

## To The SA Royal Commission into Domestic Violence.

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17/8/24

I am writing as an individual citizen not representing any organisation. I am a 78 yr old man with extensive and varied professional, academic, and life experience. All contribute to my views on the scourge of Domestic Violence. (DV) I am concerned that the Royal Commission could devolve into a binary debate, such as happens so often in the media, that misses the complexity of this societal problem, and ends up further demonising men.

The notion of toxic masculinity is one that's easy to bandy about but is counterproductive and simplistic. It is not saying much by way of response to reason that if there is toxic masculinity then there must be toxic femininity.

In the media when the subject of DV is raised analysed and commented upon very rarely is the most important question of 'why' raised. I hope and trust the Commission will do that. That 'why' can be applied to individual cases and to the wider social problem. No doubt there will be threads of

common ground between the two. 'Why' leads to understanding and understanding leads to solutions.

- Experience of Domestic Violence

I have pertinent experience in DV. When two adults live under the same roof in an intimate relationship no one outside can possibly know the dynamics that hold it together, blow it apart, or maintain it in function or dysfunction. As a man with no history of violence against anybody, I know what it is like to discover that potential within myself in the context of a relationship.

Only on reflection did I come to understand the initial attraction, love leading to marriage, and then complete breakdown including violence perpetrated against me as the final strategy into goading me into violence. The consequences were not physically damaging to either party.

After much reflection I realised that my partner's most fundamental position in life was that of a victim. Given her childhood there was some good reason for that but it meant that for much of the time, to maintain her position, she would blame and accuse rather than accept any responsibility. She would go to extraordinary lengths to maintain her position. What victims need to maintain their position is a persecutor. (See

the Karpman Triangle). The totality and nature of our relationship was much more than this but if such a basic need is not met at least most of the time then the relationship will usually down.

I realised I had played a role in this narrative and must accept responsibility for that. I maintained my basic life position too and it so happens that it was not that of persecutor. Whatever other deficiencies I may have I was never involved in DV again.

I recount this experience to make the point that people make choices about their intimate partners very often from subconscious ill-informed places. The only resolution I found was in honest self-reflection to understand the choices and decisions I had made. I also realised that relationships evolve and change as do individuals - or not.


The most heated differences in a relationship can easily become a power play. Men will tend to resort to physical means to resolve matters because generally they are physically stronger. Women will tend to call on their strengths which tend to be emotional and/or psychological manipulation. And each can exacerbate the other.

In addressing the issue of DV therefore the emphasis needs to be on the relationship rather than who perpetrated or initiated the violence.



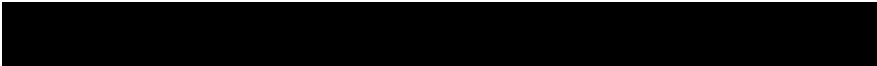
- Experience of Workplace Violence

Regularly in the news we read stories about harassment and bullying in the workplace. And often it is men who are the perpetrators. However, I have experience of working 2IC to a woman who undermined me in devious ways and made my working life hell and ultimately untenable. The woman was a manipulative bully, who abused her position of power and caused me considerable grief and hardship. There was absolutely no justification for it ie my ability and qualifications to do the job were well proven and unquestionable. It felt like violence because my life and livelihood, and that of my children, was violated.



- Violence in Society

Violence is endemic in our society. Our economy, our politics and our judicial system are competitive and adversarial. This means that once engaged in whatever battle one is waging, in whatever sector - the primary aim is to win. And if there are winners there are inevitably losers. Justice, truth, reconciliation, and restoration all take the hindmost.



- Violent Language

ASIO chief Mike Burgess's recent comments directed to leaders and the media and others to be careful with language merely confirms that language can be used in a violent way and to incite violence. Our political leaders regularly try to score political points through personal insults and exaggeration that distorts truth and violates personal dignity. This is a form of language violence from the very people who should be setting a better standard.



- Violence in Sport & Entertainment

Sport and entertainment glorify various forms of violence.



- Violence in Finance

From the complex labyrinth that is the world of finance we hear daily about the scams, rorts, grifting and gouging that hurts people in ways that must surely feel violent and for which restitution is often very difficult.



- Government Violence

The Robodebt scandal was an example of how Governments can do violence to its citizens.

The justice system detains and locks up children often to be mistreated in that environment eg the use of spit hoods. Currently some states are debating whether children as young as 12 should be held as criminally equivalent to adults. The average age for brain maturity is mid-20s. What could be more violent than this cruel treatment of children.

Australia's treatment of asylum seekers includes locking people up for years without hope. Given the consequences for their mental and physical health this treatment can best be described as violent.

Modern Australia is built on the violence of colonisation. Somewhere between 60 and 100 thousand indigenous people were slaughtered in the takeover of their lands and culture. Until recently Aboriginal people were not even regraded as being human. I have met many people who maintain this view. The reality of this violent history is too often denied, not spoken about or politically weaponised.

People who commit violence whether domestic or otherwise will often feel powerless through low self-esteem. First nations people have suffered oppression, loss of culture and discrimination their whole lives. One inevitable effect of this is that they will feel not only disempowered but ashamed of who they are.

Just as the resolution of DV depends on reconciliation and accountability between two people, reconciliation as a nation depends on the reconciliation of two peoples, the colonisers and the indigenes.

As we keep being told by a variety of politicians and various leading figures with a platform, we are a very wealthy country. But that economic wealth is increasingly distributed between fewer and fewer people. While millionaires and billionaires are increasing, 5 million ordinary people are struggling to survive, and thousands are homeless every night. These disparities and the pressures they create are a kind of systemic violence which cannot be sustained and often play out in DV.

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- Changes in Family Models

Like all people of my age, I have lived through a time when the roles of men and women in society have changed dramatically, particularly for

women, and obviously that affects men. I was brought up in a time when the man/husband was the primary bread winner, and the woman/wife was the home keeper and primary child carer.

Although on a tight budget this model worked. I and my siblings had the invaluable benefit of an ever present caring dependable mother. And we felt safe in the predictability of our father's secure employment. There were imperfections and tensions, but we have reaped the rewards of this stability. We felt valued, nurtured, and loved and learned to trust our parents and thus ourselves

In their quest for equality, which I support 100%, women have achieved much and there is still further to go particularly in equal pay. But it would be naïve to pretend that these gains come without losses, just as all gains do. Now that women are much more integrated into the economy they can work more easily. But the economy has adjusted too in that now it is virtually impossible for the average family to survive on a single income. This creates pressure on women to work whether they want to or not - as if home keeping and child nurturing are not work! The losers are children and men. Children are farmed out to so-called care much earlier than is healthy for their development, and men's status in the family is diminished.

The conglomerate of stresses accrued from these profound family and economic changes can also lead all too often to DV.

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- Violence in Religion


Although we are supposed to be a secular society religion remains a political force and still plays a large part in many people's lives. As a life-long atheist I have observed how deep-seated paternalism and misogyny are in the Abrahamic religions ie Judaism, Islam, Christianity. Men are more powerful and privileged over women. This imbalance is behind much of the child abuse and DV that breeds in these religious cultures. I hope the Commission confronts and does not defer to the too often assumed moral superiority of religious people, and recognises the it is a factor in the perpetration of DV.

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- Violence in Social Media

I am sure the Commission will look at the part Social Media (in its anti-social aspects) plays in the alienation of various groups against each other and as a tool in perpetrating other forms of violence such as stalking and demonising.



### Conclusion

In conclusion, DV, is hardly surprising when so many forms of violence are endemic, even normalised, in our society. The cultural change required will be difficult. The law will have a major part to play but education and an open honest conversation about the social values which determine coherence or breakdown must be encouraged.

When it comes to understanding DV, context is everything, whether it be the context of the home or the wider social context. And these two are not mutually exclusive.

