excludes the extraordinary or exceptional.

Everyday peace refers to the 'routinised practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society' (Mac Ginty, 2014: 549). It encompasses the actions people take to avoid or minimise conflict triggers and lay a foundation for more harmonious coexistence (Berents, 2015; Williams, 2015). Building on the work of multiple scholars (e.g. Mac Ginty, 2014; Ring, 2006; Williams, 2015), we describe a series of common everyday peace practices.

Perhaps the earliest scholar on everyday peace, Ring (2006) explored this idea with women living in an ethnically diverse apartment complex in Karachi, Pakistan. She argues everyday peace mostly occurs in domestic, feminine spaces, and observes three common themes underlying the women's behaviour, acknowledging their huge emotional labour in maintaining peace; themes she labels as *tension*, *anger*, and *intimacy*. These are summarised in Table 1.

Williams (2015) documents one more set of everyday peace behaviours, exploring this from both the victim and perpetrator perspectives. In her study of Muslim–Hindu relations in a marketplace in Varanasi, India, she suggests everyday peace is practised mostly by those with less social power – in this case Muslims subjected to decades of Hindu ethno-religious violence. For the sake of peace in everyday spaces, relatively powerless people often opt to *submit to injustice, forgoing the right to seek justice* for the threats and violence perpetrated against them, at least for now, to sustain nonviolent coexistence. However, on the flip side, some of those with greater social power

Table 2. Everyday peace behaviours observed by Mac Ginty (2014).

Avoidance	Of high-risk conversation topics (including about the conflict and past injustices), people, places, or situations, and of behaviours that could be construed as offensive or inflammatory. This may necessitate adopting a quiet and gentle disposition.
Ambiguity	Using ambiguity to mask identity, opinions, and feelings, including dissembling everyday speech. With intercommunal conflict, this can include discarding or hiding cultural/ethnic identifiers such as names, specific clothing, or areas of residence – hiding things that could aggravate conflict. Practicing ambiguity includes choosing to ignore things that could cause conflict if raised.
Ritualised politeness	Involving semi-scripted over-politeness that is often pre-conceived. This practice seeks to promote peace by not causing offence.
Telling/reading	Telling, more aptly labelled *reading* (Ring, 2006), a sensitised alertness, constantly judging motives, morals, attitudes and feelings of others, to read how and when to avoid or engage without provocation. In an intercommunal conflict setting this includes constantly reading ethnically informed identities of others. For IPV, this would focus on constant identification of the mood of the individual perpetrator.
Blame deferring	Shifting the blame for the conflict or a negative incident to a third party, the system, or some people within their own group. In IPV, this may include offering excuses for the violence.

IPV: intimate partner violence.

– in this case, Hindus – recognise and abuse the fact that the powerless have more to lose by renewed violence. Hence, Williams (2015) suggests that some choose to *manipulate* the everyday peace behaviour of the less powerful to maintain or further strengthen their position of power. Thus, she suggests a potential dark side to everyday peace that is highly relevant to IPV.

Importantly, these practices are unlikely to operate in isolation; two or more often overlap. Not all people in these situations practice these behaviours, although avoidance is considered fairly ubiquitous, and they do not do so all the time. Mac Ginty (2014) frames these practices as acts of agency by people who seek nonviolent coexistence, or more, but feel largely powerless to affect the macro conflict. In that sense, everyday peace goes beyond conflict-calming or mere acceptance of negative peace. The acts contain elements of resistance or subversion, attempting to avoid certain things in order to protect safer spaces of engagement. Everyday peace, to Mac Ginty, thus involves action undertaken by largely powerless people, to attempt to secure non-violence, hoping this could form a foundation for everyday diplomacy to later address justice issues and progress towards a positive, transformed, engaged peace.

With regard to IPV, this suggests everyday peace could provide a framework to understand the behaviours and agency of women who choose to stay in abusive relationships (or who are navigating post-separation relationships), and through understanding, point to ways to support them beneath the macro policy approaches of government and formalised programmes typically provided in the family violence space. In addition, practices of everyday peace could be presented as a soft-entry point for people unwilling to engage with traditional family violence supports, as it works with people at the stage they are at rather than pushing them to make significant decisions which they may be unready or unable to enact – particularly noting the complexity and heightened

risk level associated with terminating a violent relationship (Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020; Fisher and Stylianou, 2019). In doing this, everyday peace accepts women as they are and respects the agency with which they live their lives. We do not suggest women should tolerate violence. Rather, everyday peace accepts their current choice, and presents a framework to understand the agency of their current actions, which could lead to new types of support being formulated to operate alongside existing family violence supports.

Methodology

This paper examines new narrative inquiry data from eight experienced female IPV practitioners, to assess the significance and applicability of everyday peace to IPV. It analyses written narratives provided by these practitioners working in the family violence space (e.g. family support workers, family violence counsellors, and victim assistance workers) within four different non-governmental organisations across greater Melbourne. These practitioners have between 7 and 30 years' experience in the field, and all but one (who has a Bachelor's Degree) have postgraduate qualifications in disciplines such as social work, family violence, and community development. Practitioners were purposively sampled, based on expertise in the family violence space (minimum of 5 years). Respondents were contacts of the authors or sourced via snowball sampling. An invitation was extended to 17 practitioners with 8 providing narratives.

While this is a small sample size, it was deemed sufficient as the findings were largely consistent and the final two narratives provided no new information other than nuance, suggesting saturation. We sought what Malterud et al. (2016) refer to as 'information power' by approaching deeply knowledgeable practitioners with several years' experience of working directly with victims of IPV (p. 1753). This aligns with Young and Casey's (2018) conclusions that an information-rich sample size of 7–10 is sufficient in qualitative research and that while additional respondents can add nuance, 'the vast majority' of themes are present in small samples of under 10.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach analysing stories that 'describe human action' (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5); it 'refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials' (Lieblich et al., 1998: 2). Respondents were sent four questions and asked to write a narrative stream of consciousness:

What everyday strategies have you observed or heard of that women use to:

1. *... avoid aggravating perpetrators and to maintain calm on a day-to- day basis?*
2. *... de-escalate perpetrators when they are in a state of high arousal?*
3. *... minimise immediate harm coming to themselves and their children when the perpetrator is acting abusively?*
4. *... try and move towards a positive, sustainable relationship?*

Narratives were analysed thematically by the first author, with the 'content within the text [as] the primary focus' (Butina, 2015: 193). The narrative data were coded using the everyday peaceful practices outlined above as a theoretical framework, so against Ring's *tension, anger* and *intimacy*, Mac Ginty's *avoidance*, *ambiguity*, *ritualised politeness*, *telling/reading* and *blame deferring*, and/or Williams' *submission*. Coded data were grouped according to similarities and subthemes identified (Butina, 2015). Evidence from the family violence literature on strategies was used to further test the applicability of the everyday peace practice themes. Three respondents volunteered to

provide secondary analysis and critique on the first draft, which was facilitated through a 2-hour focus group. At this opportunity, respondents suggested some examples should be relocated; they also expanded on and provided additional examples.

Application of everyday peace to intimate partner violence

This section unpacks the relevance of everyday peace to family violence by presenting examples from the narratives, of women in IPV situations using similar practices to minimise risk and conflict. Thus, this section serves to demonstrate how everyday peace may apply to IPV and provide a foundation for further empirical research. The subheadings relate to the practices documented by Ring, Mac Ginty, and Williams, as above, to assess the suitability of this theory for explaining IPV conflict minimisation and agency.

It is important to avoid essentialising all women experiencing IPV, and recognise the complexity and variety of different women's responses. The practices of everyday peace presented below are obviously not implemented by all women experiencing IPV. Some react in opposite ways, seek external help, attack back, or act in open defiance of perpetrators' efforts to control or terrorise (Anderson et al., 2017; Nurius et al., 2011; Zakar et al., 2012). Individuals enact multiple strategies, depending on the situation and feelings at the time (Goodman et al., 2003; Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020). However, these examples were reported in the narratives and focus group.

Tension

In this paper, Ring's (2006) identification of *tension* (and *anger* and *intimacy*, explained in the subsequent subsections) are conceived as *themes* of everyday peace that underlie the everyday peace *practices/behaviours* of Mac Ginty and Williams to follow. Ring discusses tension in the context of neighbourly exchange, in which gifts, help, and reciprocal engagement between people across a difficult ethnic divide are deliberately maintained in the sort of manner usually reserved for kin and close friends. However, much of her conceptualisation of tension refers to the on-edge tension women constantly feel as a result of hypervigilance in their intimate spousal relationship. This has great relevance to IPV and women's everyday peace practices, which respondent#3 suggests necessitate women navigating tense and often conflicting emotions between loving and hating their abusers, craving and being repulsed by them, feeling protected and vulnerable, wanting to leave, and wanting to stay. Respondent#3 adds that abusers can insert their own tension and anxiety to this mix, through cyclical feelings of remorse, guilt, inadequacy, and fear of abandonment. In addition, tension captures the pervasive and strength-eroding anxiety, stress, and mental burden of choosing to remain yet needing to tiptoe around an abusive partner and attempt to do everything *right*, all the time, to avoid reproach.

Respondent#2 explains the juggling act women experiencing IPV have to undertake with their daily activities, including purposively ensuring work shifts coincide with the perpetrator's, so he is not angered by her lack of presence when he is home, and scheduling interactions with family violence workers and other social supports when he is not around. Respondent#6 refers to this as requiring women to 'sneak away to see family and friends' while respondent#7 highlights that many women either have to sever relationships with family and friends or see them in secret. Respondent#6 also raises the tension felt by women who fear the actions and words of others and

are compelled to 'ask family and friends to behave in a certain way around [the perpetrator] to keep the peace'.

Ring (2006) recounts an example of the tension women feel when trying to continue a friendship their partner dislikes or wishes her to sever. She highlights that the tension of maintaining a friendship 'under conditions of secrecy, time constraint, and heightened risk . . . could only proceed if women's routine efforts to avoid and endure male anger were intensified' (p. 168). This additional strain is unjust, but women must choose between the heightened tension of losing a friend or enduring continued tension to keep them. Ring's contribution, though, is noting the agency of women choosing to endure this tension, as a deliberate strategy to work towards the sort of peace they hope to achieve.

Anger

Ring (2006) describes male anger in her context as being widely seen to be illogical, uncontrollable, dangerous, and unpredictable; therefore, women manage and accommodate it to avoid (further) harm. She uses many examples from her ethnographic research in Pakistan, including women downplaying abuse to avoid reigniting anger, and women trying to be perfect to please their husbands by dressing modestly, being religiously pious, maintaining obedience and deference to their husbands, never flirting, staying at home, not arguing, not raising information that could anger him, and boosting his sense of masculinity and dominance. Despite arguments about cultural divides and ethnically driven practices, similar actions occur globally, including within Australia, with women attempting to avoid abuse by being the *perfect wife* – cooking, cleaning, and being demurely submissive (Hannan, 2015).

While abusive relationships are an exertion of power through manipulation and control, the potential outcome of not accommodating or managing these exertions is an outburst of anger. This is how the manipulative and controlling behaviours utilised by perpetrators are so effective, because they are backed by the threat of anger and violence. Ring's everyday peace focuses on avoidance of anger, even more than the subsequent violence. It is anger that women adopt everyday peace practices to avoid; they often accept other forms of abuse, which have extremely detrimental impacts, in an attempt to avoid anger. As such, the fear or threat of anger is a significantly pervasive and powerful coercive force, which allows other aspects of abuse to foment and escalate.

Respondent#6 mentions how women sometimes use anger themselves, to shock or deflect the attention of perpetrators. She gives the example of women putting 'themselves in the line of fire to protect children'. Similarly, respondent#7 discusses how women cover up 'children's misdemeanours' while respondent#3 notes that women may reprimand a child in front of their partner to show him that the matter has been dealt with to avoid further interaction between the perpetrator and the child. Ring (2006) describes similar shielding behaviour, with women stepping in to confront situations in such a way as to keep their spouse out of it.

Intimacy

In Ring's (2006) conceptualisation, she discusses a deep longing for intimacy and friendship with other women as a motivator for women from conflict-divided ethnic groupings to enact practices of everyday peace. Similar to *anger* above, this paper understands Ring's (2006) conceptualisation of *intimacy* as one of the motivations compelling women to engage in the intense and

all-consuming peace-promoting labours necessary to manage and survive abusive relationships. While there are many reasons for why women stay in abusive relationships, respondent#1 suggests that in many cases, at some early stage of the relationship, if not now, there was love and intimacy; a desire to (re)claim that intimacy can persist.

Ring (2006) recounts her respondents' beliefs that love is 'a dangerous force, one fearful to women because it was seen to foreclose options, to embroil one in an inevitable plot that erases agency and self-will' (p. 152). This is an interesting observation in terms of IPV, suggesting intimate love results in 'a kind of possession' and 'the loss of will' (Ring, 2006: 152). Extrapolating to IPV, intimate love may be seen as the culprit that traps women in abusive relationships, whereby love makes a person lose their rational senses as they become *crazy* or *mad* with love. This relates to the IPV *love bomb* discussed by respondent#5, where the cycles of abuse phase through *honeymoon* periods of intimacy that hook women back into the relationship and keep them motivated to try harder to return to the honeymoon. Yet to Ring (2006), there is a choice and agency in choosing to value intimacy. Thus, regardless of interpretation, an important starting point for IPV support raised by respondents surrounds understanding and respect for the choices women make, without judgement, where they are made out of reasoned agency. There is a danger of support workers perpetuating gendered disrespect for women in IPV situations, by not respecting women's choices or recognising this agency.

Respondent#3 highlights intimacy as a motivating factor for practices of everyday peace that underlies several, but not all, of the reasons women remain in abusive relationships; other examples include wanting to help their abuser, co-dependency, traumatic bonding, emotional blackmail, and eroded self-esteem. Further reasons (including fear of violent repercussions) are linked to *anger.* Additional reasons such as custody fears, finances, and logistics are important, but are well covered by the extant family violence literature and out of scope for this paper (e.g. Fisher and Stylianou, 2019; Heim et al., 2018).

The remaining subsections unpack practices of everyday peace as per Mac Ginty and Williams, girded by motivating factors of *tension, anger*, and *intimacy.*

Avoidance

Of the five practices of everyday peace identified by Mac Ginty, *avoidance* is probably the most commonly exercised in IPV situations. In these situations, avoidance practices fall into three key themes: avoiding contentious conversations, avoiding certain people, and avoiding certain behaviours, as family members seek to avoid upsetting or triggering anger through a range of strategies, discussed below.

Respondents note that conversations that may be perceived by perpetrators as *nagging*, *whinging* (including crying), *blaming*, *attacking*, or *disparaging* in any way may inflame conflict. This can manifest in women ignoring financial and other concerns, as well as what respondent#7 terms 'not calling out' bad behaviour, such as alcoholism, drug use, dangerous driving, or draconian child discipline, due to the inability to have open conversation to work through issues (Tran, 2018). Respondent#4 explains the need to 'keep the conversation neutral'. As such, conversations that reignite a former argument, violent incident, or issue of contention are avoided, or if unavoidable women may choose to quietly 'sit and wait for them to finish yelling at them or screaming or throwing things or whatever they're doing' (Mansa, 2020: 62). Respondent#2 comments that this includes 'avoiding discussing important things related to relationships [and] being quiet when

verbal abuse escalates'. Respondent#4 adds that, while most women she works with say avoiding engaging in arguments with perpetrators can help de-escalate the situation, some women find that 'this can backfire and fire him up even more'. This highlights the complexity of IPV and reinforces that a one-size-fits-all approach is obviously inappropriate, yet avoiding triggers remains a common theme.

Women may avoid being in the same area as the perpetrator when he seems aggravated (Riddell et al., 2009; Rizo, 2016; Zakar et al., 2012), which respondents note often include leaving the property or subtly moving children and pets into safer areas of the house. In addition, women may avoid raising past problems or talking about subjects that she knows could spark the perpetrator's anger (Goodman et al., 2003; Riddell et al., 2009). Respondents identify that this can include pressure for women to disremember or minimise past trauma and wrongdoing caused by the perpetrator. Respondent#5 comments that this disposition of disremembering can become internalised and interpreted by human services providers as women downplaying the violence, when in fact it may be a protective survival mechanism. If a perpetrator is becoming escalated, women may exercise meek acquiescence in an attempt to calm and de-escalate them (Tran, 2018). Respondents note that this may include accepting being shouted over, called names, and physically attacked without responding. Respondent#3 mentions that to outside observers, this may appear to be weakness, but it is a well-documented, commonsense method of avoiding conflict and hurt throughout the animal kingdom, whereby submissive behaviour can calm a dominant attacker. In addition, she notes that these quiet actions are not necessarily accompanied by terror, and can be calculated and deliberate attempts to reduce harm (as also Goodman et al., 2003).

Women experiencing IPV may modify their friendship groups, social interactions, and family ties according to the wishes of the perpetrator, with jealousy noted as a 'powerful trigger' of anger (Rizo, 2016: 586). Respondents discuss that perhaps the perpetrator has a dislike for a certain friend, possibly a friend who has seen through his charming façade. Perhaps the perpetrator is jealous of all the time his spouse is spending outside of the home, in friendship groups that exclude him. Perhaps he is worried that she is going to meet someone who would be a better partner for her; or concerned about friends who he thinks are a bad influence, perhaps who have a moral compass that guides differently than his own, which he may consider to be superior (respondents#1, #3, and #5).

To avoid conflict, women manage their social interactions with friends and family as necessary; calling friends from their workplace, using work emails, avoiding events or leaving early, and cutting or reducing contact with people the perpetrator considers undesirable (Rizo, 2016). In the era of COVID-19 and increased time at home, four respondents highlight that this has manifested in the need for women to avoid talking to those contacts via video, if they are likely to say something problematic that triggers the perpetrator. Respondents note the rise in IPV since the start of the pandemic. Respondent#3 mentions that the potential for contacts to say the *wrong thing* within earshot of the perpetrator is obviously a source of anxiety for women, who may find total avoidance of that contact the easier route.

Finally, respondents explain that many women avoid behaving in ways they know will inflame the perpetrator. This includes practices such as wearing clothes the perpetrator likes and avoiding pieces of clothing they do not like, particularly if that item of clothing is a reminder of something that could trigger an outburst (Rizo, 2016). Respondent#4 mentions that monitoring their behaviour includes 'avoiding eye contact' and 'moving slowly and carefully' so as not to get in his way, while respondent#6 includes putting up with things he likes even if she does not, and 'pretending

to be interested in whatever they're interested in'. Respondents#6, #7, and #8 include that women suppress their opinions and emotions. Women in family violence situations are forced to think more purposefully about their actions: measuring their words before talking, cleaning up, or cooking dinner quickly if an ad hoc approach may anger, being quiet and keeping the children quiet when he is watching a game, or whatever specific triggers are applicable to that perpetrator (Goodman et al., 2003; Riddell et al., 2009; Rizo, 2016; Zakar et al., 2012).

Mac Ginty (2014) describes escapism into alternative activities as a form of avoidance. Respondent#4 offered examples in which women seek to 'distract' perpetrators, such as women 'carefully putting on the radio, TV, or a movie he likes' or 'carefully using humour [such as] something funny a child did' to divert a potentially dangerous situation.

Sadly, within the avoidance theme, women in IPV situations sometimes practice deflecting attention from themselves by minimising or sabotaging their achievements. Respondent#3 notes that this sabotaging is not self-sabotage, as it is essentially caused by the perpetrator who directly or indirectly steers the woman towards turning down job offers or opportunities, or pushes them to drop out of college. Respondent#7 explains this saying that 'men became threatened when their partners returned to school. This was often because the women gained confidence and became more assertive, expecting more for themselves'. With the limelight taken away from them, perpetrators felt abandoned and fearful that their partners were drifting away, so reinstated their control through presenting women with ultimatums.

One comment made by respondent#4 that does not cleanly fit into any of the everyday peace practices, but most closely aligns with avoidance, involves the subtle removal of 'objects that could be used to harm'. This may not only include potential weaponry, but also links back to respondent comments regarding the subtle removal of children and pets from the perpetrator's immediate vicinity, and could include women keeping personally valuable items as well as weaponry away from perpetrators. This interpretation includes the way that perpetrators often hurt people, pets, or things of value to women as a vehicle to cause her emotional harm.

In all of this, the key contribution of the everyday peace framework is that it emphasises agency, often within a very narrow range of perceived options, through active resistance or creative search for means to move towards better outcomes in the longer term. Particularly in situations where the couple is no longer together, there is evidence that avoidance can help move the relationship towards positive peace. Respondent#4 notes that 'avoiding high conflict topics' can provide space for a conflict-free future, and offer potential for a healthy non-intimate relationship.

Ambiguity

Practicing ambiguity in the IPV context relates to family members using vagueness to soften potential triggers and de-escalate intensifying situations. Respondents identify how this necessitates women engaging in artful creativity to conceal, dissemble, and ignore subjects, people, and actions when identification may cause conflict, and be deliberately ambiguous about feelings, motives, and actions.

Concealing, like many practices of everyday peace in IPV, may relate to concealing the perpetrator's actions and behaviours from others, including social services, as well as concealing and reshaping potential triggers from perpetrators (Rizo, 2016; Tran, 2018). Respondents recall that women in IPV situations regularly conceal what is occurring from their external contacts for a variety of reasons, including love for the perpetrator and a sense of loyalty whereby they do not

want others to think badly of him, and not wanting to draw attention to their family – particularly to avoid the gaze of child protective services. Respondent#5 identifies that women may avoid drawing the attention of social services to prevent further conflict within the family as the infiltration of services shining a spotlight on the perpetrator's behaviour is likely to raise his anger. While respondent#2 mentions calling the police or lodging an intervention order as a help seeking strategy, respondent#7 highlights that both of these are sometimes avoided by women in IPV situations who feel that calling out bad behaviour will 'inflame' anger and violence. In this manner, concealment is a practice of everyday peace, intending to minimise conflict.

Concealment from perpetrators relates to women hiding or using ambiguity to blur something that could provoke a negative response. An example provided by respondent#3 explains that women may relabel a female friend usually called Sam, to Samantha in the perpetrator's presence. They may conceal ongoing friendships with *undesirables* by minimising contact with these people and never talking about them with the perpetrator in the hope they forget about their existence (Rizo, 2016). They may delete text or email messages or rename contacts on their mobile phones or computers (see also Matthews et al., 2017).

By dissembling and disguising their true beliefs and feelings about a subject or action, women seek to avoid conflict. This can include actions such as downplaying a violent episode, backpedalling on a conversation that is getting out of hand, or masking their true opinion on a subject (Rizo, 2016; Tran, 2018). Respondents note situations where women may ignore, disregard, or *not see* the perpetrator's negative actions or behaviours. This may be conscious and deliberate, knowing that calling him out will incite conflict and would be unlikely to lead to a positive outcome or ameliorate the undesirable action or behaviour. Respondents list that this may include ignoring things the perpetrator says or does that she would like to stop, such as swearing in front of children, excessive child discipline, drug and alcohol abuse, property damage, threats, snide comments, and a poor work ethic.

Each of the practices of everyday peace can continue even if the couple is separated, particularly if the couple have children and are expected to have some sort of ongoing relationship or contact. Respondent#5 comments that, in cases where a woman has an intervention order ruling that the perpetrator must maintain a certain distance from her and banning direct contact, women may not report breeches and be ambiguous in their enforcement of the order to placate the perpetrator and avoid further conflict.

Ritualised politeness

Respondents note that ritualised politeness includes women 'being quiet' (#2, #6), 'appeasing their point of view' (#8), and 'speaking softly and calmly' (#4). Respondent#6 lists several everyday practices to maintain perpetrators' happiness. These include 'paying attention to him and acknowledging his achievements and/or bad day', not 'giving the attention to the kids', 'keeping the kids quiet', not complaining, 'asking permission to do something', 'not taking phone calls or being on the phone in his presence', cooking his favourite meal, and 'making sure the house is clean and tidy'. Respondent#7 classifies these actions as the women 'over-functioning in the house and in the relationship', which she explains as 'carrying the lion's share of the household responsibilities [and] making things easy for him'.

Respondents note that women may adopt a false front of over-politeness and tolerance at family gatherings, business meetings, or when friends are visiting to please the perpetrator. Respondent#7

provides the example of women 'tolerating visits from his mates including drinking sessions and late nights and bad behaviour'. However, respondent#6 highlights that this is a fine line as she must 'entertain her partner's friends but not be too friendly in case she's accused of having an affair'. Even in cases where perpetrators are suffering psychosis and delusion, women may politely acquiesce with insane narratives to avoid conflict (Rizo, 2016). Respondent#5 comments that this can include agreeing with a perpetrator's unhinged ideas such as a belief in his children's immortality, whereby offering agreement intends to prevent him from *proving* their immortality by attempting to kill them.

Some perpetrators call their partners incessantly throughout the day. Despite it being annoying, anxiety-provoking, or inappropriate timing, women often take the phone calls to avoid escalating the perpetrator's paranoia and subsequent conflict (Woodlock et al., 2020). Respondents explain that women rarely know what mood they will be met with when they answer the phone calls and are braced to face the full range of emotions, an exhausting and adrenaline-wasting activity enacted to calm the perpetrator and maintain peace, which is likely to have detrimental effects on women's mental health. However, 'switching off' or not responding to messages or phone calls may have even worse repercussions with Woodlock et al. (2020) noting that this can exacerbate abuse. Respondent#2 mentions that having an alternate phone can help women who have left violent relationships remove themselves from this constant tension and take control of communication (p. 375).

This social practice may also include women being docile and doing as the perpetrator asks without complaining, questioning, or hesitating (Rizo, 2016; Tran, 2018). Respondents note that this may become almost slave-like, where the woman will fulfil the perpetrator's demands almost regardless of negative effects on the family, as the consequences of rebellion or assertiveness could result in worse outcomes. As such, respondents comment that women may give perpetrators sex (including suffering unwanted sexual acts – respondents#3 and #7), buy them alcohol (respondents#1, #3, and #7), or give them money despite not wanting to or having insufficient funds for other needs (respondent#5). Respondent#4 highlights that this includes 'being *obedient*, following instructions, and getting him what he wants [as well as] anticipating needs and wants and attempting to deliver those to prevent any *blow-ups*'. Respondent#4 also notes that avoiding these triggers in the short term is often to women's longer term detriment 'because it can ultimately lead to a bigger outburst [when the family is financially crippled], or, if she leaves, a massive financial burden for her'. Maintaining the perpetrator's happiness or approval can become all-consuming (Rizo, 2016), in line with Ring's (2006) observations discussed earlier about the emotional labour of managing these difficult situations.

In cases where the relationship has broken down, but the couple needs to maintain a connection for the sake of children, respondent#4 highlights that these strategies can help move the relationship towards positive peace through 'maintaining conciliatory communication patterns', following polite *rules* around transparency and processes, and engaging in attempts to listen to one another and change behaviour.

Telling/reading

Telling, in Mac Ginty's typology of everyday peace, refers to a constant vigilance, noting other people's ethnically informed identity in situations of intercommunal violence. In IPV situations, we note respondents' observations of a constant noting or *reading* of the perpetrator's fluctuating

mood, resulting in women (and often their children) adjusting their own behaviour based on this assessment. This practice interlocks with the practices described above; for example, while certain conversations are avoided if women feel that they may provoke a response, respondents note that there may be occasions when it is safe to raise that previously taboo subject depending on the perpetrator's mood. Similarly, respondent#6 suggests that women read the perpetrator's mood when he comes home and act responsively; for example, 'having kids go into the bedrooms if the offender comes home in a bad mood'. Respondents comment that women constantly monitor and assess this, employing patience and emotional intelligence to determine safe and unsafe times to be in the perpetrator's company or have a contentious discussion (Woodlock et al., 2020; Zakar et al., 2012).

This *telling* or *reading* is both protective, to quickly adapt to a perpetrators' mood, as well as allowing women use this for their advantage. Many women experiencing IPV have great insight into the cycles of violence and are able to recognise and calculate probable outcomes (Tran, 2018). An example provided by respondent#1 portrays a woman who utilises the honeymoon phase of a violent cycle, when the perpetrator wants to give her gifts, to collect items required for escape and re-establishment.

Blame deferring

With intercommunal violence, a third party can often be blamed to allow actors from the other two groups to maintain a layer of everyday peace. For example, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland could blame the British army. In IPV, where the conflict is usually localised between two individuals, this needs to be played a little differently. Perpetrators and their partners may use blame deferring but for different purposes. Where perpetrators may deflect blame away from themselves to minimise their responsibility for their actions, their partners are more likely to defer blame to placate the perpetrator and maintain peace (Mansa, 2020). Women's manifestations of this practice of everyday peace fall into two key themes. Women may make excuses for the perpetrator's behaviour and shift blame to others or themselves when talking to the perpetrator (Zakar et al., 2012). In addition, they may make excuses to external people and services for consequences caused by the perpetrator (Mansa, 2020).

In the first scenario, women may seek to calm the perpetrator after violence or confrontation by shifting the blame away from him, perhaps by denying the episode altogether, or otherwise justifying the violence (Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020; Mansa, 2020; Rizo, 2016; Zakar et al., 2012). In an example provided by three respondents, after violence women may offer that the perpetrator has been under a lot of stress, or use his traumatic childhood or estranged relationship with his parents as an excuse for erratic and unacceptable behaviour. Respondent#7 clarifies that women sometimes say, 'he doesn't mean it' or 'he can't help it' (e.g. because he had a bad childhood). Furthermore, women may blame themselves for the violence (Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020; Rizo, 2016; Zakar et al., 2012), submitting that they should not have questioned his judgement, cooked him that vegetable, or deliberated before fulfilling the latest demand that required instantaneous obedience.

In the second scenario, women offer excuses to deflect blame away from controlling and violent perpetrators. In an example provided by respondent#5, a perpetrator controls his partner's use of the car, banning her from using it even when he does not need it; she tells others that it is fine as she prefers to walk. In another example from the same respondent, a perpetrator prevents his children from sleeping at night due to shouting and slamming doors around the house. When the

children arrive at school the next morning, late for class, shambolic, and yawning, the partner blames rowdy neighbours. When speaking to social services to request material aid, respondents explain that women may manipulate the narrative to blame a third party. In another example provided by respondent#5, if the perpetrator spent the last of the family's money on drugs or alcohol, the partner could blame a direct debit or state that she had to spend the money on groceries, leaving them short for the rental payment.

While this appears that women are protecting the perpetrators, everyday peace notes the agency of these acts, to protect themselves and their families, knowing that any outside intervention comes with great risk of escalated harm if the perpetrator feels threatened (Fisher and Stylianou, 2019), or the loss of relationships and things they still hope holds value. In addition, respondent#3 notes that admitting that their partner has an addiction or is violent can be a source of shame for women, and some rather maintain secrecy and shoulder the burden in private (also Zakar et al., 2012). An intervention by child protection, drug and alcohol, or family violence services bring with them a similar stigma, and the potential for increased domestic conflict (Fisher and Stylianou, 2019), providing women with an added incentive to deflect blame to a third party. As such, respondents identify that this everyday peace practice is enacted to reduce conflict with the perpetrator, as well as to deflect unwanted attention and pressure from outside sources.

Submission

Williams (2015) explores the topographies of power inequality that underlie a good deal of everyday peace practice, including *submission, surrender*, and *renunciation* by the less powerful party, and the *playing with power* manipulation some employ to further strengthen their power. In IPV, this includes *submission* to injustice and *renunciation* of personal rights, to maintain peace in the present and, perhaps, a goal or dream of addressing the underlying issue at some time in the future. Williams (2015) explains *submission* as actions that accept and conceal injustice and inequality through some level of surrender and acceptance of injustice, at least for now. This practice has disturbing elements that may undermine structural change and reinforce unequal power dynamics, as well as being open to abuse; however, in the pursuit of a peaceful existence here and now, surrender can be perceived as the best option available.

Practices of *submission* in the respondents' narratives are even more worrying than some of the practices discussed above, as they provide perpetrators with an additional layer of control and result in increased subjugation of the victim. These include women informing perpetrators about their movements and interactions. Ensuring perpetrators know who she is meeting with, where, and when she will return gives perpetrators a feeling of control and security. As such, women may concede or be coerced into giving access to their calendars, mobile phones (including tracking devices), social media accounts, and emails (Dunn, 2020; Mansa, 2020), which provides perpetrators with increased ability to perpetrate violence using technological means (Dunn, 2020; Woodlock et al., 2020).

Another common practice of submission involves giving in to perpetrator demands without arguing about them, even when they are painful, unwanted, or detrimental to the family (Goodman et al., 2003; Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020; Riddell et al., 2009; Tran, 2018). Respondent#5 provides the example of women giving perpetrators access to credit or bank accounts despite it putting the family into debt or meaning insufficient funds remain to pay for essentials. Examples provided by other respondents include women giving sex, making food, or doing other things immediately

when the perpetrator demands, without resistance to maintain peace (Rizo, 2016). Respondent#6 mentions that this can include agreeing with everything the perpetrator says 'to keep the peace' and 'apologising even for something that is not their fault'.

When out without the perpetrator, respondents comment that practices of submission may include answering the perpetrator's video calls, allowing them to see who she is meeting with and assess the acceptability of the outing, or sending the perpetrator photographs that attest to the fact that she is in fact out at a café with her mother. These actions are usually subtle, and others would be unlikely to notice anything out of the ordinary apart from possibly thinking it is nice her partner calls her so often and nice that she sends him photos of what she is doing. Woodlock et al. (2020) highlight the crushing intrusiveness of these scenarios, whereby perpetrators invade every aspect of a woman's life, giving him an 'omnipresence' (p. 372). When the couple are in an intimate relationship, the value of these actions as practices of everyday peace are likely to be far more detrimental than positive, and actively reinforce and enable continuing violence. This may change if a relationship breaks down, with potential for submissive practices to enable space for positive peace and moving forward in a functional non-intimate relationship (respondents#1, #3, and #5).

In analysing respondents' narratives, we identified an additional behaviour that we labelled as *reassurance*. Many perpetrators, although notably not all, suffer from significant mental health concerns and personality disorders or disabilities with deep insecurities, low self-confidence, addiction, and trauma (Holtzworth-Monroe and Stuart, 1994; Yu et al., 2019). This is not to excuse their behaviour, but recognises that perpetrators frequently struggle through life. Focusing on this group of perpetrators, respondent#3 raises that women often have a deep understanding of the perpetrator's insecurities and seek to ameliorate, nurture, and comfort as best they can (Tran, 2018; Zakar et al., 2012). Respondent#3 reinforces that this is not solely an altruistic behaviour, as placating a perpetrator's insecurities can be a practice of everyday peace intended to reassure, to avoid paranoia and creeping conflict. It can, however, also be conducted with the hopeful aim of addressing the underlying issues to deal with the IPV and arrive at a positive relationship in the long-term.

Conclusion and implications for practice

This paper explores the applicability of everyday peace frameworks to minimise and avoid conflict in IPV scenarios. In the process, it develops a theory to assess women's agentic actions. This conceptual framework offers a different way to theorise women's survival strategies than those previously presented in the family violence literature (e.g. Goodman et al., 2003, 2005; Hayes, 2013; Rizo, 2016; St Vil et al., 2017; Tran, 2018; Zakar et al., 2012). Where framed against seemingly *strong* strategies in the family violence literature, such as *resistance* and *help seeking*, most of these fit with so-called *placating* strategies which seem gentle, unassuming, and therefore, weak. Throughout this paper, we have reframed these peace-seeking strategies as agentic attempts to minimise harm and promote peace, often conducted with deliberate and considered foresight into perpetrator behaviour and hoping to move towards outcomes the woman values.

Reflective narratives of conflict-minimising practices that practitioners have observed in practice were themed, along with data on similar strategies found in the extant family violence literature, around the everyday peace behaviour categories established by Ring (2006), Mac Ginty (2013), and Williams (2015). This analysis highlighted the significant overlap and relevance of everyday peace ideas between the state or community level to IPV at the household level. This

links with Becker-Blease and Freyd's (2005) research that found similarities between the trauma responses of war veterans and family violence survivors.

While the data from practitioners' narratives largely fit within the everyday peace practices, a theme around *hiding* (e.g. removing dangerous items) raised by respondent#4 may suggest the need for a new category within the everyday peace typology. Removing dangerous items aligns with the *avoidance* category as it is an attempt to avoid harm; however, a separate theme on *hiding* could reinterpret some strategies currently grouped elsewhere such as where women hide friendships, contact with services and other social connections, items for escape, and their opinions and feelings.

While clearly recognising that conflict minimising practices in IPV situations often negatively reinforce perpetrator control and entrench violence, some of these practices have a positive application helping women avoid harm (Goodman et al., 2003, 2005), and potentially moving towards long-term outcomes they value (such as functional post-relationship interactions). They are often deliberate, conscious acts by women, demonstrating considerable agency in difficult circumstances (Hill, 2019). They also constitute a foundation upon which further agency may be developed; for example, discussion of everyday peace strategies may help women build insight and recognise themselves as victims of IPV in toxic relationships.

Empirical findings confirm that these strategies can increase risk of harm in some instances (Irving and Chi-pun Liu, 2020), particularly as abusive perpetrators tend to naturally escalate over time – making placating strategies less effective (Tran, 2018). Furthermore, as respondent#6 comments:

> Most of the women I work with have already left the family home. They voiced that these strategies have sometimes worked, they have sometimes helped to appease the offender. However, the offender's propensity for violence always won out when he was in a really bad mood or very angry. At that point in time, no strategies would keep the women and children safe and often they would be assaulted.

This highlights the complexity of family violence and the importance of avoiding suggestions that everyday peace practices in IPV situations are automatically helpful or effective (Mansa, 2020). Nonetheless, respondents note that the strategies outlined throughout this paper have protected women and children from immediate harm and minimised conflict to some extent, as well as developing women's agency, ability to manage, and insight into violent cycles, which can strengthen their psychosocial outcomes during and after the abusive relationship (Meyer et al., 2009; Rizo, 2016).

Thus, while recognising the limitations of these strategies, having a framework to organise and understand these practices could help family violence workers (and victims and others) acknowledge the strength and agency exhibited by women experiencing IPV (Rizo, 2016). It could provide workers with strategies to support harm minimisation 'that build on women's own ways of handling the violence in their lives' (Goodman et al., 2003: 167; also Meyer et al., 2009). An obvious limitation of this paper is that it is based on practitioner experience. It would be beneficial to employ this framework through empirical research with women who experience IPV, and understand the actions they take to minimise conflict in their families from first-hand sources. This would add to the growing literature seeking to hear the voice of women and understand their experiences of violence from their emic perspectives (Hill, 2019; Special Taskforce on Domestic Family Violence, 2014; Zakar et al., 2012).

Although recognition of women's agency and ingenuity through everyday peace practices is useful and important, it is essential to acknowledge that these practices, in many ways, pander to and reinforce violent behaviours (Mansa, 2020; Ring, 2006). Rather than simply celebrating women's ability to survive these oppressive situations, the authors note the fundamental need for concurrent work to raise consciousness around gender equity and address oppressive social structures that continue to subjugate and constrain women. In addition, it is important to note that the everyday peace practices women enact in the private sphere are no replacement for formal family violence supports, such as those provided by community services organisations and the police.

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ORCID iDs

Leanne M Kelly https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3360-5212
Anthony Ware https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3203-5908
Vicki-Ann Ware https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5192-3097

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