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Anna: The content of this podcast contains references to sexual harassment and assault, and violence against women. If anyone is suffering from the result or incidence of anything we are discussing, we encourage you to seek professional help. You can call Beyond Blue on 1300224636. Lifeline on 131114 or you can call 1800RESPECT, which is a national hotline for sexual assault, domestic violence, and provides information and counselling.

Anna: Hello and welcome to this podcast, where we will be discussing the impact of the MeToo movement in the workplace today. I'm Anna Tantau, a member of CPA Australia, and I've been a public practitioner, a public servant and also worked in industry over the last 35 years. Presently, I'm a co-deputy chair of the CPA women's committee. Our committee is dedicated to raising awareness of the incidence of sexual harassment in the workplace. Looking into what is being done to reduce the occurrence, and support those who have suffered or been the target of this misconduct.

Anna: The MeToo movement was started in response to these issues. Originally founded by Tarana Burke, a New York civil rights activist in 2006. The phrase was used to raise awareness of the high incidence of sexual abuse and assault in society, both in the past and continuing today.

Anna: In 2017, the MeToo movement gained exposure as a hashtag, following accusations of sexual misconduct against Harvey Weinstein. American actor Alyssa Milano encouraged victims of sexual harassment to tweet about it, and therefore to show how big and how widespread the problem really is. So powerful has the #MeToo movement become, that it was named the Cambridge Oxford word of the year in 2018.

Anna: But what does this mean for professional women today? What are workplaces doing to take greater responsibility to ensure that sexual misconduct in the workplace is prevented or where it does occur, how is it dealt with? What support is there for the victims who report sexual misconduct or discrimination?

Anna: We recognise that there still exists low level gender bias in many workplaces and the effects of being subject to this should not be trivialised. We recognise that some groups must suffer a much greater incidence of abuse or bias because of intersectional factors such as race, religion, or culture beliefs, as well as the agenda. Today, I'm discussing these issues with Dr. Karen Morley, Prue Gilbert, and Apsara Sabaratnem.

Anna: Apsara is a teacher of organisation behaviour and managing diversity at university and has developed courses in the area of management and marketing for [inaudible 00:03:23] University. She's also the secretary of Multicultural Grains Victoria, and a committee member of Stand Together against Racism. Apsara is an intersectional feminist and a climate activist, and believes that businesses have a moral and social responsibility to shift away from carbon intensity industries, to ones that are kinder on our planet.

Anna: Dr. Karen Morley's vision is to help leaders get more impact with their teams for less effort. To invigorate leaders so that they're energised, not exhausted. Connected, not fractured, and can perform at their very best. That increases their motivation, productivity and influence. Besides being an executive coach and leadership facilitator, Karen has held executive roles in government and higher education. Her approach is informed by these experiences. Karen has coached leaders in organisations such as BHP Billiton, KPMG, RSCV, and many more. Her books, Gender Balanced Leadership: An Executive Guide, and Lead Like a Coach: How to Get the Most Out of Any Team, as well as her whitepapers, are a way for her to share her ongoing learning about what it takes to be a good leader.

Anna: Marie Claire called Prue Gilbert out as the anti-discrimination guru. Vogue named Prue a game changer. Prue was named as one of Australia's 100 women of influence in 2018. Her business, Grace Papers won the Australian Human Rights Business Award for addressing pregnancy related discrimination. Grace Papers is a unique digital platform that provides working parents with the strategies, language and framework to navigate pregnancy, parental leave and career and the challenges of being a working parent. Prue's impact extends far beyond her role as anti-discrimination and gender equality advisor. Working to put the spotlight on human rights issues that detrimentally impact women. These include gender equality in sport, an advisory board member for AFL players association for the women's league. Sexual harassment on the legal steering committee of Now Australia. Workplace discrimination for same sex parents. An advisor at some of Australia's largest organisations and every day sexism in our schools, through the #ShareTheGrassCampaign, which is being piloted.

Anna: So first, I would like to ask Apsara to provide some historical context of the MeToo movement.

Apsara: Thank you very much Anna. So I think you kind of already talked a little bit about Tarana Burke, so I'll just talk a little bit more about how the movement actually came about.

Apsara: Tarana herself is a victim of sexual violence and that happened during her teenage years and she setup this movement initially to work with women of colour, so that women of colour who'd actually experienced sexual violence were able to come forward and share their stories. And she also wanted to have a central point where she could actually include resources that these women could actually access.

Apsara: One of the things, and the central point of this movement and something that we should always keep in mind, and one that we should never really deviate away from, because that's something that she's quite concerned about as well, is that the movement is all about dismantling the building blocks of sexual violence, which really centres around power and privilege. And understanding that some people who are in these powerful positions abuse that privilege that they have and they prey on people, especially women, and in some cases also men because those people don't enjoy the same privileges.

Apsara: And one of the things that she also wants us to be very conscious about, and I think one that we need to be careful about when we're talking about these kinds of things,

especially sexual assault, is she doesn't want it to be something that's just a collection or curation of stories of sexual assault. She really wants the focus to be much broader than that, and one where survivors can also share stories of what are the practises that they're putting in place in order to actually move forward. And I think that's something also organisations can take that onboard as well is, we do know that people have experienced sexual assault, what are the practises that we can put in place to support employees who've experienced sexual assault.

Anna: Thank you Apsara. So, following on from that, what is sexual harassment and what form does it take in the workplace?

Apsara: So, I'm going to answer that with a few different things. First of all, starting off by defining what is sexual harassment and then provide some studies and some information about it. And then maybe look, go more holistically and look much broader at the societal factors that is actually leading to this as well.

Apsara: To be very clear, sexual harassment is a form of workplace intimidation, and some of the forms it might take in your workplace might be someone experiencing unwelcome sexual advances. It could be a colleague or a boss using sexual innuendo when they're communicating. You might be walking past one of your colleagues computers and there might be some sexual imagery on their computer that you might find quite unwelcome. It could be even something as simple as intrusive questions about your personal life, like your sex life, which you don't feel is appropriate. So that's what sexual harassment can take, the kind of forms it can take in a workplace.

Apsara: What I'll talk to you a little bit about as well is, just to show you how pervasive sexual assault is in this country, I find some statistics from three studies that were undertaken, and these three studies, I will definitely provide the links so that they can be made available on the show notes. So, the first study is the sexual harassment prevalence survey, that was conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2012, and that's very frightening because in that study it found one in four women, and one in six men over the age of 15 experience sexual assault in our workplaces. That's in the perceiving five years. Now, when you think about that, that is a frightening figure.

Apsara: Continuing on with that, there was another study that was undertaken by Safe Work Australia, and this was taken in 2014, and in that study was found that 17% of responders had experienced discomfort due to listening to sexual humour. So again, we're talking about something that is less severe, but quite prevalent in our workplaces.

Apsara: And, there was another study that I thought that was quite interesting as well, and one that kind of adds to this picture. Is a study that was initiated by the Victorian Trades Hall Council, and that study found that 64% of women who participated in that study experienced sexual harassment or violence in their workplace. And 19% actually opted to leave secure work as a result of what they were experiencing. So rather than addressing the problem, they felt it was much easier for them to leave the workplace. That says there's a massive issue, that it's an issue in our organisations, but it's also an issue in our society. And I think we need to look at the societal context of why that is an issue.

Apsara: So, we live in a masculine society. Australia is a very masculine society where we actually value heteronormative values. This does actually create a massive issue, because it normalises sex and gender binaries, and this is something that we also have to recognise has a historical context of colonialism, which was introduced by colonial rulers to this country. And this heteronormative construct that we have, which is centred around straightness, is a massive issue and so, what that effectively means when we talk about privilege before, straight white men, are in very privileged positions and other forms of identity are often denigrated and marginalised, and this means that if you have an organisation that is really hyper-masculine, where there's hyper-masculine cultures and permeate those organisations and these are reinforced through gender stereotypes, we know that harassment is more likely to occur in those kinds of organisations.

Apsara: So I just want to do one last bit, which is talk about, what does this mean for organisations. We need to really address the fact that we have an issue with heterosexism and that is a massive problem within our organisations, and that's because within organisations, we have an expectation that people will take on male traits of competitiveness, assertiveness and aggression. And anyone that doesn't actually present with those kinds of traits can often be targets, because they're seen as easy targets and quite vulnerable. And so I think it's really important for us to recognise that a lot of gender violence is as a result of this kind of national culture, which then permeates through our organisation cultures.

Anna: Thank you Apsara, that is a very insightful answer that has actually given quite a deep explanation of the historical context, as well as the very disturbing statistics. The prevalence of it today in more than 50% of women have experience some form of sexual harassment or discomfort in the workforce and that has led to resignation from secure work.

Anna: So, I'd like to move on and perhaps look at why people have different levels of tolerance or limits to what they can withstand or what they recognise as sexual harassment. Prue, do you have some comments on that?

Prue: Yeah. I think there's a line and understanding exactly what that line consists of is really helpful in determining whether you are actually experiencing sexual harassment or not. And the law says that it's unlawful effectively when it interferes with your ability to perform your job. And the actual definition is, unwelcome sexual conduct where someone would reasonably be offended, humiliated or intimidated. So it needs to be of an act that is sexual, it needs to be offensive or humiliating or intimidating and it needs to be unwelcome.

Prue: So this isn't talking about people being prudish or feeling like you can't say anything or comment on people's appearance anymore. It's actually talking about where it is unwelcome behaviour. So I think it is really important for people to actually understand what is the line.

- Anna: So it goes back to the person who feels that way about a comment or a gesture or something that's being made, rather than someone else telling them whether or not that constitutes sexual harassment. Is that what you're saying?
- Anna: If the recipient of a remark, if that disturbs them and makes them unable to work, then it is sexual harassment for them?
- Prue: Well, the test is what a reasonable person would consider it to be. So you don't need to assess the situation of every single person that you're communicating with. It would be what ... The reasonable standard test if you like, would consider to be inappropriate, offensive, humiliating or intimidating conduct of a sexual nature. And there are many different examples, some of which Apsara gave earlier.
- Prue: It can be comments around somebody wanting to have sexual relations with you that aren't welcome. Sexual relations in a public nature or comments to that effect. It could be comments around what you're wearing. I recall many years ago having somebody continually comment on what I was wearing, and those boots are made for walking, every time I wore certain pairs of boots, and it was unwelcome behaviour. It's always unwelcome.
- Anna: Unwelcome, yes. Okay, so I think from the point of view of organisations, what ... I think it's important to understand what organisations can do to prevent this. So Karen, should an organisation have a workplace code of conduct around this? On what other types of policies or what can organisations do to assist their employees to know, what is acceptable, not acceptable behaviour?
- Karen: Thank you. And I think that MeToo has been fantastic, because what it has done is allowed women to give voice to a whole lot of issues that haven't been on the table for discussion, and that organisations really haven't had to deal with that much in the past. So, now it is out in the open and we can talk about what should women do about that, get safe, get support. But what are organisations doing? And I don't think they're doing anyway near enough, and this is a significant leadership issue.
- Karen: I think that what can organisations and leaders do, should they have policies, should they have codes of conduct? Well maybe they should, but actually often, organisations write a policy, then they put it on the website and then what happens, who knows? So what I tend to think about what are the leadership practises that will make a difference in this area. What should people actually be looking out for on a daily basis, what should they do when they see something that doesn't look okay. How do they support both the person who doesn't feel okay, and how do they call out the behaviour that's not okay. And I think it does come down to tiny actions, small actions every day that actually make quite a big difference.
- Karen: So let's say Sarah has been approached by a senior leader who's not her boss, and he has said to her, I want you to do this for me, something sexual. She's really uncomfortable about that. He has the power in that situation, and he leads her to believe that if she doesn't comply, then life is going to be uncomfortable. And he

doesn't need to do much to make that implication, because he has that much extra power. So, she feels threatened, she feels unsafe.

Karen: What the research is showing now around sexual harassment and what people should be doing in the workplace is that it's not so much about what Sarah needs to do next, it's what's Sarah's boss does next, what Sarah's colleagues do next, what the people in Sarah's network do next, that make the biggest difference. If we really want to shift sexual harassment and bad behaviour. If you shift the context, then that behaviour withers, it just doesn't have a place in the same way.

Karen: So I think leaders need to be talking about safety culture, including psychological, emotional and sexual safety, not just physical safety, as important as that is. So the whole notion of zero harm, is really important. I think they should be training people not for compliance, they should be training people to look out for each other, to set up psychological safety, to have peer networks so that Sarah can go and, she's not going to talk necessarily to her boss because she doesn't feel comfortable. Maybe she'll talk to HR, but maybe she'll talk to Apsara because she knows Apsara's got her back. And they can at least get support and have a discussion about what should I do next.

Karen: Organisations should hold our leaders accountable for their behaviour, not just in terms of whether or not they're harassing others, but what they do about harassment. So what's Sarah's boss going to do about his peer colleague, who's the person who harassed her? So that's where we can actually shift the behaviour, and people need to know that there are supportive places for to go, their employer assistance programme or that peer network for support.

Karen: I think there are a lot of things that organisations can do in practise. There are a lot of things that individual leaders can take on and do, it doesn't require complex policy writing or procedure writing. It's simply about taking good leadership action, when and as you can.

Anna: Yes, so Prue, have you got something to add to that?

Prue: Yeah, just reinforcing really what Karen said. The most recent National Inquiry into sexual harassment that [inaudible 00:22:11] is running, revealed that one in three experiences of sexual harassment were witnessed by another person. So to Karen's point, we need to stop blaming women or asking women, I think every single one of the previous inquiries into sexual harassment has focused on the need for women to report.

Prue: What this data tells us is, it's not just about women reporting, and in fact, looking at most incidents of sexual harassment, it's actually unsafe for the woman herself to speak up, to report and a significant part of that is because the impact of sexual harassment is still underestimated, and not well understood by organisations themselves. It impacts an individual's dignity, it is a fundamental breach of human rights from that perspective, and that's the reason that it is illegal, because it impacts their opportunity to actually fully participate and bring their whole self to their workplace.

Prue: So we need to shift burdens of proof around this and take a more wholistic approach to how we look at it. Where witnesses are involved, we need to actually encourage and teach people to speak out, call it out in the moment and that will far more effectively shift the cultural norms that Apsara was speaking to earlier around creating that supportive culture from a psychological safety perspective.

Prue: But the other part I think organisations really need to focus on is the healing piece. Most people cannot report on sexual harassment because of the impact and the toll that it's taking on them personally, and we underestimate the need for healing to take place. So, in looking at the recommendations that will hopefully come out of this national report, yes we need to see improvements from a legislative perspective, but I think organisations can also shift their thinking around the inadequacies of existing AIP services. You need specialist providers who can listen to the experiences of those who have experienced sexual harassment. Listen and bear witness to their stories, and then start that healing process with them. And if that can be documented in a way and supported by somebody who clinically has that capability, then it still manages the reporting elements from an organisational perspective, but enables the individual to actually seek the support first and foremost, which I think is a big piece that we continue to miss.

Anna: Following on from that, I'm just wondering, how can leaders know whether their team is reporting these issues? How can they know whether their workplace is safe for their team, because sometimes silence means, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is a safe workplace.

Karen: If there's silence, then it's almost certainly not a safe workplace. So there's been a lot of talk recently about the importance of psychological safety and I'm a great advocate of that, because what you need in a workplace, for people to be their best, to bring their best self to work, to get the best kind of work done, is for people to be able to voice concerns and issues, as well as raise ideas, point out mistakes and problems, and feel safe and comfortable doing that.

Karen: And so I think if a leader is focused on growing psychological safety in their team, again, it's not down to Sarah to identify that she's feeling unsafe for the something, she's being sexually harassed. That whole team will be looking out for her, and that leader would be listening to what they're saying.

Karen: So I think that the way the team operates and the way leaders operate is particularly important in that. And I think that a lot of training that happens and there's resource that we'll put up in the show notes from a TEDx talk from Sharon Ravski, and she talks about the impact of sexual harassment training, which is that, if it's compliance based, 25% of people who leave that training are more likely to believe sexual harassment is okay, positive more likely to sexually harass, more likely to accept it. So really understanding the impact that leaders can have is really important. So thinking about the positive things that Prue and Apsara have been saying around, where allies, it's safe to talk about problems and issues, we want to hear about problems and issues, we're going to make response when you tell us what's going on, what we're going to do is support you by providing the right kinds of resources.

- Prue: And just adding into that, when you look at what are the indicators, if there is silence too. Where there is a significant difference in gender representation at leadership levels. Where you have turnover, higher turnover of women than men. You need to start asking questions. Where you have just a few women in teams.
- Prue: It does come back to the point Apsara made earlier and Karen reinforced too around sexual harassment isn't about sex, it's about power dynamics and privilege. So, ensuring that there is inclusivity and gender equity across your teams is the greatest way that you can actually start to mitigate and prevent sexual harassment, rather than focusing on redress.
- Apsara: And I don't think it's about whether or not people notice sexual harassment. I think it's about whether or not people are prepared to act on what they notice.
- Prue: Agree. We actually need people to be ready. Three different statements in their back pocket to call it out. And in fact-
- Apsara: Anyone.
- Prue: ... Anyone, exactly. When we did training years ago when I was general council of the company, we used this training called Law of the Jungle. And what we found is that giving people a language which was not all that sexual harassment actually enabled them to feel more comfortable about calling that out. So in that organisation, we knew that we were having significant impact on the culture when people were starting to say, "Oh you can't say that, that's not Law of the Jungle."
- Prue: So think about the language that makes sense for your culture when you are delivering this kind of training, to enable them to call it out in a way that is less confrontational. I think the expectation to ask somebody to speak up and say, that's sexual harassment, don't do that, is quite an avert way of calling this out, and it's necessary in certain circumstances, when it's at the extreme end of sexual harassment undoubtedly. But the everyday elements need to be called out and nipped in the bud.
- Anna: Yeah, that's a very important power if I'd like to term it that, to give people, to give employees is that ability as you say, those few responses that they can have ready and armed and feel confident to be able to say them, whether they say it happens to them or to someone else, to show their support before the person has even said something perhaps. So, if we're looking at nipping these incidences in the bud, what sort of practical examples can you give of comments that you can make, just to give the message that you're not quite comfortable with that or you're asking the question for people to review their comments or behaviours.
- Anna: So, I'll open that out to everyone to share some thoughts.
- Apsara: So, I think maybe saying, "Oh that's wrong, what you just said." And it might be something as simple as that, because that actually forces a person who is perpetrating that kind of harassment to stop. It's actually, it's got a bit of jarring thing, and what it

does is make them think, hang on, what have I said? And they have to reflect on what they've said.

Apsara: But I also want to add about that. This is a massive issue because we have an issue of bystander effect, and this is what Karen and Prue are talking about. And recognising that there could be multiple people who have actually witness the harassment and no one is willing, there's like a code of silence and again, that's a lot to do with where we also need to encourage all those people to stand up and come forward. So it's really important that we do, recognise that bystander effect is a massive issue and then empower people to be able to come forward. And I think one of things that the union movement really wants, and it's really been pushing for is that we're now getting really good at understanding incidents and accidents that happen in organisations, and really diligently reporting those incidents. We should be moving in the same direction with sexual harassment as well.

Prue: From a practical example, and I did have an experience many years ago, as a very junior member, of sexual harassment, and it was actually a great outcome in terms of the way the organisation managed it. And it was our client, the opposite side, if you like in the transaction that we were conducting, sexually propositioned me after he'd had several drinks, over the phone. Our client then rang me to say, "Are you okay?" And this conversation, it was on loudspeaker.

Prue: Now, I hadn't actually said anything to anybody in our workplace at that time, and the colleague I was working with said, "We're going to call you back," to the client, hangup and turned to me and said, what happened. Initially I refused to share the story, he got it out of me, and the reason that I didn't want to share the story is because I was really fearful of not being able to work on this transaction anymore, and it was a really, really important transaction that could set me up in many ways.

Prue: But the way they managed it was, he then went to the partner responsible. The partner came and spoke to me and said, "So we've thought of a few different ways that we can manage this. Firstly, it's up to you, and we'll take your input. But if you don't feel comfortable working on this anymore, we completely understand and you will not be penalised. Secondly, if you would like to continue to work on it, we can put in a delegate to attend the meetings where this person will be present. Or thirdly, if you want to continue to manage this and attend the meetings, I will personally be present in every single meeting that this man is going to be in attendance at, and will not say anything, will not speak over you. I'm not there from a legal perspective, I am there to effectively ensure that this behaviour doesn't happen again, and we will be rising up with the other side."

Prue: So I actually through that had different options, and I did go into the meeting with that person, with the partner I was working with, and I felt incredibly empowered, and I watched that person feel incredibly little and most likely hangover.

Anna: And I think that also sent a very powerful message, didn't it. About the organisation and where it stood.

Karen: And I would just add more of personal practise for people, so that when we feel uncomfortable, what proceeds that definition of being uncomfortable, is the fight or flight response. We get that sort of [inaudible 00:35:15] of energy and either anxiety in this case or excitement at times. And I think that's really important that women in particular trust their gut around that when they feel that, that's a really great sign that things aren't okay. And it's the same for bystanders watching, if they feel that sort of fight or flight response, and often people will withdraw when they feel that. But what I suggest to women is that they actually kind of use that energy to propel themselves away from the danger.

Karen: So really to kind of support that no, I actually think making a strong physical response, whatever it is, away from the threat is a really useful thing to do and people shouldn't worry about what it looks like, they should just do it.

Anna: That's very good advice, because I think it's another thing to ... It's one thing to have some verbal responses, and it's also a very good thing to have a physical response, oh, I'm going to take a step back, or I'm going to remove myself from this situation, or hold my hand up, or whatever it is. But to be prepared is the message that I'm getting there.

Anna: So, I think all of those tips and shared experiences are very useful knowledge for people to have. To wrap up, Prue I think you have some current statistics that you'd like to share.

Prue: The National Inquiry into sexual harassment that [inaudible 00:37:04] has wrapped up and we're awaiting the release of the recommendations, says that one in three have experienced sexual harassment. 39% of all women and actually 26% of men ... So, let's not assume that this is just a women's issue. This is an everybody issue. Albeit the data also indicates that four and five harassers are men, and that kind of aligns with where the power imbalance exists.

Anna: Yeah, thank you for sharing that. And I think that one of the messages that I've got from the three of you is the need to watch out for each other, so to be aware of when the people you work with maybe acting a little bit differently, perhaps asking them if they're okay, checking in with them, just, "Hey, are you okay? How are you going?" It just opens up the door for people to perhaps say something, share something when they might not have otherwise. Apsara, you've got something-

Apsara: I'm so sorry, I do actually want to add ... We really have to also look at what are masculine values and what are feminine values and in organisations, leaders really need to start looking at how can they themselves adopt these feminine values, so that those values can permeate through the organisation culture as well. So that's something that shifts, require cultural shifts, because at the end of the day, often we individualise that and I think we need to recognise it needs to be at a much higher level, and that then permeates through the organisation.

Anna: Yes, I think that's a very good point to have in our minds as we finish this. Finally, then we have some resources, anything that's been mentioned today, statistics, or helplines,

and some other resources, will be available on the show notes, as links on the podcast page. So, thank you very much for joining us today. We hope that its empowered you, enlightened you. I'd like to thank Prue Gilbert, Dr Karen Morley and Apsara Sabaratnem, for joining me today.

Apsara: Pleasure, thanks for having us.

Karen: Thank you very much.

Prue: Thanks Anna.

Anna: And I hope that you've enjoyed the podcast. Thank you.

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