



**Royal Commission**  
into Family Violence

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF SUZANNE JOI DYSON**

I, Suzanne Joi Dyson, Associate Professor, of 215 Franklin St, Melbourne, in the State of Victoria, say as follows:

1. I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

**Current role**

2. I am currently employed as Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (**ARCSHS**) at La Trobe University in Melbourne. I also hold the role of Higher Degree by Research Co-ordinator for ARCSHS. I currently supervise five PhD students.

**Background and qualifications**

3. I have over 30 years' experience working in health care, State government, the community sector, private practice and academia. I initially trained as a nurse in Australia. I lived and worked in Canada and the United States for eight years. I worked in the USA as a community health nurse for three years and as a contraceptive counsellor in Canada for four years.
4. From 1978 to 1982 I was a Community Educator for Family Planning Victoria. As part of this work I contributed to the formation of the first Community Sexuality Education Unit within family planning. This involved working with educators, parents and children in primary schools and giving presentations at both primary and secondary schools about sexuality and relationships. From 1980 to 1984 I worked as a Development Officer for YWCA Australia. From 1984 to 1986 I held the position of State Director for YWCA Victoria.
5. From 1986 to 1990 I was the Executive Officer and Women's Housing Advisor at the Victorian Ministry of Housing. In 1986 I represented the Ministry of Housing on the interdepartmental committee that advised on the introduction of Intervention Orders for victims of family violence.
6. From 1990 to 2000 I was the Managing Director of a company called Performance Innovators Pty Ltd. During this period I also held the role of Management Consultant

with YWCA Australia for a six month period in 1997. From 1996 to 1999 I was a Research Consultant with a company called Success Works Pty Ltd.

7. From 1999 to 2001 I was a Health Promotion Consultant for Women's Health in the South East. From 2001 until 2010 I was employed as a Research Fellow at ARCSHS at La Trobe University. In 2011 I was promoted to Senior Research Fellow. During this time, from 2006 to 2008, I served a term on the Health Sciences Faculty Human Ethics Committee and between 2008 and 2011, co-ordinated the post-graduate seminar series. Since 2012 I have been the higher degree research co-ordinator at ARCSHS.
8. I have worked as a consultant on a wide range of research and evaluation projects including with the White Ribbon Foundation, United Nations Development Programme, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (**VicHealth**), Australian Football League (**AFL**) and a range of government departments and community organisations. I have published widely on varying areas, including women's health, gender and health and sexuality and relationships. I have extensive research and evaluation experience in the area of cultural change programs as a means of primary prevention of violence against women.
9. I hold a Diploma in Nursing from Prince Henry's Hospital, a Graduate Diploma of Women's Studies from Deakin University, and a Doctor of Philosophy from La Trobe University. I have also undertaken preliminary studies at Monash University for a Master of Education.
10. Attached to this statement and marked **SD-1** is a copy of my current curriculum vitae.
11. Attached to this statement and marked **SD-2** is a list of the references I have referred to within the body of my statement.

## **CULTURAL CHANGE PROGRAMS AND PRIMARY PREVENTION**

### **Gender-based violence**

12. Gender-based violence is a complex social problem which grows from deeply held, often highly emotional beliefs, value systems, stereotypes and power relationships. It is embedded in the culture and social structures of almost all societies, to the point where the attitudes and behaviours that support it are mostly invisible and taken for granted.
13. The evidence demonstrates a strong link between violence against women and the systemic inequalities rooted in structural power imbalances between men and women. Explanations for violence that focus primarily on individual behaviours and

personal histories, such as alcohol abuse or a history of exposure to violence, overlook the broader impact of systemic gender inequality and women's subordination (World Health Organisation, 2014).

### **The public health framework**

14. The majority of violence prevention programmes are based on a public health framework originally developed for disease prevention. The public health framework is an approach which aims to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors and focussing on the concept of 'prevention'. It aims to provide the maximum benefit for the largest number of people.
15. The public health framework uses a three level model:
  - 15.1. tertiary interventions are concerned with treating disease;
  - 15.2. secondary interventions involve the earliest possible identification of infection or disease so it can be more readily managed; and
  - 15.3. primary prevention involves interventions which decrease the risk of disease occurring in the first place.
16. For violence prevention programmes, the three-level disease prevention model has been translated so that:
  - 16.1. tertiary interventions provide safety and support for women and children who are the victims of violence;
  - 16.2. secondary strategies involve taking action at the early signs of violence; and
  - 16.3. primary prevention is about preventing violence from occurring in the first place.
17. Gender-based violence prevention programmes using the public health model are commonly implemented using a health promotion approach. This is a discipline which strives to address the social, political and economic determinants of health to achieve a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being for individuals and communities, and to empower people to take charge of their own health (Peersman, 2001).
18. Using this approach, primary prevention programs to prevent violence against women focus primarily on promoting equal and respectful relationships, and on changing the cultures that support violence and disrespect.
19. Health promotion has proven effective in changing 'lifestyle' practices which involve known risk factors for disease; for example, controlling cholesterol levels to reduce the risk of heart disease, or controlling smoking to reduce the risk of cancers. The

move to target the deeply-held values and behaviours that lead to violence against women is relatively new and as yet unproven, yet the public health approach dominates the field.

### ***Critique of the public health model***

20. The public health model is not without its critics. For example, Lupton (1995) argues that public health may be used by practitioners who do not necessarily appreciate how concepts such as knowledge, power relations, society and the human condition have come to be understood in the humanities and social sciences.
21. Violence prevention practitioners come from a wide variety of disciplines. Many are skilled practitioners who use a feminist framework based on understandings about gender and power. For others, the public health discourses that underpin many programmes may not be well understood or well applied. Without a critical understanding of the application of health promotion theory, programmes are unlikely to be effective. Health promotion is a discipline which should be implemented by practitioners with a sound understanding of the practice and its ramifications (Whitelaw et al., 2001).
22. Many prevention programs avoid dealing with men's violence against women because some men (and women) might (and do) become defensive when these issues are raised. Peas (2014) argues that the term 'violence against women' avoids the issue that men are not explicitly named or addressed as perpetrators of violence against women. He argues that the public health framework targets individually held attitudes whereas it should be targeting social and cultural norms, and must be accompanied by changes in structural relations and social practices (Peas & Flood, 2008).
23. Notwithstanding the criticisms of the public health model, knowledge about how primary prevention works in social settings is growing as primary prevention strategies to prevent violence against women are put into place and evaluated. The project of preventing gender-based violence is likely to be long-term and challenging. The public health approach requires close monitoring to ensure it is working in both the short and longer term. Different and theoretically informed approaches also need to be tried and tested.
24. VicHealth's primary prevention program is based on the public health model and uses a social/ecological model. In this model, the problem of violence against women is essentially one of culture and environment, rather than one of psychological or biological deficits in individuals. This model ideally works at three

levels of the social ecology: individual/ relationship, community/organisation and societal. In theory this model addresses both structural, group and individual change. In practice, however, many programs continue to focus on individual change as suggested by Peas (2014).

25. Other theoretical models for attitude and behaviour change have been identified in social psychology which may also have implications for prevention of violence against women programs.

25.1. The Elaboration Likelihood Model argues that lasting attitude and behaviour change occurs when participants are motivated to hear a message, able to understand it, and perceive the message as relevant to them.

25.2. The Social Norms Approach suggests that the majority culture, or normative environment, may support an individual's beliefs and behaviours and seeks to achieve change through social marketing. The Social Norms approach aims to shift men's perception of social norms by revealing the extent to which other men also disagree with violence or are uncomfortable with common norms of masculinity.

25.3. The Community of Responsibility Model is based on the premise that everyone in a community has a role to play in ending violence against women.

25.4. The Stages of Change Model suggests that behaviour change is a process, and that at any given time, individuals are at different levels of motivation or readiness for change. People at different points in the process of change can benefit from different interventions (Dyson & Flood, 2008).

26. The alternative models to the social/ecological framework mentioned here were identified in a 2008 literature review of prevention approaches for the AFL (Dyson & Flood, 2008). I am not aware that any of these have been tested in Australia. Primary prevention is an approach that could potentially draw on a range of these models and address the critiques discussed above, however, there has been little documented research to test alternative approaches or to develop new ones. A key problem with most primary prevention programs is that while attitude and behaviour change are sought, only attitude change can be measured, and then only in the short to medium term. I would argue that research that identifies prevention strategies that lead to measurable, demonstrable behaviour change such as a reduction in abusive or violent behaviour and pro-social bystander behaviour is needed.

### **A comment on the meaning of gender**

27. Two main theoretical understandings dominate the analysis of power in society: Marxist and post structural.
- 27.1. A Marxist understanding of power sees power as a limited commodity possessed by a few. Others must struggle to win power and revolution is the ultimate solution.
- 27.2. In a post structural construction, power is not a commodity but a potential that exists when it is put into action. Power circulates in social networks, is exercised, not possessed, operates in diverse and complex ways between individuals and groups and is transmitted in discourse.
28. A post structuralist understanding of gender constructs it as a social institution that structures social relations. Dominant gender identities are defined in culture, language, symbols of gender difference, prevailing beliefs and attitudes. Gender is socially constructed and therefore open to change (as opposed to being a fixed, biological given).
29. Many more recent approaches to gender-based violence prevention have embodied a post structural understanding of gender and power, as suggested by Ollis (2011). This means gender and power are inextricably linked and the way in which gender and power are understood affects the way in which education programs are delivered.

### **Primary prevention programmes**

30. Against a backdrop of mounting evidence regarding the impact of gender-based violence on the community, shifts in community attitudes, and changing government policies and legal remedies, a number of primary prevention initiatives have been funded and evaluated in Australia.
31. In the following section, I will discuss three projects I have been involved in: one in community football, one in schools, and another in a workplace setting. I will then identify factors for success that are emerging from these culture-change programmes.

### ***Community Football: Fair Game Respect Matters***

32. In part, sport has been identified as a setting for primary prevention as a result of the number of high-profile incidents of sexual assault and violence against women,

and also because of the sexist peer norms that are often associated with male-dominated sports (Dyson & Flood, 2008). This has been described as 'group disrespect', a phenomenon which includes rude and aggressive behaviour, consumption of pornography, and encouragement of group drinking at both individual and group levels (Rosen et al., 2003).

33. In 2005, the AFL developed a policy called 'Respect and Responsibility' which initially focused on elite football and positioned the AFL as a community leader with responsibility for its community clubs and promoting its message to the wider community. The policy included an education programme based on the social/ecological framework, with a focus on the individual/relationship level of the model.
34. In addition to the elite AFL competition, football is a popular community sport, with almost 2000 clubs in the state of Victoria alone. When working well, community sports clubs play an important role in maintaining social health and connectedness (Bailey, 2005; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The benefits experienced by members in community clubs include enjoyment, recognition and being of service to others (Messner, 1989). Women are deeply engaged in all aspects of community football as parents, partners, volunteers, players, coaches, umpires, administrators, spectators, and in a myriad of other roles. Notwithstanding the dominant masculine environment, many women love the sport (Dyson et al., 2011).
35. These qualities and the existence of the AFL's Respect and Responsibility Policy made Victorian community football clubs a prime site for the introduction of an ambitious six-year community development/culture-change intervention introduced in 2008, known as Fair Game Respect Matters. The programme was led by AFL Victoria, funded by VicHealth and introduced serially into three leagues; two metro and one regional. In all, the programme has reached approximately 120 clubs and thousands of members. The programme functioned in the following way: two volunteers from each club, known as 'drivers', were invited to participate in a series of training sessions about violence against women and the inclusion of women in clubs. Drivers were provided with an audit tool to take back to their club to review their club's ethos and environment, communication, and inclusion of women and girls. They were asked to facilitate discussions and lead planning to introduce changes to make their clubs safe and inclusive for women and girls. Training sessions for drivers were delivered monthly during the football season over two years in each league. I led the evaluation from the start and provided feedback to enable continuous improvement.

36. The Fair Game Respect Matters programme and evaluation finished in 2014. One of the most significant lessons from the programme is that culture change cannot be predefined and is unlikely to proceed in an orderly manner. There were times when it appeared the programme was not working and the education component did not evaluate well. In part this may have been because the principles for adult education were not applied, and in part because a fairly simple expectation was built into the programme that an equal and respectful environment would come about by increasing the numbers of women in all aspects of the game. Despite the programme not meeting all of its predefined goals and expected outcomes, change happened and often in unexpected ways, principally because individual men and women wanted to end the iniquity of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls and improve the performance of their clubs.
37. Early changes that I observed in clubs were superficial. Women in clubs were consulted about what would make the club more welcoming for them. From this emerged simple solutions like cleaning up the female facilities, installing baby change tables, and decentering the bar – which was usually at the centre of the club rooms where (mainly male) social gatherings occurred. By making simple physical changes, more women started to see the club as welcoming and stayed for longer rather than dropping their children at training and leaving. These clubs focused on becoming family-friendly as well as on encouraging equal and respectful relationships.
38. Six years on, we can see more complex, nuanced changes that have emerged in the culture of clubs and the structure of the organisation. Women have asserted themselves in a range of roles and are making themselves heard in operations, such as decision making and in a range of (often non-traditional) on- and off-field positions. Structural change has also been implemented at the head office of AFL Victoria: policy changes have been introduced and social responsibility mainstreamed into every aspect of the sport, so equal and respectful relationships have become part of training for coaches, umpires and development staff who work in schools and with Indigenous and multicultural communities.

***Schools: Breaking the Silence***

39. Schools are established sites for health promotion programmes, and a health promoting schools model has been developed to guide such initiatives (Lee, 2009; Mūkoma & Flisher, 2004). This model has three overlapping and interconnected domains which must be addressed in any intervention: the school organisation, ethos and environment; links with the wider school community (including parents,



carers and local support services); and curriculum, teaching and learning. This is known as a whole-school approach.

40. In 2009, in conjunction with the Australian White Ribbon Foundation and the Sydney Region Department of Education, I developed and piloted a programme on the prevention of violence against women for delivery in participating Sydney schools. While there have been many short programmes for students in schools, there have been few culture-change programmes specifically targeted at school leadership to prevent violence against women in the school setting to date. There are strong links between sexuality and relationships education curriculum and broader culture-change programmes. Two key factors for success emerge from evaluations of sexuality and relationships programmes in Australia: active leadership from the school principal and high-quality training for teachers (Dyson, 2008). The programme became known as Breaking the Silence and was underpinned by the key factors for success outlined above and advocated by Carmody et al. (2009). Based on this evidence, primary, secondary and special school principals were recruited to lead cultural change in their schools to prevent violence against women.
41. Participant principals were invited by the Sydney Regional Director of the Department of Education (himself a White Ribbon Ambassador) to attend three one-day workshops over the course of a year and in the meantime to work in their own schools to introduce whole-school cultural change appropriate to the age, stage and cultural background of their school community. At the first workshop the participants were introduced to concepts of gender and power, gender-based violence, respectful relationships, and cultural change as a prevention strategy. The second workshop focused on theory and the principles for prevention programmes.
42. In the Breaking the Silence program, workshops were participatory and based on critical pedagogy (which I discuss in detail below). At the first workshop, principals worked together collaboratively to plan how to take what they had learnt back to their schools. At the second workshop they worked together to plan White Ribbon Day events for their schools in November (near the end of the school year in Australia) at which they would launch the Breaking the Silence program that would be introduced across the whole school the following year. The third workshop was held after the White Ribbon Day events, which the principals reported on and then worked together to plan their comprehensive programme for the following year.
43. The Breaking the Silence programme provided information and support to participant principals; workshops were not directive but assumed principals and teachers to be skilled educators capable of developing interventions that are

appropriate and culturally sensitive to their individual contexts. Thus, Breaking the Silence was not conceived as a classroom programme to be taught but as a comprehensive intervention which could change the ways things were done in the classroom and in all aspects of the school's operations. It was piloted over three years with 50 principals.

44. In 2010, the first pilot was evaluated. The evaluation found that one of the key factors for the success of the programme was leadership support. This applied not only to the principals and their willingness to take a strong leadership role in the programme in their schools but also to the Regional Director who was an initiator of the programme. He was an inspirational leader who continued his role outside of the training, in assisting with the recruitment of participants, attending every workshop (and actively participating) and holding social events between workshops to support and encourage the participating principals as a group. Another key finding from the evaluation was that most parents and carers supported the programme.
45. Not all schools had spectacular results: some did successfully introduce a whole-school programme, but many focused on the White Ribbon Day as an annual awareness-raising event. Primary schools appear to have been more able to introduce comprehensive programmes, and secondary schools more able to include respect in their sexuality and relationships programmes (Dyson et al., 2011). Every school that participated did organise a White Ribbon Day Event and there were many creative spin-offs from this. For example, some primary and secondary schools ran joint events and connected older and younger students in discussions about respect. A boys-only school partnered with a nearby girls-only school and supported senior girls in making a presentation on respect in relationships to the boys.
46. In 2012 the White Ribbon Foundation ran a national Breaking the Silence conference and invited educators from all over Australia to attend. A number of schools which had participated in the Breaking the Silence training ran workshops and reported on what was happening in their schools three years on. One primary school, whose principal commented in the 2010 evaluation that as a result of the programme 'the school is [now] a calmer place' (Dyson et al., 2011), ran a workshop at the conference and confirmed that those changes had continued through 2012.
47. The White Ribbon Foundation has continued to run the Breaking the Silence program nationally. I am not involved in the current program.

***Workplaces: Y Respect Gender***

48. Workplaces are another setting in which sexism and cultures of disrespect can thrive. There are also likely to be women in any workplace who have been personally affected by violence and the culture of the workplace can potentially exacerbate the effects of intimate partner or sexual violence. Despite decades of anti-discrimination legislation and the availability of equally (or better) qualified women, gender equality in senior leadership roles remains an intractable problem (Whelan & Wood, 2012).
49. Recognising the link between gender inequality and gender-based violence in workplaces, VicHealth in 2011 funded a three-year gender equality workplace intervention at the YMCA in Victoria called Y Respect Gender (**YRG**).
50. In Victoria, the YMCA consists of a head office and many satellite recreation centres around the state, with over 6000 staff members in total. The goal of the YRG project was to better understand how to build equal and respectful relationships between men and women in the workplace at an organisational and systems level. Specifically, the project aimed to build equal and respectful relationships between men and women, increase women's representation and leadership, and create a positive, respectful and equitable organisational culture and working conditions. The YMCA voluntarily undertook the intervention and received funding to employ a project officer to manage the project. ARCSHS was funded to evaluate the project and I was the principal investigator.
51. The YRG approach was to introduce cultural change in four pilot sites using critical pedagogy and to introduce systems change to create pathways for women into senior positions. Learning from the pilot sites was then disseminated throughout the organisation. The project evaluation found the most challenging goal was to increase the number of women in leadership positions. While women are well represented on the YMCA's board, despite support for the goal in theory, the senior management team remained exclusively male throughout the life of the project.
52. A superficial approach to gender equity is to increase the numbers of women employees without addressing the ways that these changes affect interpersonal relations within the workplace. Unconscious gender bias occurs when perceptions of women's abilities, strengths, weakness and capabilities are based on stereotypes (Steele at al., 2002). Unconscious bias leads to women being rated as less likeable than men, being judged as having less potential for success, less likely to attain higher paying roles, and when they do, less likely to receive bonuses and rewards

for equivalent levels of performance to their male counterparts. In their research, Whelan and Wood (2012) found that unconscious bias is endemic in many workplaces. Furthermore, Whelan and Wood reported that backlash occurs when women display behaviours seen as masculine, such as dominance, agency over their own success or 'masculine' traits in their appearance or self-presentation.

53. 'Stereotype threat' suggests that negative gender stereotypes can impact on performance and ability. Stereotypes that construct women as less able or competent than men can pose a psychological threat to those who feel reduced to the stereotype. Individuals who experience stereotype threat may experience performance deficits in areas where they are negatively stereotyped (von Hippel et al., 2011).
54. A YMCA Victoria staff survey carried out at the baseline early in the YRG project evaluation showed a relationship between female gender and stereotype threat among women staff members.
55. To address stereotype bias, von Hippel et al. (2011) suggest that mentors and supervisors: be optimistic about the full range of women's abilities; provide challenges and opportunities to try on new roles; stress the 'expandability' of skills and abilities; affirm that women 'belong' among the well paid and upwardly mobile; value varied approaches to work, including non-traditional styles of administrative leadership; and provide access to and be themselves role models for what women can achieve. To address stereotype threat, positive messages about women need to be promulgated to counter negative stereotypes. It is also important for women to see other women in senior roles; many women believe that senior management is unreachable because they lack role models and mentors to support them to aspire to senior management.
56. At the time of writing, the YRG funded program has come to an end. YMCA Victoria has taken on these issues and made a significant shift from the early days when little action was being taken to address the difficult issue of women in leadership roles. It is working to address the dominant masculine culture at all levels. All parties to this project have acknowledged that three years is not long enough to see significant change, and the YMCA has asserted its intention to stay involved in the work for the long haul. The YRG project officer role was funded for a further six months at YMCA Victoria, on the basis of three days' work per week. He has now been employed at YMCA National with a view to rolling out the program nationally.

### **Factors for success**

57. While there are specific contextual lessons for each of the three settings discussed above, the key lessons are remarkably similar. To be effective, programmes must be:
- 57.1. based on a coherent theoretical framework informed by clearly defined understandings about gender and power;
  - 57.2. led by well-trained, flexible facilitators who have a clear understanding about the theoretical basis for the program they are implementing;
  - 57.3. subjected to high-quality evaluation (Carmody et al., 2009).
58. While none of the prevention projects I have been involved in have achieved revolutionary change to date, promising changes are underway. I have identified four factors for success that have emerged through my research and review of the relevant literature. Those four factors are:
- 58.1. an authorising environment;
  - 58.2. critical pedagogy;
  - 58.3. a process orientation to change; and
  - 58.4. a strengths-based approach.
59. I discuss each of these four factors below.

### ***An authorising environment***

60. Authorising environments are those formal and informal bodies and significant individuals that provide legitimacy and support for a particular issue or area. These might include governments, community organisations and non-government organisations, religious leaders, senior managers, published research based evidence, high profile advocates, the media and many others that have an influence on public opinion. An 'authorising environment' creates and supports opportunities for change. The importance of authorising environments at all levels cannot be overstated as the foundation for prevention of violence against women projects.
61. The Commonwealth and Victorian governments' prevention policies create an authorising environment. VicHealth has been a leader in funding and facilitating prevention research and programmes for over a decade and its leadership authorises change. In addition, the media is increasingly adopting a positive role in prevention. With the three projects discussed above, the authority of formal and informal leadership values and policies and programmes made it possible for clubs,

schools and work areas to build on these and develop their own ways of engaging with change. Leadership is also an important factor for an authorising environment. The active engagement and formal support of leaders at all levels of an organisation provides authority for change efforts.

### ***Critical pedagogy***

62. An accepted 'truth' in prevention is that knowledge about violence against women is a prerequisite for prevention programmes. Each of the projects discussed above commenced with an introduction to violence against women using PowerPoint slides and lectures about the extent, scope, cost and impact on individuals and the community as a whole. This was arguably effective in catching the participants' attention but it was not always productive. Some participants had personal knowledge or a strong sense of social justice and wanted to work towards change, but others were confused about the link between gender equality and preventing violence against women, and why these topics were relevant in a football club or workplace.
63. A problematic response to didactic presentations about violence against women from some (mostly male) participants was to construct women as vulnerable and in need of protection. For example, in football clubs there was an issue of lack of lighting in car parks. In some cases the clubs suggested that women needed to be escorted to their cars at night, rather than addressing the structural issue underpinning the problem. A second problematic response was to question the information about violence against women and claim that violence is also common against men at the hands of women, but simply under-reported. Yet another problematic response was reaction to the information about violence against women was the assumption that a problem existed within their particular group that was not spoken about but needed to be fixed. The sports clubs and workplaces we engaged with for the most part did not see violence against women as a problem that affected them. Consequently there was either resistance to change or a search for who was violent and how to stop it.
64. The challenges discussed here are not so much a problem of information delivery as one of style of delivery. To be effective, culture-change programmes must find ways of communicating about the reasons for the programme that avoid the kinds of pitfalls described above. Unless the message is delivered clearly and with authority, linked to the setting and clearly understood by everyone – it can result in confusion.

65. Adult learning is based on the notion that adults are autonomous, self-directed and use accumulated life experiences and knowledge as a foundation of learning. It also works on the basis that the education should have a practical focus and that participants need to be shown respect as learners. Much adult learning is non-formal, and is essentially a social process. Critical pedagogy builds on this notion; it is about learning from concrete experience and critical reflection, through group participation, trial and error, discovery, and learning from one another. It is a process by which groups of people can work towards change on real issues or problems. It aims to facilitate a learning environment and experience through which a diverse group of participants can discover new modes of relating to each other. Critical pedagogy is an approach to education that shifts the power away from the educator towards empowering learners (Freire, 1973, 2005). Individual learning styles differ and varied approaches are appropriate to maximise learning in any group.
66. An example of this approach in action occurred in the YRG workplace project. Initially the project officer went into pilot sites to introduce the project using the traditional lecture approach with PowerPoint slides. In collaboration with the evaluator and the VicHealth project manager, this approach was discussed and modified so that subsequent engagement with pilot sites used critical pedagogy. This shifted power away from the facilitator to the staff members, who started to take control of the program in ways that suited their contextual needs. In one site they developed a system for raising concerns about sexist behaviour that had previously not been challenged which resulted in productive conversations and behaviour change. In another site, flexible employment practices were introduced (that had always been within organisational policy but not used in practice) which enabled the employment of a woman in a traditionally masculine dominated area. These changes were the result of ongoing reflection and conversations within these small workplaces under the leadership of the centre manager, and resulted in greater flexibility and local ownership.

### ***A process orientation to change***

67. A third key factor in achieving culture change to prevent violence against women relates to a process orientation to change. While goals, objectives and specified outcomes are important, the processes that are employed to realise that change and the resultant learning is often more important than the goals themselves. This is about the new knowledge, relationships, interactions and innovations that occur when people come together with a shared purpose. Culture change can be best

supported through the use of processes that are flexible, discursive, locally owned, genuinely participatory, and use 'critical questioning' (Fletcher, 2012).

68. According to Baser et al. (2008), outcome-focused projects are based on planning, control and an assumption that change can be directed. In the projects discussed above it was not uncommon for expected outcomes to be specified from the outset. For example, for the community sport project the funding body stipulated that the project would introduce an education programme that would lead to clubs having an increased capacity to institute policies and responses to address violence against women, increase the participation of women and girls; and form partnerships with stakeholders in the community. For voluntary clubs and committees these are relatively unrealistic goals.
69. Rather than achieving expected outcomes in a linear fashion, change in these projects tended to be messy and at times even chaotic. The process of culture change is based on principles of adaptiveness and flexibility in implementation, and on learning and adjustment as the work progresses (Baser et al., 2008). By focusing more on process than fixed targets, space is opened up for creativity, new learning and capacity to emerge.

### ***A strengths-based approach***

70. The strengths based theory that underpins this approach has been developed for health promotion practice. In this theory, traditional disease-focused approaches to health and well-being that use a pathogenic (or deficit) model sit at one end of a continuum while a salutogenic (or strengths-based) model sits at the other (Antonovsky, 1996; Harrop et al., 2006). A strengths-based approach makes visible and values the skills, knowledge, connections and potential in a community (Harrop et al., 2006). In primary prevention programmes a positive, strengths-based approach which engages participants as partners with agency in the change process is essential.
71. The principle of positive, inclusive and enabling environments was an important factor for success in the programmes described here. When working towards eliminating violence against women it is not always easy to find positives and if programmes are presented as, or assumed to be about fixing a problem, these programmes found it hard to maintain any momentum.
72. In the realm of sport we focused on clubs as valuable community resources that could be improved by drawing on the under-used skills and resources that women could contribute. In some schools, traditional approaches to discipline were revised



so that rather than punishing students whose behaviour was unsatisfactory, the family was brought together as a resource in an equal and respectful environment to discuss problem behaviour early. Similarly, in the workplace the positives from the baseline staff survey were promoted and the facilitator worked with staff to build on these positives while setting in place strategies and pathways to address the identified shortcomings.

## RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS AND CHILDREN

### Sexuality and relationships education

73. Tying into the work I have described above is the related issue of sex and sexuality and relationships education for children and young people, and how this intersects with the primary prevention of gender-based violence. In my view, access to appropriate knowledge about sex and sexuality, accompanied by an understanding about ethical and respectful relationships, will build children and young people's competencies and resilience and contribute to new cultural norms of non-violence. To my mind, the concepts of sexuality, equality and respectful relationships cannot be separated. Sexuality and relationships education should have as its frame the issues of equality and respect and form part of any primary prevention programme implemented in schools.
74. Sexual health and wellbeing encompasses social (how we relate to others), emotional (feeling), cognitive (thinking), and biological (bodily) aspects of what it means to be human. It also encompasses ethical sexuality, how we learn to care for ourselves and others in relationships (Carmody, 2008).
75. Children and young people who are equipped with critical thinking skills, appropriate knowledge and understanding about sex and sexuality, and who understand and practice ethical and respectful relationships, are better able to make safe, responsible choices. This applies to both themselves and others. The Victorian Department of Education's Victorian Essential Learning Standards (**VELS**) has excellent guidelines for sexuality education, starting from primary school. According to the VELS website, "Good sexuality education focuses on love, safer sex, abstinence, respect for others and oneself, diversity, personal rights and responsibilities, relationships and friendships, effective communication, decision-making and risk behaviours".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/social/physed/Pages/about.aspx>

76. There is no doubt that today parents feel concern for their children's sexuality education and want their children to have the information they need to have happy, healthy sexual relationships as adults (Dyson & Smith, 2012)
77. Yet young people repeatedly tell us that 'we' – parents, teachers and a range of experts – are failing to get sexuality education right. In 2013, in a survey of secondary school students in years ten and twelve, only one third of the participants (37%) were confident to talk to their parents about sex. Only 23% of the boys and 16% of the girls received information from their parents, and 27% of boys and 43% of girls received information from their mother. One third of the participants had received sexuality and relationships education in primary school (years 5 and 6) (Mitchell et al., 2013).

### **Sexuality and relationships education from a young age**

78. I think it is important that this kind of primary prevention work begins in the home at a very early age, with children as young as two or three years old. The feeling and thinking aspects of sexuality are apparent from early in life. From the time a child becomes aware of her or himself as a separate being they are capable of pleasant bodily sensations. Many parents feel challenged by these behaviours and when questions that arise from their very young children about sex differences or reproduction. The way parents handle early sexual behaviour or questions about sex is the beginning of sexuality education. Silence is as powerful as answering questions, and avoidance and lies have an effect as much as conversations and truth. Parents who are able to establish ongoing, open, comfortable communication with their children from early in life – not only about sex, but about feelings and answering questions – are better able to support and advise their children when they reach adolescence, a time when the parent/child communication can notoriously break down.
79. Sexuality and relationships education with primary school aged children can be a vexed question. Many parents focus on the adult physical aspects of sex rather the broader concepts inherent in sexuality as discussed here. Nonetheless, most parents accept that some sexuality education will be provided in the late primary school years, but who, what, when and how is often hotly contested by parents and in the media. Generally it is accepted that parents should be more responsible for the intimate domains of values, attitudes and expectations, which may differ from family to family, and that schools should be more responsible for knowledge and social behaviour.

80. From my own research, I have observed the following:
- 80.1. parents often reproduce their own poor experiences of sexuality education unintentionally;
  - 80.2. some parents experience anxiety, uncertainty and lack confidence when required to discuss issues about sex and sexuality with their children; and
  - 80.3. parents want to do better but are concerned about timing, appropriateness and what to say.
81. Supporting parents to communicate with their children about sexuality and relationships may not focus on sex per se, but on allaying their anxieties, providing resources and developing communication skills.
82. My research with parents has found that many would like support beyond books for their children about sex and reproduction. One suggestion made by parents in my research was to have a resource for parents that they could turn to when they are faced with questions they do not feel able to handle. This resulted in the development of a resource *Talk Soon Talk Often* (initially in print form for the WA Department of Health and circulated in schools). It is now also being made available as a PDF on a number of other Australian state government websites.
83. I am not aware of any specific programs for parents about providing their children with appropriate sexuality and relationships education in the home. Some ideas I have include informal health promotion for new parents from infant welfare nurses who could talk to parents about when to expect 'tricky' questions from children once they start to ask questions (usually between two and three years), some ways of handling embarrassment or discomfort and what might be an age appropriate response to 'difficult' questions. Another group who have regular contact with parents of very young children are childcare workers. By providing pre- and in-service training and resources for these professionals who have regular contact with pre-school children and their parents about informal education processes, they could potentially be equipped to carry out this role informally.
84. I am aware that child care workers in the YMCA, as part of the YRG project, deal with questions from parents on a regular basis about appropriate gender roles and play. The YMCA childcare centres have a policy of encouraging children to play without enforcing traditional gender roles. Some parents question this when they become aware that their little boy is playing with dolls, for example, and the childcare workers engage in conversations about this with those parents based on the YMCA's policy. This is an example of informal primary prevention.

85. In the international literature, a few formal parent/child communication programs have been conducted; these programs are usually with the parents of adolescents when communication has already broken down and many take a problem based approach that focuses on preventing pregnancy and STIs rather than on safe, ethical relationships. These studies are generally small and no high quality model for parent education has been established in Australia or internationally to my knowledge.
86. My own research with parents in single sex and mixed groups repeatedly shows that parents appreciate the opportunity to come together and discuss sexuality and relationships education in a supportive setting.
87. Parent education sessions that are linked with school programs, use a critical pedagogy approach, and focus on communication and what to expect could also be another idea for supporting parents. These should be facilitated by an external 'expert' and include teachers and school leaders as participants.

## **Conclusion**

88. A key focus for violence prevention education is promoting respectful relationships and behaviours. A challenge for such a project is that 'respect' as a concept has different and often conflicting meanings for different people. Although the tendency is to assume respect is a concept used generically to describe a basic type of relationship between individuals with an emphasis its positive, nurturing and egalitarian aspects (Schirmer et al., 2013), some people respond with aggression when they feel disrespected and others conflate respect and commanding fear. Ideas about mutual respect may be a shifting concept. If promoting respectful behaviours is key to eliminating violence against women, a shared understanding about respect is essential. Programmes based on normalising respect must focus on what the concept implies in the lived experience of the individuals, groups and communities where prevention programmes are implemented, and be supported by wider social marketing efforts.
89. Primary prevention of violence against women is a work in progress; it must be seen as part of a spectrum of approaches that address individual, community and societal norms. Culture-change projects must address the links between gender, power inequities and violence against women in ways that include men and women as partners in prevention without losing sight of the power inequalities inherent in gender as we understand it. For some men relinquishing power may be perceived as a loss; yet change in gender relations has been underway for decades, in ways

that have gone relatively unnoticed. For example, in one generation men have taken a greater role in the care and raising of children, and women have entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers. For the most part, these changes are not seen as a loss. For cultures of respect and non-violence to take root they must be framed as offering benefits to the individuals and organisations being asked to undertake them.

90. New approaches are being developed and tested in different settings. Too often those who witness violent or threatening behaviour or misogyny in action feel unprepared to intervene safely. Strategies to engage individuals who are bystanders to violence show promise (Henry & Powell, 2014). The bystander approach supports individuals to learn non-violent ways of intervening to stop an incident, reduce the risk of one escalating, and strengthen the conditions that work against violence occurring in the first place (Powell, 2011). Attached to this statement and marked **SD-3** is a copy of a paper I co-authored with Dr Michael Flood and Dr Julianne Corboz, titled 'Challenges of Bystander Intervention in Male-Dominated Professional Sport: Lessons from the Australian Football League'.
91. While some in-service training is currently provided for prevention practitioners, no specific pre-service training is available to prepare people for the work, which is complex and challenging and requires specific skills, resources, tenacity and a belief that change is possible. The number of people who support change, both male and female, is growing. While change in gender norms and relationships is underway, there is a long way to go before equal and respectful relationships are understood and enjoyed by everyone. Further, there is no clear roadmap to guide new programmes. Alongside the important work being done by practitioners there is a need for more applied research to theorise change and for rigorous evaluation of programmes.
92. Prevention, early intervention and responses to violence against women must go hand in hand. This is a traditionally under-funded area and it is imperative that these three areas are not competing for a limited funding pool. Funding is required to implement programs and for research and evaluation. Currently the funding for prevention programs (including evaluation) is limited and generally short term for two or three years. I am not aware of any long term follow up of evaluated programs to understand the systemic or individual impact of such programs, so we do not know whether they have had an effect or not. Funding for prevention research that investigates areas of new knowledge is almost non-existent.

93. Because violence is so entrenched, there is also an urgent need to identify the specialist skills needed by practitioners to carry out this work. At a minimum, an understanding of issues such as how knowledge is produced, power relations, society and the human condition are needed to prepare practitioners for the field.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Dyson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and 'D'.

**Suzanne Joi Dyson**

Dated: 4 August 2015