

Resistance and Backlash to Gender Equality: An evidence review

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Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth).

Suggested citation

Flood, M., Dragiewicz, M., & Pease, B. (2018). Resistance and Backlash to Gender Equality: An evidence review. Brisbane: Crime and Justice Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

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Executive Summary

Gender equality initiatives often face resistance and backlash. This report begins by examining such resistance, describing its character and origins and the typical forms it takes. The report surveys existing efforts to prepare for and respond to backlash. It concludes with recommendations for how most effectively to respond to, and indeed prevent, resistance to gender equality initiatives.

Defining backlash and resistance

The terms ‘backlash’ and ‘resistance’ are used interchangeably in this report to refer to any form of resistance towards progressive social change. With regard to gender, backlash is one of the many practices and processes which maintain or reinforce gender inequalities.

The origin and nature of backlash and resistance

Resistance is a common, perhaps inevitable, response to progressive social change. While efforts to build gender equality, remedy other social injustices and promote health have long met with opposition, the forms this takes are diverse, contextual and historically specific.

Resistance and backlash may be practised both by individuals and collectively, by formal organisations and informal groupings. They may involve formal or informal strategies. Resistance is most likely to come from the people who are advantaged by the status quo. In the case of efforts to build gender equality, resistance is more common from men than women.

Resistance takes common and identifiable forms:

- Denial: Denial of the problem or the legitimacy of the case for change
- Disavowal: Refusal to recognise responsibility
- Inaction: Refusal to implement a change initiative
- Appeasement: Efforts to placate or pacify those advocating for change in order to limit its impact
- Appropriation: Simulating change while covertly undermining it
- Cooption: Using the language of progressive frameworks and goals (‘equality’, ‘rights’, ‘justice’, and so on) as a way of resisting change
- Repression: Reversing or dismantling a change initiative

Denial is one of the most common forms of resistance. Individuals and groups seeking to push back against progressive social change often:

- Deny that the problem exists; minimise its extent, significance, or impact; or rename and redefine it out of existence
- Blame the problem on those who are the victims of it
- Deny the credibility of the message
- Attack the credibility of the messengers of change

- Reverse the problem, adopting a victim position, claiming reverse discrimination, and so on.

Resistance to gender equality initiatives has its origins in the defence of privilege. It is a predictable expression of masculine socialisation, and expresses both men's and women's adherence to sexist social norms. Backlash to gender equality programs and messages often takes the form of the denial of inequality or privilege, and counter-claims of male disadvantage. Resistance is also enabled by diluted and simplistic understandings of gender (e.g. of men and women as equally limited by 'gender roles'), the notion that we live in a 'post-feminist' world in which gender equality already has been achieved, and neoliberal emphases on individual rights and market solutions rather than social inequalities and collective solutions.

Existing efforts to prepare for and respond to resistance

Three kinds of strategy are relevant in responding to and preventing backlash and resistance to gender and other social justice initiatives:

- Organisational / institutional strategies: How to involve individuals, institutions, and organisational policies, processes, and structures in the initiative
- Framing strategies: How to articulate, communicate, or frame the initiative
- Teaching and learning strategies: How to teach about the initiative and engage people in coming to understand and support it

Recommendations for policy and programming

The report recommends the adoption of the following strategies:

Organisational strategies

Organisational support is critical in reducing and preventing resistance to gender equality policies and programming. Resistance is more likely when there is little institutional support. The report recommends the following:

- Secure support from key stakeholders in positions of power
- Address efforts specifically to those individuals and groups who are most likely to be resistant
- Form strategic partnerships and allies

Framing strategies

Framing strategies – effective ways of articulating or communicating programs and initiatives aimed at change – are vital in reducing and preventing resistance. The report recommends the following:

- Frame gender equality within a robust feminist framework as a matter of fairness and social justice.
- Articulate the rationale and benefits:
 - Develop clear, compelling narratives for the problem and the solution
 - Draw on shared principles and goals, both organisational and personal

- Encourage expectations of positive outcomes from gender equality efforts.
- Anticipate and answer common resistant reactions.
- Emphasise that men will benefit.
- Address claims about male disadvantage.

Teaching and learning strategies

Teaching and learning strategies can lessen the likelihood of resistance. The teaching processes used, the environment of the learning, the content and the educators all make a difference.

A general task in educating about gender equality is to provide people with a balance of challenge and support: challenging privilege, and supporting personal and collective readiness to make change. Teaching and learning strategies should also:

- Create safe, respectful, and supportive environments for learning
- Be participatory, interactive and of sufficient length to allow change to occur
- Draw on a variety of teaching approaches known to be effective in building social justice and challenging privilege, such as personal stories, role-plays, empathy induction and appeals to moral and ethical values
- Be provided by educators who are skilled, compassionate, and respectful.

Conclusion

There is a considerable literature on understanding resistance to gender equality policies and programming and other progressive initiatives, but far less literature on how to respond to and prevent backlash and resistance. A VicHealth resource derived from this report, *(En)countering resistance*, identifies a range of practical strategies for engaging organisations, framing gender equality initiatives and educating about gender. The authors intend that this report, and the resources based on it, can assist with limiting the extent or intensity of backlash and in some instances prevent it from occurring at all.

Part I: Defining and Conceptualising Backlash and Resistance

Defining backlash and resistance

Backlash – resistance against progressive social change – is a common feature of the social world. When patterns of inequality and injustice shift, individuals and groups, particularly those advantaged by the status quo, resist. Members of privileged groups seek to restore, maintain and increase their power and position.

The term ‘backlash’ first was articulated close to half a century ago (Lipset & Raab, 1970), yet the phenomenon has characterised social change and contests over structural inequality throughout history. Every social justice project meets resistance, whether focused on civil rights, economic injustice or gender equality (Adelabu, 2014; Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012; Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2011; Burke, 2005; Faludi, 1991). More generally, progressive efforts to change social and economic arrangements often elicit pushback, as amply demonstrated by the experience of public health efforts regarding tobacco control (Cancer Council Victoria, 2016)

The terms ‘backlash’ and ‘resistance’ are used interchangeably in this report to refer to any form of resistance towards progressive social change, with a focus in this evidence review on resistance to gender equality. Resistance is resistance *to* – it is an active pushing back against progressive programs, policies and perspectives, and its purpose is the maintenance or reinforcement of gender inequalities. There are many routine ways in which gender inequalities are produced and reproduced in organisations and elsewhere: formal and informal discrimination, unconscious bias, male–male peer relations which exclude women, and so on (Flood & Pease, 2005). Resistance therefore is a subset of the many practices and processes which sustain gender inequality, defined by opposition, challenge or pushback against efforts to build gender equality.

Backlash is a response to actual or perceived challenges to existing hierarchies of power. It is a reaction against progressive social change that seeks to prevent further change from happening and reverse those changes already achieved. A typical feature of backlash is the desire by some proponents to return to aspects of an idealised past in which structural inequality was normalised (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012; Breines, Cerullo, & Stacey, 1978; Dragiewicz, 2011, 2018 in press; Faludi, 1991). Backlash is a reaction against emancipatory political objectives, rather than the reversal of established hierarchies of power (Hawkesworth, 1999).

Our definitions of backlash and resistance differ from some usages of these terms. Elsewhere, these terms have been defined more broadly, more narrowly, or positively. Faludi’s 1991 work popularised the term ‘backlash’, defining it as the “cultural counterreaction” to feminism, offering an understanding of ‘backlash’ broader than the one adopted here, as it included any media messaging contrary to feminism (Faludi, 1991). Similarly, ‘resistance’ in some accounts includes any form of interference in or challenge to diversity initiatives in organisations (Agocs, 1997; Chrobot-Mason, Hays-Thomas, & Wishik, 2008; Flood & Pease, 2005; Thomas & Plaut, 2008), or indeed ‘doing nothing’ in order to preserve the status quo, such as institutional inertia and lack of support in the form of non-engagement, understaffing, underbudgeting, insufficient gender training, and so on (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014). Other accounts of backlash restrict its application only to the use of coercive power (either the threat of sanction or the use of force) to regain lost or threatened power (Mansbridge & Shames, 2008), or focus particularly on organised, public resistance by anti-feminist men’s and fathers’ groups (Dragiewicz, 2011; Flood, 2012b; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998b). While organised ‘men’s rights’ groups, websites, and campaigns are one of the most visible

expressions of anti-feminist backlash, our definition of backlash incorporates other forms of resistance as well. Finally, in our use, ‘resistance’ is always negative, and refers to opposition to gender equality initiatives, although we recognise that the term ‘resistance’ is also used in a positive sense by some feminist and social justice advocates to describe desirable challenges to injustice.

Conceptualising backlash and resistance

Several further features of backlash and resistance are worth emphasising. Resistance to gender equality is inevitable, diverse and contextual, individual and collective, and more common from men than from women.

Inevitability of resistance

Backlash and resistance are inevitable responses to social change. That is, wherever there is progressive social change, there will also be resistance. Backlash is to be expected in the face of the prospect of social change. In particular, members of privileged groups are likely to push back against change and defend the unequal status quo, because of their material and psychological investments in this (R. L. Allen & Rossatto, 2009; Castania, Alston-Mills, & Whittington-Couse, 2017; Curry-Stevens, 2007; Goodman, 2001; Pease, 2010). Although its controversial nature is sometimes glossed over in efforts to highlight the benefits of gender equality, “feminism is inherently controversial” because of the challenge it poses to established politics and power relations (Walby, 2011, p. 14).

In a sense then, backlash is a sign of progress, whereby changes to women’s status seem possible or are underway. A wide range of activities designed to reduce gender inequality have been incorporated into economics, politics, and culture around the world, and these are increasingly adopted by the state (Walby, 2011). It is the success of these feminist projects, rather than their failures, which has spawned anti-feminist backlash. However, backlash itself may be successful, with progress towards gender equality halted or reversed.

Diversity of resistance

Backlash and resistance are diverse, contextual and historically specific. They are always situated within, and shaped by, the character and dynamics of gender and other features of the context – of the particular workplace, community, country, and so on. For example, resistance to gender equality initiatives in one workplace or sporting club may differ from that in a different setting. In different contexts and periods, resistance is focused on different issues, has different dynamics and strategies, and is triggered by different dimensions of social change (Thomas, 2008). Resistance to gender equality has both similarities to and differences from resistance in other areas of public health. Similarities include arguments about unnecessary intervention in ‘private’ matters or civil liberties by a ‘nanny state’, community anxieties about gender and sexuality (as for HIV/AIDS), and consumer resistance to behaviour change, while there are differences in the extent to which resistance comes from powerful economic interests (Keleher, 2017). Historically, anti-feminist backlash addresses key sites of patriarchal power such as electoral politics (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Carroll, 2009; Katz, 2016), the family (Breines et al., 1978; Halperin-Kaddari & Freeman, 2016), work (Burke, 2005), violence against women (Dragiewicz, 2011; Girard, 2009), reproductive rights (Harrison & Rowley, 2011) and schools (Martino, Kehler, & Weaver-Hightower, 2009; Mills, 2003). While anti-feminist backlash has typical characteristics, there is also historical and cross-cultural diversity in the issues on which it focuses and the tactics it adopts.

Resistance both collective and individual

Resistance and backlash can be individual or collective. At the individual level, men in an organisation, for example, may voice opposition to or undermine gender equality initiatives. They may sit sullenly through a workshop, tear down a poster, criticise a program coordinator behind her back, or vote against a gender equality initiative at a board meeting. Resistance may be collective too, comprising collective efforts to challenge progress towards gender equality. This collective resistance may be formal (in the shape of anti-feminist ‘men’s rights’ and ‘fathers’ rights’ groups, petitions and legal action, and so on) (Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2004, 2010). It may be informal, as is the case when male friends or peers in a workplace or sporting club resist gender equality initiatives as a group or use online technologies to disrupt and ‘troll’ gender equality forums or harass their advocates (Henry & Powell, 2015; Vera-Gray, 2017). As our evidence review shows, backlash may be formal or informal, at both the individual and collective levels. It includes more and less organised efforts to oppose gender equality in formal contexts such as law and academic research, and informal contexts such as social media and peer groups. Resistance to gender equality initiatives has not had anywhere near the level of organisation visible for example in response to tobacco control, where the tobacco industry has adapted an array of formal strategies to resist control (Cancer Council Victoria, 2016), but some similar strategies have been adopted by opponents of gender equality, including lobbying, media advocacy, rights groups and litigation.

Resistance among both men and women

Resistance to progressive social change is more likely to come from the people who are advantaged by the status quo. Men are more likely than women to resist progress towards gender equality. Men’s resistance is well documented, for example, in defensiveness about and hostility towards efforts to address men’s violence against women (Berkowitz, 2004; Flood, 2005-2006; Keller & Honea, 2016; Rich, Utley, Janke, & Moldoveanu, 2010). Men are less supportive of diversity programs for minorities and more likely than women to respond with backlash (Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004). However, women too resist progress towards gender equality, albeit less frequently than men. In addition, members of privileged groups may enlist members of disadvantaged groups to support their campaigns. For example, in electoral politics, high-income white men historically have used racist and anti-immigrant appeals to enlist poor white men in campaigns to reinforce structural inequality. Faced with emotive appeals to the threat from below, poor white men can be distracted from the inequitable distribution of resources that harms them the most (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Men are more likely than women to engage in backlash against gender equality, as noted above. Men’s attitudes towards gender are more conservative than women’s, as both Australian and international studies show (Flood, 2015). Men’s recognition of sexism – their recognition of actions or situations as discriminatory towards women – is poorer than women’s (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). When men do notice sexist incidents, they are less likely than women to perceive them as discriminatory and potentially harmful for women (Becker & Swim, 2011), and men are particularly unlikely to detect discrimination and recognise its severity when the sexism is more subtle (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). Also, many men overestimate the extent to which their male peers agree with sexism (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003; Hillenbrand-Gunn, Heppner, Mauch, & Park, 2010; Kilmartin et al., 2008; Stein, 2007).

Privilege often is not visible to those who have it. Members of privileged groups thus often get angry and defensive when their privilege is challenged. People are more likely to be aware of their experience of oppression than conscious of their privilege. Thus the reproduction of structural inequality does not require active intent on the part of the privileged. Members of privileged groups become accustomed to the

advantages that accrue to them, experiencing them as normal. As a result, they feel entitled to unearned advantages and experience loss of privilege as disempowerment or victimisation. Accordingly, members of privileged groups are often shocked and angry when their privilege is challenged (Pease, 2010).

Women, as well as men, may resist and criticise gender equality initiatives (Steuter, 1992). Women have led anti-suffrage campaigns (Marshall, 1985; Thurner, 1993), organised opposition to the U.S. Equal Rights Amendment (Frenier, 1984; Marshall, 1985), and taken part in contemporary forms of anti-feminism (DeKeseredy, Fabricius, & Hall-Sanchez, 2015; McRobbie, 2011; Steuter, 1992). It is well documented that some young women offer widespread support for women's equality with men while, concurrently, rejecting the label 'feminist' (Buschman & Lenart, 1996; Negra & Tasker, 2007). Analyses of women's anti-feminism find a number of reasons for their participation: from ethical and moral concerns (Thurner, 1993); to opportunism (DeKeseredy et al., 2015); investment in class privilege and existing gender norms and family roles (Chafetz & Dworkin, 1987); the belief that there is no more need for feminism because it has accomplished its goals (McRobbie, 2011); and out of resignation (Dworkin, 1983). Organisations seeking to promote gender equality should expect resistance from women as well as men due to these varied interests and perceptions, and the vilification of feminism in popular culture.

Defining gender equality

This report focuses on backlash and resistance to gender equality. How are these defined? The United Nations defines gender equality as "the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, and girls and boys" (UNWomen). VicHealth defines gender equality as "equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society; sometimes referred to as formal equality" and gender equity as involving "fairness and justice in the distribution of resources and responsibilities between men and women; sometimes referred to as substantive equality. It often requires women-specific programs and policies to end existing inequalities" (VicHealth, 2016, p. 1). Meanwhile, *Change the Story* combines these concepts: "Gender equality involves equality of opportunity and equality of results. It includes the redistribution of resources and responsibilities between men and women and the transformation of the underlying causes and structures of gender inequality to achieve substantive equality. It is about recognising diversity and disadvantage to ensure equal outcomes for all and therefore often requires women-specific programs and policies to end existing inequalities" (Our Watch, ANROWS, & VicHealth, 2015, p. 61). The Australian Human Rights Commission (2017) identifies three critical areas for achieving gender equality: economic security for women, eliminating violence against women and women in leadership. Given these different definitions, efforts to attain gender equality have included both calls for formal equality and gender-conscious or sex-specific programs.

Extensive and diverse strategies have been used over time to promote gender equality, as a review of 85 agency evaluations identified (Hunt & Brouwers, 2003). These strategies include:

- developing a shared vision and explicit consensus on gender equality objectives
- involving stakeholders from civil society in dialogue on objectives and activities
- assessing and strengthening organisational capacity for gender responsive and participatory analysis
- incorporating gender equality objectives into activity, program or project objectives
- using participatory strategies to involve both women and men in design and implementation of

gender equality objectives

- ensuring that gender strategies are practical and based on quality gender analysis
- ensuring that responsibilities for implementing gender equality objectives are explicit in job descriptions
- collecting adequate and relevant sex-disaggregated baseline information
- supporting women's organisations to work for gender equality
- strengthening women's leadership capacity using participatory strategies
- working with men to promote equality with women.

Part II: The Origin and Nature of Backlash and Resistance to Gender Equality

What forms do backlash and resistance to gender equality take, and why do they occur? While they have diverse roots and contexts, it is clear that backlash and resistance stem from defence of the privileges enjoyed by dominant groups. Anti-feminist backlash is enabled by, or able to draw on, various popular ways of thinking about gender equality such as depoliticised notions of 'sex roles' and the idea that feminism is irrelevant because gender equality has been achieved.

Forms of backlash

Various forms of resistance to gender equality are practised by individuals and organisations alike. While types of backlash can be described in numerous ways, there are typical themes and tactics which recur across issues and historical periods (Agocs, 1997; Godenzi, 1999; Menzies, 2007).

- *Denial*: Denial of the problem or the legitimacy of the case for change.
- *Disavowal*: Refusal to recognise responsibility to address the problem or the change process for this problem.
- *Inaction*: Refusal to implement a change initiative.
- *Appeasement*: Efforts to placate or pacify those advocating for change in order to limit its impact.
- *Appropriation*: Simulating change while covertly undermining it.
- *Cooptation*: Using the language of progressive frameworks and goals ('equality', 'rights', 'justice', and so on) to maintain unequal structures and practices.
- *Repression*: The reversal or dismantling of a change initiative once implementation has begun.

Resistance thus ranges from passive blocking techniques which seek to maintain the status quo, to strategies which seek to minimise or coopt change efforts, to active, aggressive opposition in order to restore the old order (Godezi, 1999; Smirthwaite, 2009).

Denial of the problem or the case for changing it is a very common element of resistance to gender equality initiatives. Individuals and organisations may:

- Deny that the problem exists; minimise its extent, significance and impact; or rename and redefine it out of existence
- Blame the problem on those who are the victims of it
- Deny the credibility of the message on the basis that it is supposedly irrational, untruthful, or exaggerated
- Attack the credibility of the messengers of change by impugning their motives and marginalising them as a special interest group
- Reverse the problem, adopting a victim position, claiming reverse discrimination, etc. (Agocs, 1997; Johnson, 2001)

Men may resist efforts to address gender inequality by maintaining that there is no problem because they have no conscious intent to oppress others, or they may acknowledge the problem but insist they are one of the 'good guys' and have no need to change anything (Adelabu, 2014; Haddad & Lieberman, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Pease, 2010).

Disavowal – the refusal to accept responsibility for dealing with the change process – overlaps with denial. Organisations, for example, may offer a series of excuses for inaction: 'It is not my problem. I'm not responsible because I didn't create it; it's up to others to fix it', 'The issue will be dealt with when the disadvantaged groups change', and 'We can't afford to deal with this issue at this time ... There are other more pressing priorities' (Agocs, 1997, p. 9327). Refusing to implement changes that have been agreed to includes not allocating resources for the implementation of the change, not enforcing new policies, not setting standards or timelines to monitor the change, coopting the process by delegating the change to those who disagree with it, and actively sabotaging the change process. Dismantling change processes that have already begun is an active form of repression and involves the shutting down of new policies (Agocs, 1997).

The defence of privilege

Men's resistance towards gender equality is a predictable expression of their involvement in gender relations in general. Boys and men are socialised – in families, among peers, through media, and so on – to adopt sexist understandings of gender and to take certain forms of privilege or entitlement for granted. Masculine social scripts inhibit men's development of social justice attitudes and actions, because they encourage fear and hostility towards femininity and the suppression of empathy, nurturing and compassion (Davis & Wagner, 2005). In short, men's backlash and resistance are structured by the social construction of masculinity.

Among both men and women, opposition to gender equality initiatives is shaped by sexist norms – by the widespread acceptance of gender inequalities as biologically determined, inevitable or justified. National data shows that significant proportions of men, and substantial but lower proportions of women, endorse gender-inequitable beliefs (VicHealth, 2014), and this is likely then to inform discomfort with or hostility towards gender equality programs. Backlash and resistance are more likely among individuals who hold sexist norms, and in contexts characterised by sexism, gender segregation, and male dominance.

More widely, any effort at change within an organisation or workplace will encounter resistance. Both individuals and organisations have inertia and habits, and any change threatens this. Social justice initiatives may bring fears of change, challenge belief systems and threaten people's sense that they are good and caring and competent (Goodman, 2001; Smirthwaite, 2009). Resistance thus varies in the extent to which it is consciously ideological or explicitly political.

Backlash is, above all, a response by dominant groups who feel threatened by challenges to their privilege by disadvantaged groups (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012; Pease, 2013; Watt, 2007). Men's backlash to gender equality can be understood as 'aggrieved entitlement' (Kimmel, 2013). As Kimmel argues in *Angry White Men*, we are witnessing the end of white men's experience of unquestioned entitlement. White men are increasingly forced to compete with women, racialised minority men and immigrants for jobs and resources to which they feel entitled. Unable to access the kinds of work they expect, some men feel humiliated and emasculated. Because employment and breadwinner status are closely linked with traditional forms of masculinity, thwarted entitlement threatens their core masculine identities. They seek to restore more traditional and patriarchal forms of manhood. While thwarted entitlement may be

personally experienced as victimisation, it is indicative of increasingly precarious privilege. While these men may not feel powerful as individuals, “they feel entitled to feel powerful” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 124).

Given that backlash represents the defence of privilege, it may intensify with progress towards gender equality. For example, there is evidence that increases in gender equality can prompt increases in men’s use of violence against women, as men threatened by women’s empowerment use violence to reassert their dominance and control (Whaley, 2001). As women begin to gain autonomy and status in relationships or at the community or societal levels, violence against them may initially increase, but is likely over time to reverse and decrease overall (Whaley, Messner, & Veysey, 2011).

The denial of privilege

One of the most common forms of backlash and resistance to gender equality efforts is the denial of privilege – the rejection of the claim that women are disadvantaged and men are privileged, or even the counter-claim that now it is men who are disadvantaged. Individuals may report feeling ‘tired’ of diversity and inclusion initiatives (Bendick Jr, Egan, & Lofhjelm, 2001) or ‘sick of being blamed’, reflecting lack of awareness of their dominant group identities and privileges and the denial of inequality (Goodman, 2001). Many men feel under threat from feminism, and draw attention to what they see as forms of male disadvantage – to do with health, divorce and custody, and violence by women – as a defensive counter to this (Bacchi, 2005; Kimmel, 2011; Lingard, 1998; Maddison, 1999a, 1999b; Meer, 2013). Faced with feminist attention to sexist inequalities, some men (and women) exclaim, “What about the men?”, derailing and silencing conversations about misogyny and sexism (Bennett & Fox, 2014).

Perhaps one of the most well-developed areas of anti-feminist backlash is centred on interpersonal violence. In the wake of four decades of feminist advocacy and scholarship on men’s violence against women and other forms of violence, resistance and backlash to this work also is well established (Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2010). Anti-feminists claim that women’s partner violence against men is just as common and serious as men’s against women, and there is some agreement with this in the wider community in Australia (VicHealth, 2014). Men’s rights advocates thus endeavour to meet feminist claims with counter-claims, or try to delegitimise efforts to address men’s violence against women by characterising it as ‘male bashing’ and ‘demonising men’.

Resistance to efforts to challenge male dominance has been informed and enabled by popular notions that boys or men are ‘in crisis’. The notion that males are in crisis (because of changes to work, education and family) is visible in popular media commentary (Saatchi and Saatchi 2013), on anti-feminist men’s websites (Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016), and in backlash responses in particular areas such as boys’ education (Lingard, 1998). In such accounts, now boys or men are framed as the ‘new disadvantaged’ and masculinity is under siege as a result of feminist reforms. One version of anti-feminist backlash here involves essentialist appeals to men’s intrinsic natures or biology, drawing on evolutionary psychology theories (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012).

In recent years the discourse of men’s needs has sometimes replaced the discourse of men’s rights as a more nuanced form of backlash. Injured masculinity and vulnerable men with unmet needs are framed as a men’s health problem that needs to be addressed. Thus, men’s health promotion has been appropriated to articulate men’s suffering (Salter, 2014). A similar dynamic is visible in the anti-feminist One in Three campaign’s framing of men as the victims of women’s violence (Flood, 2012a).

Discourses of ‘sex roles’ and ‘equality’

Men’s opposition to gender equality efforts has been enabled by some common but limited ways of framing gender and feminism. When the second wave of feminism began in the 1960s, it comprised differing strands of feminism (often described as liberal, socialist, and radical). Liberal feminism emphasised the limitations of traditional ‘sex roles’ for women. Advocates of ‘men’s liberation’ argued that just as the female sex role constrained women, so too the male sex role was limited, especially in the areas of health, emotional lives and relationships (Farrell, 1974; Nichols, 1975; Pleck & Sawyer, 1974). These early accounts of ‘sex roles’ lacked attention to wider patriarchal inequalities, and therefore it is no coincidence that some men’s liberationists later became men’s rights advocates (for example Farrell (1993)). Men’s rights advocates appropriated sex role theory to argue that men were more oppressed than women in relation to domestic violence, divorce, rape allegations, media representations, and so on. On the other hand, more feminist accounts of men’s lives in Critical Masculinity Studies rejected the language and theories of sex roles (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Connell, 1987; Messner, 1997).

Anti-feminist men’s and fathers’ rights advocates also have sought to use the language of ‘rights’ and ‘equality’ to push back against feminist gains (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2011; Flood, 2010; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998a, 1998b; Kimmel, 2011). In family law, for example, men’s rights advocates have used a limited and formal notion of equality that is premised upon treating everyone the same, within a context that draws upon standards that are based on the experiences of men. While many men’s rights advocates are vehemently critical of all forms of feminism, some more ‘moderate’ forms of men’s rights advocates claim support for what they call ‘equity feminism’ (Hoff Sommers, 1994). Proponents of backlash have thus at times appropriated liberal notions of equality to advance their claims (Dragiewicz, 2008).

The weakening of feminism and the notion of ‘post-feminism’

A series of interrelated social changes in Western societies have intensified the possibilities for backlash responses, including the weakening of feminism as a social movement, the emergence of a post-feminist sensibility and the rise of neoliberalism (Messner, 2016). Despite the entry of feminists into the policymaking machinery of government, significant feminist organising on social media, and the cultural popularity of some forms of feminism, traditional social movement organising by women has weakened. In addition, as feminism has been institutionalised and professionalised in some domains, its critical and change-making edge has been dulled (Gill & Scharff, 2013; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003; Negra & Tasker, 2007). While a weakening of feminism should in one sense produce a decline in backlash, given that the threat to patriarchal privilege has lessened, it also creates opportunities for new discourses and tactics of backlash.

The decline in feminist collective advocacy has been paralleled by an increasing sense among men and women that feminism is no longer needed. In ‘postfeminist’ discourse, women have attained equal rights with men, gender inequality and women’s oppression is in the past, and consequently feminist activism is no longer required (K. J. Anderson, 2014; Messner, 2016). Overlapping with this, the rise of neoliberalism has promoted a pervasive emphasis on individual rights and the primacy of the economic market, further weakening the ability of feminists and others to call attention to structural inequalities and to social solutions for them (Cornwall, Gideon, & Wilson, 2008; Oksala, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014).

Part III: Existing efforts to prepare for and respond to resistance

What programs and strategies exist for preparing for, responding to, and managing resistance and backlash? Despite the fact that resistance to gender equality initiatives is widespread, there has been little development of tools or resources focused on this. Many general guides to gender equality or violence prevention work acknowledge the fact that there will be resistance to this work, but there are few substantial resources for responding to or preventing this. The most substantial literature on resistance can be found in social justice pedagogy, although other relevant sources include literature on diversity and inclusion, and literature dealing with resistance in other fields, such as science (Cook, 2015a, 2015b; Diethelm & McKee, 2009), public health (Hooker, 2017; Keleher, 2017) and environmental issues (McCright, 2010; McCright & Dunlap, 2011, 2013).

There is substantial overlap between strategies for preventing or responding to *resistance* to gender equality and strategies for generating *support* for it. Support and resistance are opposing sides of the same coin, in that strategies which increase individuals' or groups' support for gender equality also diminish their resistance to it. Nevertheless, this review focuses on tools and approaches for resistance and backlash in particular, although we examine both strategies intended to respond to or manage resistance and strategies intended to prevent or minimise its occurrence in the first place.

Strategies for responding to and preventing resistance can be clustered into three overlapping streams – organisational, framing, and pedagogical – each with a distinctive focus:

1. *Organisational / institutional strategies*: How to involve individuals, institutions, and organisational policies, processes, and structures in the initiative.
2. *Framing strategies*: How to articulate, represent, or communicate the initiative. These strategies might also be termed discursive, rhetorical, or ideological, as they concern the content and meaning of gender equality initiatives.
3. *Teaching and learning strategies*: How to teach about the initiative and engage people in coming to understand and support it.

In the remainder of this section, we briefly discuss and assess previously studied efforts to prevent and respond to resistance. In the final section, we offer more detailed recommendations about those approaches and tools which are most likely to be effective.

Organisational / institutional strategies

Organisational leadership and workforce cultures are critical influences on the likelihood of resistance to gender equality work in organisations.

Individuals are more likely to resist particular initiatives where there is little normative support for them – when they perceive that their leaders and managers do not support the initiative or expect them to avoid or disrupt it (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008). Workplace cultures may undermine diversity initiatives, whether by implicitly encouraging the view that they are irrelevant or hypocritical, or by not holding managers and leaders accountable for equity and diversity, for example in hiring and retention (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008).

Framing strategies

In discussions of how to respond to resistance, there is considerable focus on how to frame the cause in ways which will minimise backlash and enhance support. For gender equality initiatives, key strategies include finding persuasive ways to ‘make the case’ for gender equality, anticipating and undermining typical resistant reactions, and challenging common defences of gender inequality.

Perhaps the most common case for gender equality is the moral or ethical one: that gender equality is a matter of what is fair, just or right. Men in particular have an ethical imperative to address gender inequality related to women’s human rights and social justice. Alongside this, two other common ways of making the case for gender equality in organisations are the ‘business case’ and, when seeking to engage men’s support, the argument that ‘men will benefit too’. The ‘business case’ emphasises that gender equality is good economically for organisations and the country, in that it generates improved productivity and organisational performance, enhances the talent pool, and enables greater teamwork and collaboration (Flood & Russell, 2017; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016). The notion of ‘benefit to men’ emphasises how men themselves will gain from progress towards gender equality (described in more detail below).

Both the latter appeals are valuable, but also problematic. The ‘business case’ has helped to generate significant support and momentum for gender equality initiatives. At the same time it may reduce issues of equity and social justice to their economic value for shareholders, neglect appeals based on values and principle despite the evidence of their influence, and sometimes draws on essentialist assumptions about the differing skills and orientations women and men bring to the workplace. It risks diminishing the case for change if women’s inclusion and gender equity are not in fact much more profitable (Fine, 2017). The ‘benefit to men’ case also has a widespread appeal, but a single-minded emphasis on how men will gain risks neglecting men’s gendered power and privilege and the costs to men of progress towards gender equality. If we are to engage men in gender equality initiatives, we have to understand men’s resistance to change. Hence, we will need to develop pedagogical strategies that challenge men’s complicity in the reproduction of gender inequality rather than trying to convince them that they have nothing to lose from gender equality (Pease, 2014a).

Challenging common defences of gender inequality may involve developing fact sheets or ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ which provide accessible rebuttals of typical gender-inequitable responses. However, as experience in relation to controversies over public health and science suggests, it is ineffective to respond to contrary belief systems or myths simply by throwing more information at them. Instead, further teaching and learning strategies are useful, including those which ‘inoculate’ individuals against misinformation, as we discuss in Part 4.

Teaching and learning strategies

Resistance to teaching about gender equality has been most well documented in diversity training at workplaces, and in teaching on gender, race, sexuality and other axes of social inequality in university classrooms. Resistance, particularly from dominant group members, is well documented in both contexts (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008; Thomas & Plaut, 2008). Resistance to diversity training is an ongoing problem, with some perceiving that such programs grant unfair advantages to non-traditional employees or unfairly blame white men for the problems others face (Kulik, Pepper, Roberson, & Parker, 2007). Nevertheless, a meta-analytic evaluation of diversity training outcomes finds that such training has sizable positive effects on outcomes related to cognition, affect (emotion), and skill (Kalinoski et al., 2013).

The degree of resistance to training on sexism and gender or other issues is shaped by participants' previous experiences and social locations, the way the training is framed, the training's content and process, and the wider organisational context. Diversity training is more likely to generate resistance when, for example:

- the training is seen as remedial or punitive
- the participants have high levels of fear or anxiety about, or hostility towards the training and its consequences, including concerns about loss of a privileged status quo, fears about saying or doing the wrong thing, denial of the need for change, and perceptions of threat related to social identity
- the participants expect negative outcomes, such as embarrassment, anxiety, conflict, or undesired changes in work behaviour
- the training conditions involve passive instruction, large groups, unclear tasks or agenda, and inadequate facilitation
- the organisational or corporate culture is unsupportive, with only weak connections between the training and organisational goals and objectives (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008).

Part IV: Recommendations for policy and programming

There are some general principles which should guide responses to backlash and resistance to gender equality. First, the overriding goal is to make progress towards gender equality. Efforts to reduce and prevent resistance must not be at the expense of this goal – they must not diminish or dilute the project of challenging gender inequalities and injustices. They must maintain an analysis of gender inequality that emphasises structural and power inequities and, correspondingly, prioritises structural change and redressing power imbalances as priorities for change. To fulfil this, it will be valuable to draw on feminist frameworks and approaches alongside other social justice and change management strategies. Second, some level of resistance is inevitable. Resistance to gender equality initiatives in workplaces and elsewhere is common, understandable, and predictable. Third, we must seek both to reduce backlash and resistance and to prevent their initial occurrence.

Organisational / institutional strategies

Programs of organisational change must involve the whole organisation from top to bottom, as research from various fields has documented (Agocs, 1997; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008). However, organisational support also is critical in reducing and preventing resistance. Individuals in a workplace or other formal settings are less likely to resist gender equality initiatives if they perceive strong support for active participation from executive, managerial and supervisory personnel (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008). Diversity training is more likely to have a significant impact if the trainer is a direct manager or supervisor rather than other internal staff member (Kalinowski et al., 2013), underscoring the influence of leaders' support. Thus a comprehensive gender strategy, involving organisational structures, practices and policies, is both a vital strategy for preventing resistance and a necessary feature of gender equality work in organisations more generally.

Secure support from key stakeholders in positions of power

Engage senior men in an organisation to support and initiate change initiatives. For example, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2015) established Male Champions for Change in 2015 to engage influential men to work with women to take action to advance gender equality.

Address efforts specifically to those individuals and groups who are most likely to be resistant

Address formal or informal sections of a workplace known to have more sexist or patriarchal cultures:

- Craft materials specifically for them
- Find supportive messengers and leaders who are more likely to be palatable to them
- Work more intensively with them.

Form strategic partnerships and allies

Forge links with a wide range of groups and individuals who experience similar resistance and opposition to their work for social change:

- Build personal support systems

- Link with large collectives of like-minded people
- Engage in open debate and discussion
- Acknowledge what someone else is saying regardless of their motives.
- Take part in difficult conversations. Listen to others without becoming defensive. Acknowledge fears and misinformation about equity (Hankivsky, 1996).

Agocs (1997) proposes six strategies in response to institutional resistance to change:

- Resist and refuse to be coopted
- Create allies to ensure joint action wherever possible
- Make the case for change by continuing to present sound arguments and evidence to unmask the ideological claims of the opponents
- Make effective use of existing resources to convince power holders that change is in their interests
- Mobilise politically to effect change from outside of the organisation
- Build new parallel organisations to embody the values that you are working towards.

In addition, he proposes three specific organisational responses in relation to different levels of resistance identified earlier:

- Ensure that a credible diagnosis of the cultural and structural barriers to change is articulated, and the focus of change is on systemic issues within the organisation.
- Challenge rationalisations for resistance with evidence and counter arguments.
- Establish clear monitoring processes to ensure that all stages of the change process are implemented.

Framing strategies

How gender equality work is communicated or understood is crucial, not only in preventing resistance, but in guiding this work in the first place.

Frame gender equality within a robust feminist framework

It is important to frame gender and gender equality within a feminist framework, offering an understanding that is conceptually clear, theoretically insightful and politically progressive. ‘Commonsense’ and popular understandings of gender often conflate sex and gender, assume that patterns of gender are biologically determined, understand gender only in terms of individual attitudes and identities, and neglect gender inequalities. Indeed, simplistic and limited attention to gender is visible in common health promotion frameworks (Gelb, Pederson, & Greaves, 2011), although there have been recent calls for ‘gender-transformative’ approaches which consider gendered social structures and systems (Our Watch et al., 2015; Pederson, Greaves, & Poole, 2014).

A robust feminist framework:

- Distinguishes between sex (biological characteristics that define males and females) and gender

(roles, behaviours, activities and attributes; and the social organization of women's and men's lives and relations), while acknowledging the complex relationships between sex and gender

- Recognises that gender is personal, interpersonal, and structural:
 - Gender is part of individuals' identities and enacted or performed in their everyday lives
 - Gender shapes interpersonal relations and interactions
 - Gender is embedded in wider structures, institutions, and social arrangements (K. L. Anderson, 2005)
- Emphasises that gender involves unequal relations of power (Htun & Weldon, 2010) and a pervasive (but contested) pattern of male dominance
- Addresses the intersections of gender with other forms of social difference and inequality such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and disability
- Has a progressive or emancipatory political agenda of reducing gender inequalities and building gender justice.

It is important to move beyond individualistic and depoliticised approaches to gender in order to understand the obstacles to achieving gender equality. While it is tempting to employ a variety of framings and communication strategies to increase support for gender equality, a number of commentators note that feminism and critical theories of gender are major intellectual sources for advancing gender equality and responding to the backlash (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2011; DeKeseredy, 2011; Dragiewicz, 2011; Jensen, 2017; Johnson, 2001; Pease, 2014b). A feminist-informed framework will direct the focus of gender equality policies and programs towards structural issues, both in relation to direct interventions, and also in relation to how interventions at other levels of the unequal gender order can contribute to transformation at the structural level.

Articulate the rationale and benefits

A key framing strategy is to articulate the rationale for and benefits of the gender equality initiative. One aspect of this is to offer clear, compelling accounts or narratives of the problem and the solution. One powerful example of this is 'Change the Story', Our Watch's violence prevention framework (Our Watch et al., 2015). Another important aspect is encouraging expectations of positive outcomes from gender equality efforts, such as "more harmonious interpersonal relations, improved productivity, greater job security, competitive advantage for the organization, social justice, and other positive outcomes" (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008, p. 36).

Issues of gender equality and diversity should be framed in terms of shared principles and goals. There will be greater buy-in, and less resistance, if people see the work as consistent with their own values and goals and with their organisation's mission statement, goals or long-term planning. More broadly, framing should appeal to the commitment many people have to principles of democracy, fairness and equality (Goodman, 2001).

Anticipate and answer common resistant reactions

Anticipate likely resistant reactions to gender equality initiatives, whether in the general rationale, answers to 'frequently asked questions' or other materials. These might include prepared counter arguments on

typical resistant reactions such as the ‘myth of merit’ (UNWomen, 2015).

Given that resistance comes more frequently and more intensely from men, there are particular framing strategies of use here.

Emphasise that men will benefit

Part of a ‘benefits’ rationale is highlighting how men will benefit from progress towards gender equality. Men’s resistance to gender equality initiatives stems in part from the idea that gender equality is a zero-sum game – that as women gain greater equality, men will lose (Prime, Moss-Racusin, & Heather Foust-Cummings, 2009). It is sometimes valuable to emphasise instead that gender equality is ‘win-win’ (Holter, 2014; Kimmel, 2013). Indeed, the same logic applies in working on other forms of social injustice. Exploring privileged groups’ self-interest in social justice and alternatives to systems of domination – what they have to gain from social change – should be part of the work (Goodman, 2001). As well as framing gender equality in terms of widely held principles and goals, we should foster awareness among men (as members of the relevant privileged group) of “how they have been limited by oppression and why it is in their self-interest to foster social change” (Goodman, 2001, p. 94).

An emphasis on the positive benefits for men of gender equality is visible in a range of pro-feminist texts on men and gender (Holter, 2014; Kimmel, 2013; Pape, 2011). We can encourage men to see the costs of having to continually ‘prove’ masculinity and live up to unrealistic expectations of manhood, and the penalties men pay (particularly from other men) if they fail to live up to these ideals.

Men will benefit from progress towards gender equality in terms of:

- personal wellbeing (freedom from the costs of conformity with dominant definitions of masculinity)
- interpersonal relations (improvements in the lives of the women and girls they care about, and benefits to men’s relationships and friendships with women, children and other men)
- workplaces and communities (benefits to communities through flexibility in divisions of labour, improvements in women’s health and wellbeing, and reductions in violence against women; and to workplaces through greater productivity, creativity and diversity.)

However, a ‘benefits for men’ framing must be careful to ensure that men’s interests, needs and concerns in relation to gender equality do not come too much into the foreground, thus marginalising women’s interests and concerns for social justice. To assume that we must avoid any recognition of the negative effects among men of the loss of their former status privileges is to give the ground to anti-feminism (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2011; Pape, 2011; Pease, 2008). Men may lose some material privileges and entitlements through gender equality but, if men do experience losses, they should be seen as necessary to achieve a more just world.

Move men away from entitlement

Some resistant men’s anger, distress and claims to rights are based in a sense of entitlement, such as their experience of a loss of relative power (Kimmel, 2013). In response, we must encourage men to abandon their sense of male entitlement and to untangle themselves from the traditional forms of masculinity on which that sense of entitlement is based. This means challenging the male peer cultures that validate traditional forms of masculinity. It also means locating men’s experiences, for example of job loss and

insecurity, in the context of the deindustrialisation and elimination of manufacturing jobs (Messner, 2016).

Address claims about male disadvantage

Be ready to address claims that men are now disadvantaged relative to women (the ‘denial of privilege’ described in Part II above). The key strategy here is to acknowledge areas of male pain and disadvantage, *and* to offer an alternative account of them (Flood, 2004). Whether with regard to men’s health (Salter, 2013), fathering after separation (Flood, 2012b), the decline of traditionally masculine areas of work or other issues, we can acknowledge that some men do face real problems, *and* their causes typically are not women or feminism, but narrow gender roles, traditional constructions of masculinity, economic shifts, and so on.

The general strategy here is to acknowledge men’s pain or distress and reframe this, and thus move men away from the entitled defence of privilege. This includes addressing men’s disempowerment, both imagined and real. Some men feel disempowered when they are not – when what has happened is that they have lost unfair advantages they had previously taken for granted. The discomfort they feel is not a symptom of systemic advantage, but the discomfort of losing privilege. On the other hand, some men genuinely *are* disempowered – not as men, but because of poverty, social marginalisation, and so on.

One common area for claims of male disadvantage is men’s health, where men’s rights discourse has some presence in the sector’s accounts (Salter, 2014). In opposition to an anti-feminist account of men’s health, we can emphasise the following:

- Men’s physical and emotional health is constrained above all by traditional constructions of masculinity (not women or feminism), with conformity to traditional norms associated with poorer health, greater risk-taking and lower help-seeking (Courtenay, 2000; Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek, 2007; Wong, Ho, Wang, & Miller, 2017).
- More widely, men’s health represents the ill-health effects of patriarchy. In contexts which are more patriarchal and less egalitarian, men live shorter lives, as shown in both cross-national and US research (Kavanagh, Shelley, & Stevenson, 2017; Stanistreet, Bamba, & Scott-Samuel, 2005).
- Poor health among men often reflects social divisions and disadvantages associated, not with gender, but with class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and disability (Pease, 2009; Williams, 2003).
- Men’s health and women’s health should not be seen as in opposition, and in fact women’s and feminist organisations have been important advocates for men’s health (Flood, 2004).

Another issue for which there is significant backlash and resistance is domestic violence. There are well-developed responses to and rebuttals of typical anti-feminist claims about women’s domestic violence against men, for example:

- Acknowledgement that men are the majority of victims of violence, and that their perpetrators overwhelmingly are other men
- Critiques of inaccurate claims about female perpetration and male victimisation that include data on actual gender asymmetries in domestic or intimate partner violence, and critiques of the conceptual assumptions and methods in literature used to claim gender symmetry (M. Allen, 2011; Braaf & Meyering, 2013; DeKeseredy, 2011; Flood, 2006, 2012a; Kimmel, 2002a).

Other typical, resistant claims regarding violence against women include ‘Not all men are violent towards

women' and 'Why focus on violence against women rather than addressing all violence?'.

- In responding to 'Not all men', acknowledge that men differ in the extent to which they perpetrate physical violence against women. At the same time, emphasise the wide range of forms of abuse and coercion men (and women) may use (Stark, 2007). Illustrate how some men control or coerce their female partners without ever using physical violence. Challenge simplistic and comforting distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' men. Note how non-violent men may condone violence or reproduce gender inequality in other ways.
- In responding to 'Why not address all violence?', acknowledge that all forms of violence are wrong, whether against women or men and whether by men or women. Emphasise how different forms of violence have distinct dynamics and drivers, and require specific campaigns and strategies (Costello, 2015; Flood, 2012a). At the same time, note how different forms of violence overlap and interrelate. Provide examples of how men's violence against women and men's violence against other men are related (Fleming, Gruskin, Rojo, & Dworkin, 2015; Whitehead, 2005; Wojnicka, 2015).

Critique organised anti-feminist backlash

Direct criticism of the groups and networks which foster anti-feminist backlash is a further, important strategy. There are four key criticisms to offer. Such groups (1) represent a hostile and misogynist reassertion of patriarchal power, (2) offer profoundly inaccurate accounts of gender, and have strategies and solutions which are (3) dangerous for women and children and (4) limiting for men themselves. With regard to the last point, for example, men's and fathers' rights groups neglect the forms of disadvantage or pain which men actually experience, focus on the wrong targets, do not generate appropriate services for men, and antagonise potential supporters (Flood, 2004, 2012b).

Teaching and learning strategies

Teaching and learning strategies can lessen the likelihood of resistance. The teaching processes used, the environment of the learning, the content and the educators all make a difference. For example, research on diversity training finds that resistance is reduced if:

- the training involves small groups
- there is clarity of agenda, time, task and space
- effective facilitation of 'in the moment' interactions occurs
- there are clear interactive norms
- ongoing support is provided post-training (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008).

More widely, meta-analysis finds that diversity training is more likely to have a significant impact if the teaching involves active instruction, longer duration (four hours or more) and allows social interaction (Kalinoski et al., 2013).

Teaching and learning strategies must take place within a context of wider organisational and institutional change. As evaluations, reviews and meta-analyses of violence prevention and sexuality and relationships education emphasise, whole-of-organisation or institution-wide approaches are necessary to maximise program effectiveness (Ellis, 2008; Fulu, Kerr-Wilson, & Lang, 2014; Gibbons, 2013; Gleeson, Kearney,

Leung, & Brislane, 2015; Hester & Westmarland, 2005; Tutty et al., 2002).

There is a wealth of information on how to teach about social justice, including gender justice. While this is particularly relevant for formal educational settings, it also provides valuable guidance in any context where one is seeking to generate support for a gender equality initiative.

In the short term, to reduce defensiveness and resistance, we must provide people with a balance of challenge and support: challenge to privilege, and support to foster personal and collective readiness to make change. Goodman (2001) provides a detailed account of how to do this, emphasising that creating a safe, respectful and supportive environment is key. For example:

- Discuss common reactions to the material in order to pre-empt and defuse resistance.
- Provide clear structure and expectations to allay participants' concerns about confrontation and embarrassment.
- Create engaging learning spaces for honest conversations (Ouyang, 2014).
- Affirm people's self-concepts, for example by noting with men that other men have worked for social justice, such that they are more able to sustain threats to their worldviews without becoming defensive.
- Ensure that participants feel heard and respected, including acknowledging their (perceived) experiences of mistreatment or injustice (without necessarily accepting their views or experiences as valid or real), because people focused on their own pain and needs will find it harder to attend to or care about the misfortune of others.
- 'Surface' peoples' resistance, acknowledge it, and explore it (Karp & Sammour, 2000).
- Provide opportunities for frequent feedback (Goodman, 2001).

Important dimensions of teaching about gender equality

Alongside these general processes, several other dimensions of teaching and communicating about gender equality are important: the content, the strategies, and the educators.

Content

The content of teaching on gender equality is critical, as the discussion of framing above suggests. Communications about gender equality, whether in a presentation to the board or an email announcement, should embody the framing strategies discussed. Gender justice, like other forms of social justice, should be grounded in a conceptual framework that emphasises privilege, oppression and power (Lechuga, Clerc, & Howell, 2009). It is vital for social justice education to emphasise the critical examination of privilege as the other side to oppression, disadvantage and social exclusion (Applebaum, 2010; Goodman, 2001; Heldke & O'Connor, 2004; Johnson, 2001; Kimmel, 2002b; Lechuga et al., 2009; Pease, 2010).

Teaching strategies

There is a well-developed scholarship on effective teaching practice in behaviour change areas such as violence prevention and sexuality education, and its principles are relevant more widely: such education must address key 'risk factors' or relevant determinants of the issue at hand. It must be of sufficient duration and intensity to effect change, it should be participatory and interactive, and it should be provided

by skilled educators (Flood, Fergus, & Heenan, 2009). Such features also enhance the likely impact of diversity training, as meta-analysis documents (Kalinowski et al., 2013).

Specific teaching strategies, in addition, have been recommended in the literature on social justice pedagogy as effective ways to foster critical consciousness:

- The use of personal stories of privilege and oppression (Castania et al., 2017)
- Role-playing, simulations, and immersion (Goodman, 2001; Lechuga et al., 2009)
- Real life situations and contexts; Community-based research (Adelabu, 2014; Goodman, 2001)
- Men listening to women and women's experience (Klindera, Levack, Mehta, Ricardo, & Verani, 2008)
- Discovering information: gathering data, using interviews and surveys, etc. (Goodman, 2001)
- Fostering empathy (Goodman, 2001)
- Engaging emotions (R. L. Allen & Rossatto, 2009); Generating discomfort (Boler, 2004)
- Appealing to moral, ethical, or spiritual values (Goodman, 2001)
- Encouraging collective responsibility for social injustice (Boyd, 2004)
- Drawing on mentors, female or male, with experience and expertise in gender politics
- Facilitating a sociological imagination, including an awareness of social structures and power relations (Haddad & Lieberman, 2002).

Teaching strategies developed specifically for members of privileged groups – ‘pedagogies of the privileged’ – also have developed in social justice education, inspired by Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed (Breault, 2003; Curry-Stevens, 2007; Frueh, 2007; Goodman, 2001; Kimmel, 2002b; Lee, 2002; van Gorder, 2007). For example, Curry-Stevens (2007) identifies six steps for educating members of privileged groups about oppression and privilege:

- Development of awareness of the existence of oppression
- Understanding the structural dynamics that hold oppression in place
- Locating oneself as being oppressed
- Locating oneself as privileged
- Understanding the benefits that accrue to one's privilege
- Understanding oneself as being implicated in others' oppression and acknowledging one's oppressor status.

Such processes can be incorporated in education and training on gender issues with men or within mixed-sex groups.

Educators

Knowledgeable and skilled educators are vital to the effective delivery of education and training on gender equality (Flood et al., 2009). While they must have content expertise, they are more likely to be effective if

they also are authentic, credible, empathetic and open-hearted. They should have engaged in their own critical self-reflection, they should not have a punitive orientation towards members of the privileged group, and they should be respectful and compassionate (Goodman, 2001).

Insights from science communication

A complementary set of recommendations for effective ways of countering misinformation and denial comes from the field of science communication. One insight is that focusing only on debunking ‘alt-facts’ or untrue and misleading statements is ineffective (Hooker, 2017). Other strategies have proven more effective.

Inoculating against misinformation

Inoculation is a persuasion strategy that induces resistance to persuasion by exposing individuals to a small dose of arguments against an idea, followed by criticism of those arguments (Perloff, 2017), using the same logic as for vaccines. By exposing people to a weak form of antifeminist argument, and then explaining the fallacies it uses, we can neutralise antifeminist persuasion (Cook, 2015b). A meta-analysis finds that inoculation is effective in increasing resistance to particular messages (Banas & Rains, 2010), and recent experimental studies continue to find that inoculation can be effective at neutralising misinformation (Cook, Lewandowsky, & Ecker, 2017).

Highlighting facts, not myths

It is important to ‘bust the myths’ – to refute the misinformation that informs resistance to gender equality. A common strategy is to highlight and debunk common myths, using a ‘Myths and Facts’ approach. However, this can backfire, in that by focusing on the myth it may make people more familiar with it and reinforce it (Cook, 2015a). Instead, a Fact–Myth–Fallacy structure is likely to be more effective:

- Lead with the fact, not the myth
- Provide an explicit warning before providing the myth
- Explain the fallacy that the myth uses to distort the facts (Cook, 2015a).

Identifying fallacies

Part of inoculation is explaining the problematic techniques used to create myths or misinformation. If people can understand these, they are less likely to be persuaded by faulty claims. In science for example, science deniers use five techniques to distort facts: fake experts, logical fallacies, impossible expectations (unrealistic or unreasonable standards of proof), cherry picked evidence and conspiracy theories (Diethelm & McKee, 2009)

Acknowledging doubts and fears

When people express doubts or concerns about the risks communicated to them, it is best to acknowledge these. There is evidence that simply showing people *more* data can make one’s views look more like propaganda, make opposing arguments more memorable and amplify people’s worries (Hooker, 2017).

Conclusion

Efforts to make progress towards gender equality will, perhaps inevitably, generate some degree of resistance and backlash. Backlash has typical features and foundations. Yet there are ways to limit the extent

or intensity of backlash, and even prevent its initial occurrence. This report has outlined a host of strategies – how to engage organisations at the level of structures and systems; how to frame or communicate gender equality initiatives; and how to educate and engage participants about gender equality – in order to respond to and prevent backlash.

Our literature review demonstrates that, while there is a considerable range of literature on theorising and understanding backlash, there is limited empirical research on existing strategies for preventing and responding to backlash. Further research is needed to comprehensively review and evaluate responses to backlash, and the effectiveness or otherwise of the strategies proposed here.

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Appendix: Review methodology

The reviewers searched for published literature using Google Scholar and scholarly electronic databases of published literature available via the QUT library and the UTas library including: ProQuest, EBSCO, Muse, PsycINFO, Web of Science, Science Direct, Hein Online, SSRN, Trove and Dissertation Abstracts International. For relevant sources identified, we then expanded the sample by searching citing articles, related articles, and articles cited in the references.

The search terms were:

- backlash
- blowback
- resistance
- sexism
- anti-feminism, antifeminism
- reaction
- counter movement
- counter mobilisation
- men's rights
- fathers' rights
- equity
- equality
- gender
- privilege
- diversity
- gender mainstreaming
- multiculturalism
- feminism
- anti-racism
- climate change denial
- xenophobia
- populism
- colourblind

We included all types of studies and population groups in our review, because much of the relevant literature is qualitative, and the quantitative studies are not comparable due to the wider variety of disciplines and topics relevant to backlash and resistance. We excluded studies that lacked substantial discussion of backlash or resistance and those that were not applicable to the Australian context. Only studies published in English were cited.

The evidence review draws primarily on literature in the gender equality field. We have not comprehensively reviewed the broader literature examining backlash and resistance in other areas of public health and social change (for example, tobacco control, HIV and AIDS, vaccination), due to the limited scope and timeframe of the review.