

Preventing Adult Sexual Violence Through Education?

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Introduction

Over the last thirty years there have been significant sexual assault legal reforms in many jurisdictions in an attempt to increase justice for victims of sexual assault. A recent study of prosecutorial decision making in adult sexual assault cases in Australia found that the exercise of prosecutorial discretion accounted for a relatively large degree of case attrition, with 38 % of cases in the sample withdrawn from prosecution (Leviore 2005:5). The study also found 44 % of cases resulted in a conviction, but this figure encompassed a sizeable number of cases finalised by way of a guilty plea. This suggests there is much work still to be done to increase the successful prosecutions of offenders and to ensure victims of this crime can have confidence in our court systems. The role of the law as a deterrent of crime has a chequered history especially when it relates to crimes of interpersonal violence such as sexual assault. While the law remains an important strategy to address sexual violence, its primary role is addressing a crime after it has occurred. This has meant that anti-violence workers, activists and governments have all made moral and financial investments in education as a major strategy to reduce the incidence of sexual violence in our communities.

Given this substantial investment, it is timely to consider the current state of sexual assault prevention education. This paper will provide an overview of current research on the effectiveness of sexual assault prevention education programmes in Australia and the US. It will also consider some of the limitations and unintended consequences of existing approaches to sexual assault prevention. Many well-intentioned programmes run the risk of placing responsibility for prevention on women and excluding or not successfully engaging men. It will be argued that how gender and sexuality are constructed has a significant impact on the kinds of prevention strategies promoted and the likelihood that primary prevention is achievable. A key focus of the discussion will be on the needs of young women and men who we know are most vulnerable to sexual assault either as victims or perpetrators. Alternative approaches to sexual assault prevention education will be explored that move beyond the risk avoidance strategies common in many prevention education programmes. This paper begins by reviewing recent research on the sexuality of young people and data on the risks of sexual assault facing primarily young women. A consideration of both of these factors is seen as essential to informing effective sexual assault prevention education strategies.

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Young people and risk

In contrast to previous generations young people are now generally exposed to sexual pressures to become sexually active at a younger age (Holland et al 1996). The first large scale Australian Study of Health and Relationships (ASHR) of 19,307 people aged 16–59 found that age of first intercourse for women and men has significantly declined so that the majority of young people in the final years of school will have commenced sexual activity (Smith et al 2003). The ASHR study found that 4.8% of men and 21.1 % of women had been forced or frightened into having sex. They also found that homosexual and bisexual respondents were more likely to have been sexually coerced. The level of coerced sex amongst young people was specifically identified in 2002 by the third national Australian sexual health survey of 2,388 students in Years 10–12. The findings indicated that over a quarter (25.9%) of all sexually active students had unwanted sex at some time in their lives. Being drunk and pressured by their partner were the most common reasons they gave (Smith et al 2003). Sexual coercion has negative impacts on psychological, physical and sexual health. It is often associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, suicide and anger (de Visser et al 2003:198). Despite sex education programmes in schools, young people continue to seek out other sources of information. The rapid uptake of Internet use amongst young people has created increased opportunities to access sexual information and sexually explicit material that often provides distorted views of human relationships. In 1999 alone 75% of 18–24 year olds accessed the Net (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1999).

Alongside this data on sexuality, the Australian Women's Safety Survey found that young women aged 18–24 were three times more at risk of physical or sexual assault (ABS 1996). The Australian findings of the International Violence against Women Survey also indicate that young, single, Australian born, unemployed women have a far greater risk of experiencing violence from men than any other age group (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Further they found that of the 6,677 women surveyed 57% reported experiencing some form of physical or sexual violence over their lifetime. They were more likely to experience physical violence (48%) rather than sexual violence (34%). Victimization surveys such as the ABS National Crime and Safety Survey and the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey suggest that between 12 and 20% of sexual assaults against women are reported to police — a reporting rate lower than for other major crime categories. In 2003, the last year for which ABS data are available, 82% of recorded sexual assault victims were female (Australian Institute of Criminology 2005).

The level of violence evident in these data is very concerning. However, the focus of this paper will be on the prevention of sexual violence as this is a particular form of interpersonal violence that has proved resistant to prevention and has received less direct attention in the context of assisting young people. The data from both sexuality research and violence data suggests that young people are exploring sexual intimacy earlier. At the same time young women and homosexual and bisexual women and men are particularly at risk of sexual assault or coercion. Continued low reporting of sexual assault to police and attrition that occurs if a charge is laid suggests there are large numbers of people in the community who experience sexual violence and do not seek help. These findings suggest a pressing need to address the underlying reasons for these behaviours and finding ways to prevent violence before it occurs.

Approaches to prevention education

The Australian social policy framework around intimate violence has varied federally and between states. Since 1997 the NSW 'Strategy to Prevent Violence against Women' is used to provide a range of prevention and policy strategies. The Federal government uses the generic term of 'Partnerships against Domestic Violence' that incorporates sexual assault. In the 2001–02 Budget, the Australian Government announced funding of \$16.5 million for a National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault (NICSA) with the aim of facilitating access to national policy data, informing effective prevention strategies and building evidence-based research (Office for Women 2006). In the US, following recognition of the high incidence of 'date rape' the Federal government now mandates rape prevention efforts on college campuses that receive federal funds (Koss 1988, Heppner et al 1995). The US government directive has resulted in a plethora of rape prevention programs but researchers argue little is known about what types of programs are most effective, what attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural outcomes can be expected; or how stable any changes are over time (Heppner et al 1999). Examining both the US and Australian programmes reveals some significant limitations (Carmody & Carrington 2000). These include limited hours of input, and a focus on teaching women to manage the risk of rape or dangerous situations. Parrot's (1990) survey of 26 US universities found twenty-one of these universities had programs for women, while only two had programs aimed at changing male behaviour. Even more concerning was that some researchers have found a rebound effect. Winkel & De Kleuver (1997) found a perpetrator focused educational strategy aimed at reducing domineering masculine behaviour backfired as stereotypes were unintentionally reinforced among the cohort. Kimberley Breitenbecher published the most extensive review of 38 college-based studies of sexual assault prevention programmes in the US in 2000. Her sample differed from other reviews in considering male, female and mixed-sex audiences (see Lonsway (1996) and Flores & Hartlaub (1998) for comparison with single sex populations). Her conclusions provide salutary lessons for future prevention research and programme development:

Although prevention programs can result in favourable attitude change, the magnitude of such change is often small, and investigations using repeated measures designs suggest that initial positive attitude change often decays or rebounds to pre-intervention levels over time. More important, reductions in rape-supportive attitudes have not been linked to subsequent reductions in the incidence of sexual assault. (Breitenbecher 2000:40).

In response to these critiques, Sochting et al (2004) suggest that the ineffectiveness of campus based sexual assault programs is partly due to a focus on attitude change. Interestingly, they argue for self-defence training for women and a greater focus by programmes on incorporating knowledge about risk factors for women. This is problematic for several reasons. The authors themselves admit there is no evidence to show that women trained in self-defence reduce their risk of rape. Secondly, the focus is shifted back to women managing their own risk and thirdly men are left absent from the prevention strategy. There are also some ethical problems in targeting 'at risk women' as primary recipients of prevention education. In particular, the problem of rape is constructed as one that requires cognitive restructuring to learn self protection skills. The cultural context which promotes and condones sexual violence is thus made invisible.

Also absent from most programmes is a recognition of the diversity of women and men who experience sexual violence. The study samples are exclusively drawn from college/university student populations. This in itself provides little insight into the experiences of the majority of women and men who are not college educated. Rarely are the particular needs of lesbians and gay men, people with disabilities or those from different cultural backgrounds acknowledged (Carmody 2003a, 2003b).

The issue of evaluating the effectiveness of prevention education is a complex one. As Breitenbecher (2000:40) points out it is not enough for campus administrators to fund a programme; there needs to be a commitment to systematic evaluation. Similar problems have been found in evaluating Australian anti-violence programs. This is not a new concern. Commenting on strategies to combat community violence the Victorian Social Development Committee (1988) expressed concern that numerous programs had received substantial financial resources but had not attempted to measure the extent to which they have achieved their objectives. Indermaur et al, (1998) conducted an extensive evaluation of school based youth violence prevention programs. They concluded that successful programs are based on: partnerships in which the contributions of all parties are recognised and valued; attention to detail in implementation and evaluation; and a commitment to principles of scientific method to ensure aims and objectives are achieved.

In 1997 Federal funding was provided to run domestic violence (including sexual assault) prevention workshops for young people at a cost of \$0.9 million. Over 13,500 young people aged 12–25 years of age attended workshops in 40 locations across Australia. The final report on this extensive programme found a number of problems regarding the success of the interventions. While they argued most programs achieved their objectives there was inconsistency in evaluation methods, educational models used, budgets allocated, local support varied and a strong reliance on the assumption that awareness raising would lead to changes in behaviour (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2000:25).

What seems to be missing in many programmes is a clearly thought out programme design that moves beyond a belief that increasing awareness of sexual violence will prevent it from occurring. Many of the programme results that have been published to date reveal limited hours of input focused primarily on women. It is somewhat naïve to think that a few hours of awareness raising will transform deeply embedded cultural norms and practices about gender relationships. This suggests sexual assault prevention education needs to bring together research on young people's sexuality, and sexual violence to move beyond the limitations of existing anti-rape prevention education. The kind of knowledge and the skills needed to learn negotiation in intimate relationships is absent from most Australian and US rape prevention education programs. It leaves young people ill equipped to make sense of their own feelings and vulnerable to exploitation. The existing research on sexual negotiation and young people has been primarily motivated by concerns to reduce sexually transmitted diseases (Wingwood et al 1993) or to control reproductive outcomes (Wolff et al 2000). Another body of work explores sexual consent and understanding differences in communication patterns between women and men. Cowling (2004) is critical of rape avoidance strategies that focus on an idealised form of communicative sexuality. Rather, he argues that sex education aimed at avoiding rape should take account of the student's existing knowledge and experiences and consider the process of consent.

Unintended consequences – reinforcing traditional gender and sexuality discourses

Prevention approaches have taken many forms but most energy has focused on secondary and tertiary prevention after an assault has occurred. Within primary prevention, legislative deterrence has been a key focus and as law and order discourses gain increasing acceptance by Western legislatures there has been an increasing reliance on heavier penalties for offenders. Alongside legal strategies has been a commitment to anti-violence education. This strategy has been strongly supported by governments and anti-violence campaigners

to attempt to redress gendered assumptions and practices which result in women's experiences of sexual assault from male intimates (Carmody & Carrington 2000). The focus of this education has been victim directed and in most cases targeted at women around risk or rape avoidance (Neame 2003).

The increasing public recognition of sexual violence in our communities has resulted in a focus on the danger of intimate relationships especially heterosexual ones. Sexual assault prevention education can further contribute to the invisibility of young women's sexual desires and pleasures by a focus on teaching refusal skills. As Kitzinger and Firth (1999) argue the teaching of 'refusal skills' is common in many date rape prevention assertiveness programmes for young women. They aim to teach women to 'just say no' to avoid victimisation. These approaches reinforce women's sense of fear and keep us separated from fully exploring our sexual potential. If this strategy fails to deter unwanted sexual advances, there is an increased likelihood of self-blame. Research with young women indicates sex often 'just happens'. Deborah Tolman (2002) argues that this allows them one of the few 'decent stories' that covers their own sexual desire and reinforces the dominant belief that 'good girls' do not have sexual feelings of their own. Programmes that teach rape avoidance by focusing on refusal skills thus reinforce women as passive non-sexual or reluctant subjects with men the assertive sexual aggressors. Evident in these approaches are traditional constructions of gender for women and men.

For more than 30 years feminism has challenged these approaches with counter discourses of women's agency and ability and right to experience sexual pleasure. Despite this, sexual assault prevention education can result in reinforcing traditional gender expectations using danger and the threat of rape to continue to place responsibility with women for managing men's sexual desires. At the same time women's own desires are at best made invisible or at worst seen as irresponsible and contributing to sexual violence.

The diversity of women's sexuality within heterosexual or same sex intimacy is rarely acknowledged in current sexual assault prevention education. However, same sex sexuality is also problematic. The 'outer limits' of the sexual hierarchy, following Gayle Rubin (1992), constructs lesbian women's desire and pleasures as 'unnatural', 'sick' and 'sinful', and the lesbian faces homophobic assumptions as a potential sexual predator. It is virtually impossible to find published evaluations of sexual assault prevention education that even consider the possibility of sexualities other than heterosexuality. There are two issues here. Firstly, there is the long history of paradoxical relations between the state and lesbian and gay sexuality. On one hand 'the lesbian' is often associated with criminality eg Lesbian 'vampire killer' Tracey Wigginton or Aileen Wuornos, 'America's first woman serial killer' or seen as a sexual predator of other women or completely invisible. Public recognition of lesbians and lesbianism almost always occurs in a negative context, with the surrounding discourses serving to reinforce the good woman/bad woman (Davies & Rhodes-Little 1993:16). Gay men also experience assumptions about them as sexual predators of other men or underage boys. On the other hand, despite the gains made by gay and lesbian political movements in most Western countries for increased citizenship rights, the movements themselves have been slow to address same sex violence. The high level of hate crimes from those outside gay and lesbian communities has been a primary focus (Mason & Tomsen 1997). The 2004 campaign 'There's No Pride in Domestic Violence' by the NSW Anti-Violence Project and the Aids Council of New South Wales (ACON) is a welcome redress to this denial.

There is very little evidence that most sexual assault prevention education programmes attempt to challenge particular forms of masculinity that promote and condone sexual violence and the exercise of power and control of those perceived to be 'more vulnerable' or 'different' based on gender, class, culture, ability or sexuality. This suggests a retreat to determinism that fails to acknowledge how men and women can and do resist dominant cultural practices. This focus on education to control or regulate the unethical desires and practices of men that the law has been even less successful in achieving holds little hope of primary prevention of sexual violence.

These findings suggest that both sexuality and sexual assault prevention education can play a significant role in contributing to or resisting dominant discourses of gender and sexuality. Education programmes that resist the dominant order can therefore provide alternative spaces for young people to explore non-violent ethical and pleasurable relationships.

Future directions in sexual assault prevention education

Given the problems explored above, it not surprising that researchers and victim advocates have begun to investigate alternative directions. Research in public health has increasingly been critical of prevention models that focus on behavioural change targeting individuals. This has led to a call for an ecological approach to social problems such as sexual violence where a more systems oriented model is preferred which includes an analysis of gender and power (Neame 2003).

While some programmes in both Australia and the US continue to focus on awareness-raising as a key strategy for prevention, there is some recent evidence in the literature of a shift in focus in the design and assumptions underpinning programmes. This is most noticeable in work that is thinking beyond 'at risk' women and constructively developing ways to challenge dominant masculinity norms by actively engaging men in programmes and challenging cultural norms of male violence.

Breaking the link between masculinity and violence

Hong (2000) reports on one attempt. He conducted a year long study of Men Against Violence (MAV), a peer organisation at Louisiana State University. MAV focuses on changing cultural and peer group norms, rather than on individual and interpersonal variables. It aims to achieve this by an explicit critical analysis of hegemonic masculinity and building a closeknit community of men whose guiding values represent broader, non-limiting ideas of what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour for 'real men' (Hong 2000:270). The group was founded in 1995 with the aim of combating stalking, domestic violence, fighting, hate crimes, hazing, rape and vandalism. It is supported by the university administration through the student health centre and its advisory board includes faculty staff and alumni. It is a registered non-profit organisation. Interestingly, MAV passed an amendment to their constitution in 1998 that mandated an all male executive board. This came about as they found when women got involved they tended to take on more of the work and the men's contribution declined.

Hong's (2000) evaluation charts the difficulties and shifts the men went through in trying to find alternative ways of being men. His participants were challenged to face their own internalised homophobia about being seen as an all male organisation challenging dominant forms of masculinity. At the same time their sexual objectification towards women was held up for scrutiny. What we don't know from this study is the impact membership of MAV

had on levels of actual violence or sexual assault. Despite this, the program demonstrates that there are some spaces where men are beginning to challenge the links between masculinity and violence. Six other universities have also set up chapters of MAV and it will be interesting to follow their progress and contribution to violence prevention.

Alan Berkowitz (1994) was among the first to develop a protocol and program focusing on men's responsibility for preventing sexual assault. The program developed in 1987 is now run as a required workshop for all first year men at Hobart College New York, was evaluated in 1996 and 2000. Both studies found a reduction in rape supportive attitudes and increased understanding of the difference between consent and coercion directly on conclusion of the workshops but this effect was not evident six weeks later (Berkowitz 2004:185–186).

Jackson Katz's (1995) work on reconstructing masculinity has been focused on college athletes. Through the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Project at Northeastern University in Boston, Katz and his colleagues seek to reduce men's violence against women by inspiring athletes and other models of traditional masculine success to challenge and reconstruct predominant male norms that equate strength in men with dominance over women (1995:163). Working with athletes to promote non-violence and increase positive attitudes to women has been used in the Australian context by Catherine Lumby and Kath Albury in their work with the National Rugby League in NSW following a number of serious incidents of alleged sexual assault (personal communication 2005).

Katz (1995:165) argues that few violence prevention programmes foreground discussions of masculinity, which he sees as highly problematic given the high representation of males in violent crimes against women and men. He emphasises the need to work with male students rather than focus on men as actual or potential perpetrators. Rather he builds their skills as active bystanders who can use their status as role models to intervene or prevent violence against women. By not acting they are complicit in perpetrating violence.

Influenced by Berkowitz's work and using concepts from community psychology on community change and prevention, Banyard et al (2004, 2005) propose an alternative approach to sexual assault prevention education. They argue that mobilising pro-social behaviour on the part of potential bystanders increases community receptivity to prevention messages by decreasing resistance to them and increasing the likelihood of individuals taking an active role in prevention and education. They point out that one of the key problems in achieving success in prevention programs is the lack of receptivity to prevention messages (Banyard et al 2004:64). Citing the work of Heppner et al (1995, 1999), they argue that men, in particular, may be resistant to prevention messages, as they perceive it as negative to men, and so they tune out. They suggest that constructing men as potential offenders and women as victims results in a focus on at-risk individuals. Alternatively they argue 'it is crucial that programs get both men and women to really listen to prevention messages and find ways to target all community members rather than select groups of at-risk individuals' (Banyard et al 2004:65).

The likelihood that bystanders will engage in pro-social helping behaviour is increased if the person has an awareness of the problem, its negative impact on the victim, if they are asked to help, make a commitment to help and see them as partially responsible for solving the problem. Importantly, bystanders need to feel they possess the skills to intervene, have the opportunity to see individuals modelling the behaviour and have strategies to ensure their own safety (Banyard et al 2004:69).

To assess the effectiveness of this strategy Banyard et al (2004) undertook a study involving 389 undergraduates at a Northeastern University in the US. The study involved a control group and compared two different interventions. The first involved a one-session input and the second involved three sessions. Importantly, and usually absent in most programme designs, they followed up students at two, four and twelve months. Their findings are promising. Decrease in rape myth acceptance and increased knowledge of sexual violence were found over time. They also found significant increases in pro-social bystander behaviour; increased bystander efficacy and an increase in self-reported bystander behaviours. More significant change was found with the longer prevention program. Gender analyses found benefits for both male and female participants (Banyard et al 2005). The researchers acknowledge the limitations of the study, including the fact that their participants were primarily Caucasian students (reflecting their university population), and acknowledge that the bystander approach is relatively recent and there exist few instruments to assess bystander attitudes and behaviour. Despite these concerns, the findings suggest an important alternative approach to sexual assault prevention education that moves beyond risk avoidance or targeting at-risk groups. One of the reasons why this research is so important to the field is that it also measured behavioural outcomes by evaluating student *behaviour* not just attitudes or increased awareness.

Other approaches to violence prevention that focus specifically on men have also emerged in Australia. The work of Bob Pease from Melbourne and Men against Sexual Assault (MASA formed in 1989) rejects the view that 'all men are genetically programmed to be violent or that violence is simply an expression of men's inner nature'. Pease argues that 'men's violence is both socially constructed and individually willed' (Pease 1995:259). MASA has a primary focus on rape education awareness for all men. They argue that there is a relationship between the dominant model of masculine sexuality and the prevalence of sexual assault in society (Pease 1995:263). Using a range of community education and social action activities, the group aims to challenge both men's individual attitudes and behaviour and the cultural responses to sexual assault in the community. As Pease sees it, 'if we are going to end violence against women it will require a major transformation in consciousness raising among men; MASA endeavours to be one small step in that direction' (Pease 1995:267). This approach is an important one in that it reflects the concerns of men who reject expressions of intimate sexual violence as normal for men. Michael Flood (2004:1) another Australian researcher echoing Katz and Berkowitz, argues that it is necessary 'for men to take responsibility for preventing sexual violence because the vast majority of assaults are perpetrated by men against women, children and other men'. He suggests that a range of pedagogical approaches are needed to work with men, including encouraging victim empathy, teaching skills in non-violence and consent, enabling men as bystanders to act and challenging men's conformity to sexist peer norms.

Thinking about sexuality and sexual violence prevention

One of the missing opportunities in much sexual assault prevention education is the link between the sexual behaviour of young people and how this could inform sexual assault prevention educational strategies. Feminist theory and politics have been crucial to our understandings of sexuality and the crime of sexual assault and there have been a number of shifts within feminism since the 1970s. Central to debates around both sexuality and sexual violence is the issue of power. Feminist writers and activists in the 1970s articulated a power and control discourse to explain rape in society. They argued the social structuring of gender relations was inherently patriarchal and rape was the central manifestation of this power (Brownmiller 1976). Over the following thirty years it has become clearer that power

is not monolithic but is exercised in varying forms in different patterns of relating or abuse. Therefore sexual violence is not only about gendered power but has particular meanings and realities that are linked to how women and men negotiate sexual intimacy. This was reinforced by the increasing recognition that a known person such as a boyfriend, husband, male partner or relative or person known in the immediate social network of the women commits most sexual abuse.

Feminist critiques of male power have been hotly debated over the last thirty years. Some writers (eg Jeffreys 1994) continue to argue that power within heterosexual relationships is inescapably patriarchal and exploitative. Others such as Jackson (1996) suggest heterosexual relations are contested and male power is vulnerable to subversion. Allen's (2003) research on how young people negotiate heterosexuality suggests that what is needed is a conceptualisation of power which captures both women's agency in relationships and the ways in which these relationships are simultaneously governed discursively and materially by male power. Martin (2002) argues that researchers have extensively studied the demographics of 'teenage' sex, sexual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours but there is little research on young people's experience of sex. How do they decide to have sex and is this the same or different for young women and men? Therefore there is a gap in current research that seems fundamental to informing educational strategies to assist young people.

Holland et al's (1996:159) research on young women and men's experience of first sex argues that it is within the privacy of individual relationships that the rules of male domination can be negotiated and disrupted. It is within this very context where young women in particular are most vulnerable to pressure and coercion for unwanted sex or even rape. The ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed within sexual assault prevention education are therefore central to prevention aims. The links between sexuality and sexual assault prevention education are starting to be made more explicitly by some Australian researchers.

Research by Margot Rawsthorne (2002) as cited by Neame (2003) discusses how most school or health based education programs emphasise 'responsible sexuality', which focuses on the risks and dangers of sex in terms of unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, while remaining largely silent about pleasure. In contrast to this approach, Rawsthorne advocates 'providing young people with the skills to "peel back" the layers of meaning surrounding sexuality' in order to interrogate the labels (for example, 'frigid' or 'slut') and relationship dynamics (an exclusive focus on heterosexual intercourse) that constrain the types of identities and practices available to them. In this way, young people may be able to fashion non-violent and non-exploitative ways of being masculine or feminine (Neame 2003:13).

Carmody & Carrington's (2000) critique of published evaluations of sexual assault prevention education in the US and Canada concluded that prevention programmes based on the individual 'pathology' of certain men or the 'risky' behaviour of certain women had little hope of success. Rather they argued that it is necessary to challenge those cultural norms that normalise intimate sexual violence and to recognise the cultural production of gender relations and how these can be played out in some intimate encounters. The power of cultural practices to normalise intimate sexual violence are evident in the ways some victims of sexual violence are disbelieved by friends, families and even police at times. A further example of how this operates is the way in which traditional gender scripts encourage male aggression in trying to achieve sexual intimacy and how women are expected to resist or risk being denigrated. An alternative approach that encourages negotiation of consensual, reciprocal and mutually pleasurable relations could inform prevention strategies and promote ethical sexual conduct.

Carmody (2003a) explored this proposition further and developed an alternative theoretical framework for rape prevention education. This approach argued that sexual assault prevention education programs are often underpinned by unarticulated discourses of gender and sexuality which reinforce essentialist ideas about male and female behaviour focus almost exclusively on the unethical behaviour of men and deny the dynamic and fluid negotiation that occurs in intimate sexual encounters or relationships. A central proposition was put forward that used Foucault's notion of sexual ethics (Rabinow 1997). Foucault argued that ethical subjectivity is only possible when a person takes care of himself or herself but is also mindful of the impact of their desires, feelings and acts on another. Foucault invites us to consider that acts are the real behaviour of people in relation to the moral code or prescriptions. The code tells us what is permitted or forbidden and determines the positive or negative value of the different possible behaviours. This is clearly where laws about consent and community education come into play.

Testing out the applicability of this theoretical approach resulted in a qualitative research study (Carmody 2005) that explored the different ways in which women and men of diverse sexualities from both metropolitan and rural areas negotiate ethical non-exploitative sex. The 25 participants were aged from 20–59. This was a small study and therefore the results are not generalisable to a wider population. Despite this, the study provides some insights into how some women and men negotiate ethical sexual intimacy. The findings indicate that women and men use a range of skills, knowledge and strategies including: verbalising clear expectations and limits, non-verbal bodily movements, trial and error, time, taking risks in self disclosure, trust, flexibility and receptiveness of a partner, self reflection and monitoring their own responses. They also had developed skills to negotiate barriers to self-care and care of the other. Power relations were not found to be fixed to culturally proscribed gender relations. Instead the participants indicated a fluidity of power within their relationships and in their sexual encounters regardless of their choice of erotic partners. While these findings offer a positive alternative, there is a need to expand the research to a larger sample and to explore and assess how young women and men negotiate sexual intimacy.¹

Implications for anti-violence education

This review of sexual assault prevention education strategies suggests we are currently failing to address the kinds of information and skills that are needed, especially by young people, to negotiate pleasurable ethical sexual intimacy. Most sexual assault occurs between known people and it is the negotiation or lack of negotiation of consent that poses most problems. A critique of a sample of existing programs suggests that many are, reinforcing heteronormativity possibly unintentionally, and are limited to attempts to 'police' unethical behaviour and continue to place the primary responsibility for this on women. The continued prevalence of sexual violence in our communities suggests these approaches have had little impact on primary prevention.

Recent research by Schewe (2004:263) indicates there have been substantial shifts in prevention efforts over the last ten years. He argues that in the past prevention efforts focused on assaults by strangers and primarily targeted potential victims for education and

1 The Australian Research Council has just funded a three year research project with the author as Chief Investigator in partnership with NSW Rape Crisis Centre entitled 'Promoting ethical non-violent relationships of young women and men aged 16–25 years of age' (<<http://www.sexualethics.org.au/>>). It is anticipated this project will provide insight into alternative approaches to anti-rape education that move beyond the problems identified above.

skills training. This has shifted to more actively include men and recognition that rape by someone women trust is much more likely. There is also evidence that there is a growing critique of 'quick fix' solutions to sexual violence prevention education. Instead a more systemic approach is emerging that locates gender, sexuality, individual and community responsibility as key issues for further research and programme implementation. Programmes that fail to acknowledge the diversity of ways in which women and men conform or resist dominant forms of masculinity and femininity will have little hope of success. More than this, there is a pressing need for programmes to move away from awareness-raising to a much more detailed focus on working with young people around the negotiation of sexual intimacy. If we shift focus from teaching refusal skills and awareness-raising to a focus on promoting and developing ethical non-violent relating, there may be a greater possibility of preventing sexual violence within intimate relationships. This is particularly important given that most sexual assault occurs between people known to each other. The findings of the qualitative research with women and men of diverse sexualities highlights the dynamic nature of negotiating desire and pleasure (Carmody 2005). This approach is currently invisible in most sexual assault prevention education programmes.

A young woman may desire sex but feel she must say no to protect her reputation amongst peers or potential lovers or to avoid danger. A man may feel obliged to challenge resistance as he has learnt this is the 'game' to achieve sexual intimacy and establish his masculinity. This is particularly difficult terrain to negotiate especially for young people who we know are most at risk of sexual assault. Current programmes fail these young people by retreating to simplistic advice. Sexual intimacy is not a simple matter — it is imbued with a multiplicity of expectations about gender, varying desires and motivations and overlaid by heteronormative discourses that place a moral value on specific acts and choice of erotic partners. Programmes — such as those identified by Berkowitz (1994, 2004); Flood (2004); Hong (2000); Katz (1995) and Pease (1995) that actively confront hegemonic or 'hyper'-masculinity, seek to challenge these assumptions and provide alternative models of masculinity that value non-violence and respect for others. Young women also need to be exposed to alternative ways of exploring sexual intimacy that ensure they feel safe, but not at the expense of their own desires or needs for intimacy (Rawsthorne 2002; Carmody 2003a, 2003b, 2005).

Beyond the individual skills needed by young women and men there is also a need to explore how social groups and communities can assist in preventing sexual violence. The promising research by Banyard et al (2004, 2005) on increasing skills of people to be active bystanders may be a fruitful area for further research and development. In situations of high alcohol or other drug intake this may prove very beneficial in preventing unwanted, coerced sex or rape. This approach challenges the idea that 'it is none of my business' by suggesting that we all have a community responsibility for preventing sexual violence and that we can act to assist others when they may find themselves in situations beyond their control. The need to take responsibility for intervening in situations or having policies that reduce risk to individuals rests not only with individuals but also with organisations including businesses where people congregate. This has recently been very evident following the death of an Australian woman on a cruise ship where drugs and alcohol and unwanted sexual activity are alleged to have occurred (The Australian 2006:11).

These approaches are radically different from focusing on teaching women to learn risk avoidance or leaving men positioned simply as dangerous and denying any other subjectivity. Education would be focused on building an understanding of the process of ethical negotiation of all intimate relations whether sexual or not. This creates the possibility of moving away from a punitive education model which aims to achieve

prevention through threat of punishment or controlling risk and promotes a pessimistic view of gender relations with men as always dangerous and women as passive 'victims'. This approach also has potential for challenging homophobia and racism, as an ethical person would be required to critically reflect on the implications of their behaviour on themselves and care for others. It would also be important to locate these discussions within the broader socio-cultural and historical context and consider how these shape our sense of self and our relations to others. Crucial also is a consideration of power relations. There is a need to understand how the dominant gender order continues to limit the possibility of more egalitarian relations between women and men, children and adults. Awareness of these factors, however, does not preclude the possibility of recognising the fluidity of power relations and the role of individual and collective resistance to dominant discourses concerning sexuality and violence.

If we continue to essentialise masculinity and femininity and avoid the complexity of sexual relations and sexual violence we leave little hope for primary prevention becoming a reality instead of a dream. Instead we are left with a situation in which interpersonal violence is increasingly normalised and remains unchallenged. This is deeply depressing and provides little hope for the future.

A thorough and extensive critical appraisal of prevention strategies to date is therefore very pressing for scholars, feminists of all theoretical perspectives and other individuals and groups committed to non-violent communities. As discussed above there are shifts occurring in sexual assault prevention education and policy makers and practitioners need to be aware of these trends. Schewe (2004:264) argues that the primary tasks now facing the violence prevention field include knowing whether an intervention is effective but also for whom that intervention is most effective and what characteristics and components of that intervention are responsible for its effects.

Published evaluations of sexual assault and broader violence prevention education strategies in Australia continue to be minimal and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This is essential for the development of best practice approaches to ensure that the time, energy and financial commitments made to these programmes have some realistic possibility of contributing to primary prevention.

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