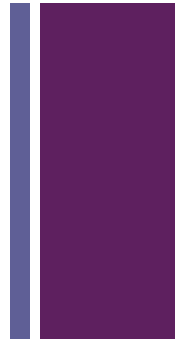




**“Public Health just
doesn’t get it!”:**
Addressing resistance
to a public health
approach to sexual
violence prevention

Matthew Huffman, MOCADSV
Ashley Maier, CALCASA
Jonathan Yglesias, WA DOH
...and **YOU!**

+ Where it all began...



Public
health is

_____.

+ So I studied it.



“Public Health Just Doesn’t Get It”: The resistance to using a Public Health framework in social justice movements.



Ashley Maier, MSW

Oregon Attorney General’s Sexual Assault Task Force

AIM

This study exposes the resistance to using a public health framework to address social justice issues and prepares practitioners to anticipate, understand, and effectively respond to it.

BACKGROUND

The public health framework has increasingly gained attention and credibility for use in prevention work, yet has also faced unexpected criticism. In fact, many public health practitioners are ill-prepared for the resistance they face when working to prevent issues like gendered violence, human trafficking, hate crimes, and other social justice issues. Many who work in the movements criticize public health, saying it utilizes a disease-oriented model and does not address oppression or social justice. Public Health, however, is very compatible with social justice and an anti-oppression framework.

METHODS

Information was collected via confidential one-on-one interviews with community-based advocates in Oregon in 2009 and 2010.

RESULTS

What is the resistance?

Public Health is a medical model, with a history of use for disease prevention, which doesn’t easily transfer to issues like violence prevention (which has more social than biological causes).

It doesn’t address the root causes of complex social problems, just the risk factors.

Public Health is about HEALTH. What does that have to do with social justice?

Public Health acts like it owns prevention – oppressed communities have been doing this work for ever, just not using these inaccessible terms like “primary prevention.”

Public Health just tells people what to do. It doesn’t care about eliminating injustice.

Public Health ignores gender. It ignores patriarchy. It doesn’t acknowledge the gender-based nature of many problems.

How do individuals reconcile their concerns?

We use the Public Health approach as a complement to a number of other approaches: human rights, criminal justice, gender equity. It all works together to provide a comprehensive analysis of and response to a community-wide problem.

For me, Public Health provides the tools I need to put theory into action.

It wasn’t until we learned the Public Health model of violence prevention that we really understood the value of data informing our efforts and the importance of thinking beyond the individual.

Public Health is just another way of wording all the things I learned in Community Psychology. It’s all about the health of a community... finding out why people are falling into the river and stopping that rather than pulling out bodies. It provides a model for strategic action.

It helped us to define violence and abuse as an issue of health equity. We hadn’t thought about the fact that it stems from health disparities before. Social determinants of health – those are totally based in oppression.

CONCLUSION

The quest for social justice is the driving force of ethical Public Health practice.

David Lee, MPH

CA Coalition Against Sexual Assault

A SOCIAL JUSTICE MODEL OF PUBLIC HEALTH



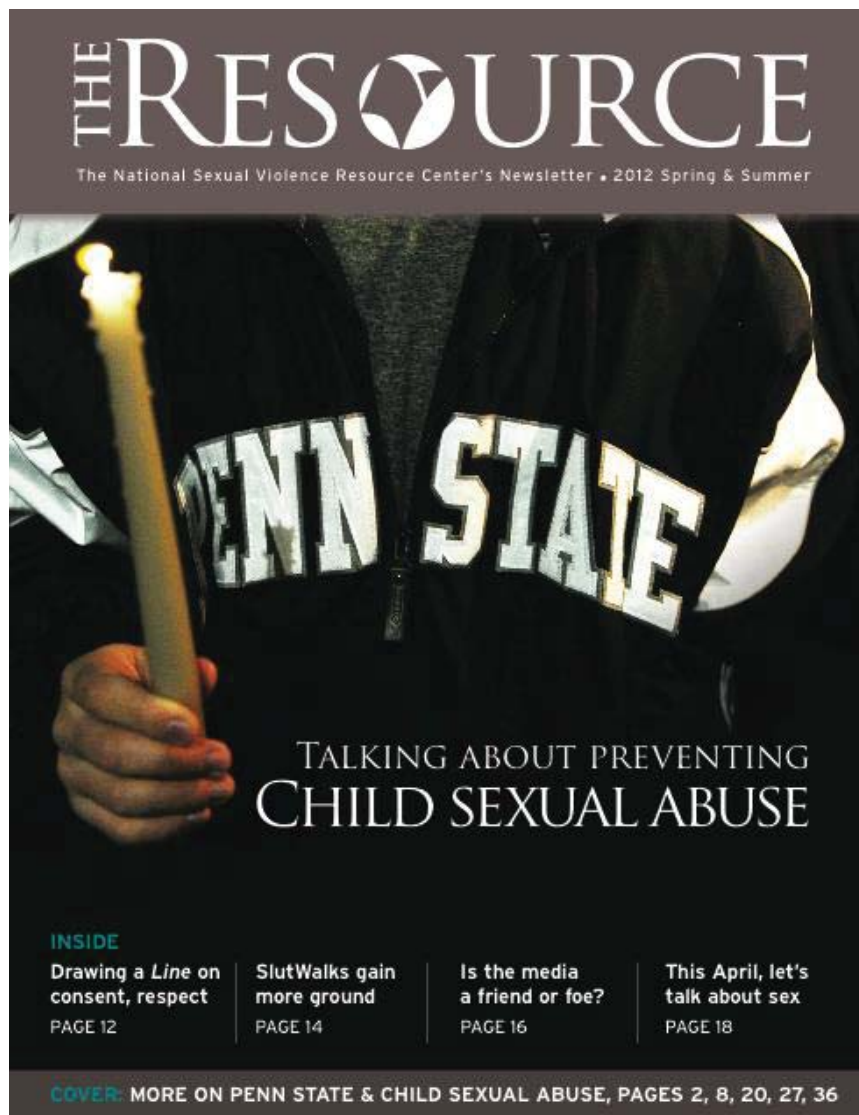
REFERENCES

Lee, David. (2009). A Social Justice Model of Public Health: Integrating Prevention of Violence Against Women [Video podcast]. Retrieved from <http://www.preventconnect.org/>

CONTACT

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+ And then...



PREVENTION APPROACHES

Public health approach is comprehensive way to improve prevention outcomes

BY ASHLEY MAIER
PREVENTION PROGRAM COORDINATOR, OREGON SEXUAL ASSAULT TASK FORCE

Successful sexual violence prevention work requires the use of multiple strategies and approaches. Some of the most common approaches used today are:

- Gender equity: Promotes healthy notions of gender
- Human rights: Frames sexual health as a basic human right
- Criminal justice: Focuses on offender accountability
- Public health: Concentrates on the health and well-being of populations

As I began work for the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force (ORSATF) in 2009, I noticed resistance to and questions about the last approach, the public health approach.

The public health model outlines four steps:

- 1) Define the problem
- 2) Identify risk and protective factors
- 3) Develop and test prevention strategies
- 4) Ensure widespread adoption

Its core principles include the health of the public, data-informed approaches, cultural competency, and prevention.

I came to ORSATF after four years of community health work, surrounded by public health researchers and practitioners who approached their work through an anti-oppression lens. To me, this work was about promoting health. I realized that my perspective was not universal when community partners and others asked me why I kept using the term "sexual health" or why I considered this a "health" problem.

SEE THE POSTER ONLINE

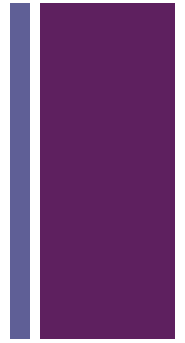
To view Ashley's full poster, pictured at right, visit <http://tinyurl.com/bt88hbs>

After many conversations, I asked to record people's comments about the issue.

I had two main concerns. On the one hand, it seemed that sexual violence prevention practitioners believed that public health does not address social justice. In addition, their stated experience with public health practitioners indicated that social justice was not the core of every public health practitioner's work. My findings confirmed these concerns. With statements such as, "Public health is a medical model, with a history of use for disease prevention, which doesn't easily transfer to issues like violence prevention [which has more social than biological causes]," and "Public health ignores gender. It ignores patriarchy. It doesn't acknowledge the 'gender-based' nature of many problems," I wondered why it was that some social justice activists embraced the model. If this was the prevailing opinion within social justice circles, how did these individuals reconcile their concerns?

What I found was that individuals who embraced the public health approach thought comprehensively. They realized that public health is one model of

+ Still resistance?

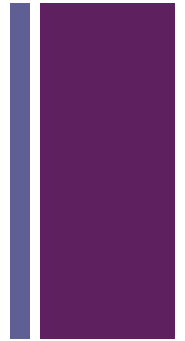


Yes



No

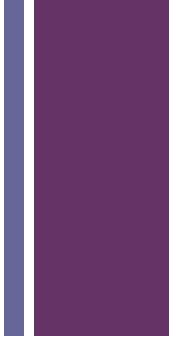
+ Still resistance?



Yes



No





Defining Public Health

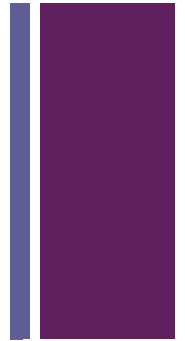


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Perception

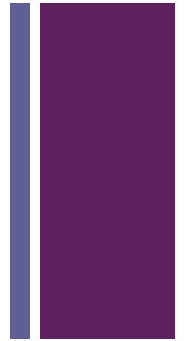
+ Medical Model

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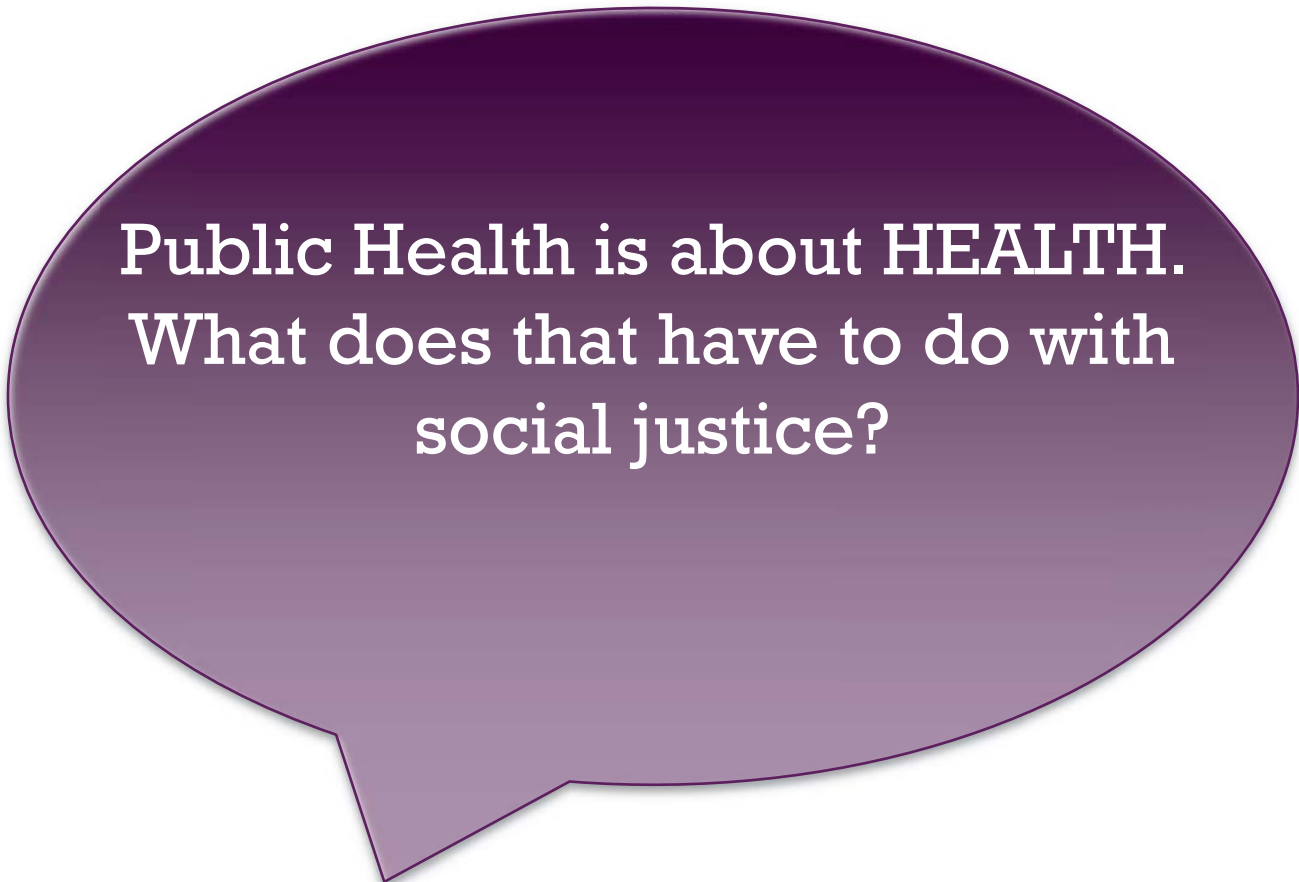


+ Limited

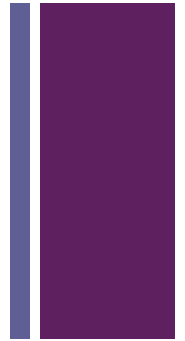
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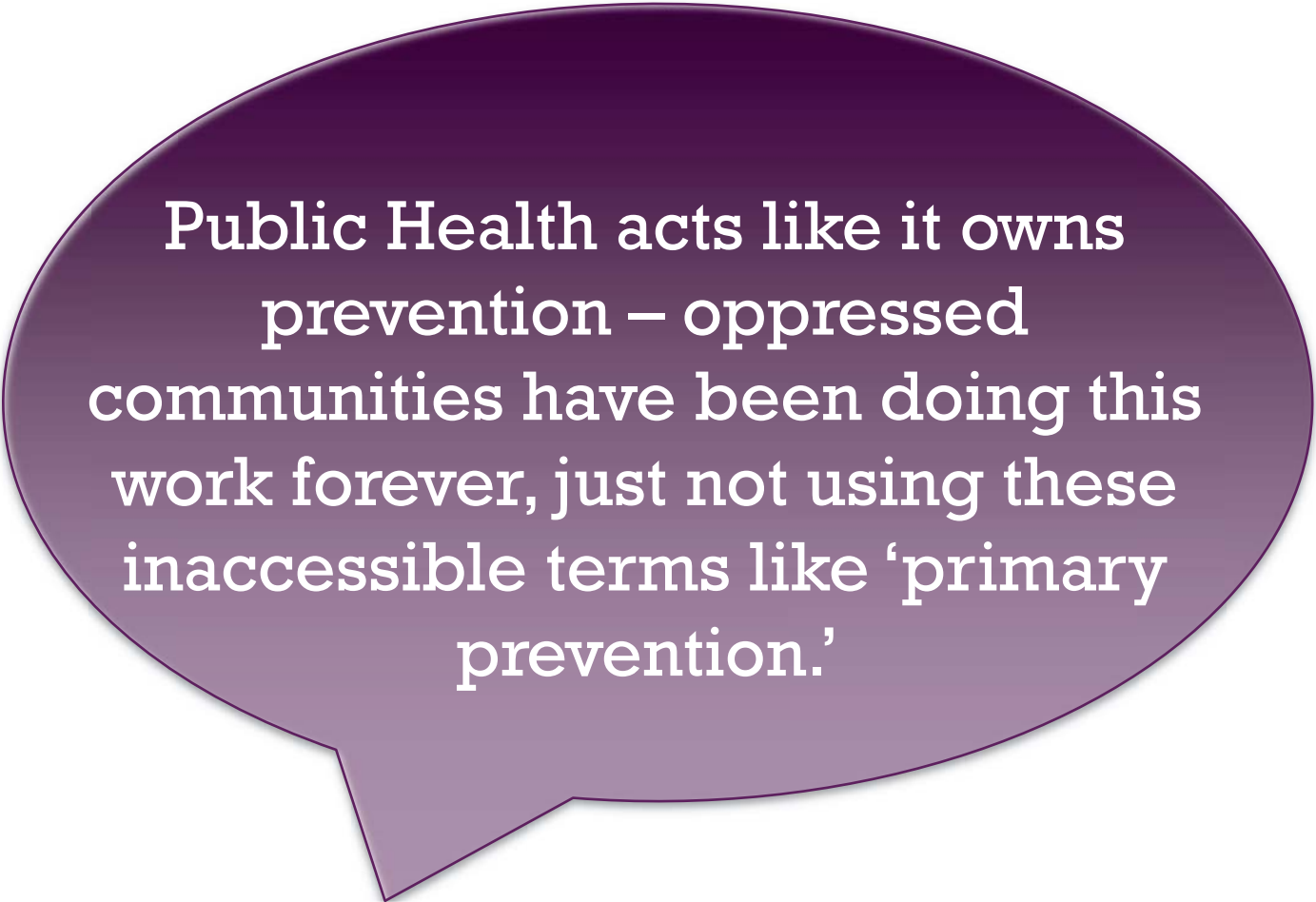
+ Ignores Social Justice



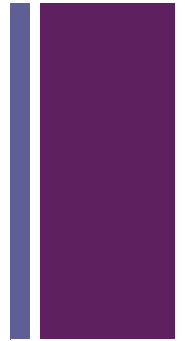
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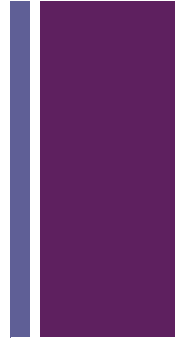
+ Arrogant



Public Health acts like it owns prevention – oppressed communities have been doing this work forever, just not using these inaccessible terms like ‘primary prevention.’

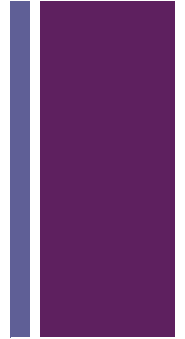


+ Directive/Behavior-
obsessed/Shallow



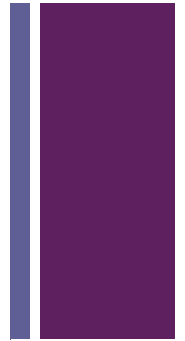
Public Health just tells people
what to do. It doesn't care about
eliminating injustices.

+ Directive/Behavior-
obsessed/Shallow



Public Health just tells people
what to do. It doesn't care about
eliminating injustices.

+ Neutral



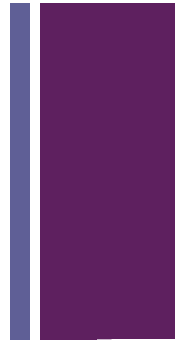
Public Health ignores gender. It ignores patriarchy. It doesn't acknowledge the 'gender-based' nature of many problems.



Suggestions

+ Love Others

We use the Public Health approach as a compliment to a number of other approaches: human rights, criminal justice, gender equity. It all works together to provide a comprehensive analysis of and response to a community-wide problem.

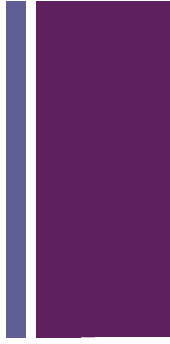
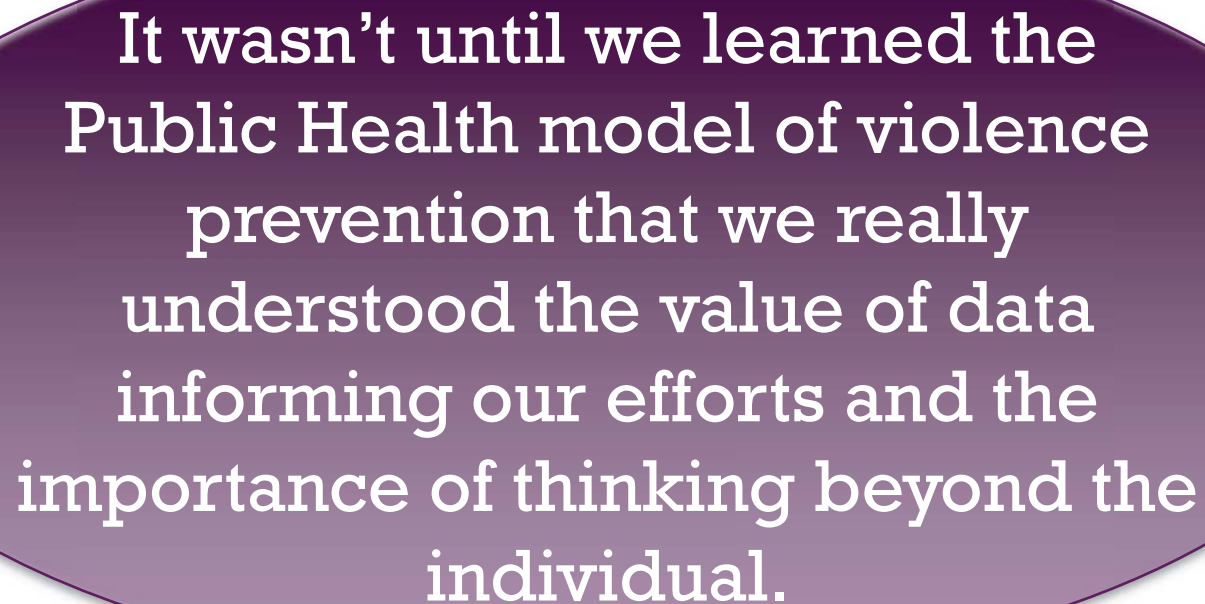


+ Accept Limits



For me, Public Health provides the tools I need to put theory into action.

+ Patiently Point Out Perks



It wasn't until we learned the Public Health model of violence prevention that we really understood the value of data informing our efforts and the importance of thinking beyond the individual.

+ Shift the Lens & Language

Public Health is just another way of wording all the things I learned in Community Psychology. It's all about the health of a community...finding out why people are falling into this river and stopping that rather than pulling out bodies. It provides a model for strategic action.

+ Focus on Health Equity

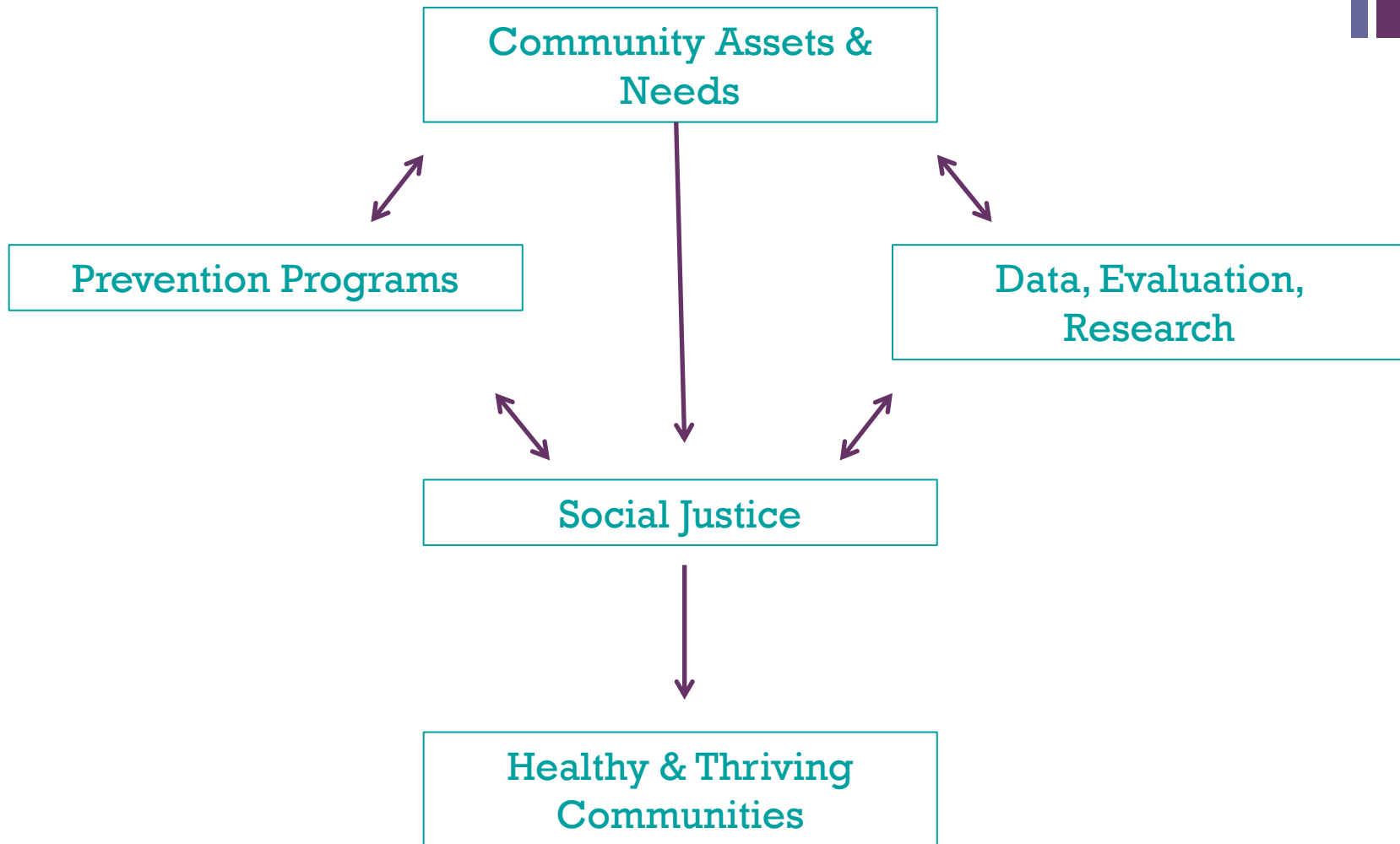
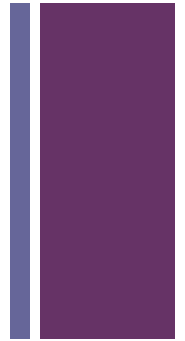
It helped us to define violence and abuse as an issue of health equity. We hadn't thought about the fact that it stems from health disparities before. Social determinants of health – those are totally based in oppression.



+

So...

+ It's all about social justice.





I love public health.