**Managing resistance to gender equality for policy and practice**21 March 2018

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

So just in short, if you can go one by one down the panel and can you briefly tell us – this sounds blunt but, you know, I'm on the clock – what are you doing here and what experience have you had with backlash and resistance, particularly in your work environment? Can we start with you, Luke?

**Luke Cornelius**:

I'm here because I put my hand up to a lead the Victoria Police response to the VEOHRC review into sex discrimination, harassment, and predatory behaviour among Victoria Police employees. And one of the key pieces that we've had to engage with on this journey has been understanding the reality of resistance and what backlash looks like. One of the key things we've learned is don't make assumptions in this space. Work out how to actually identify surface and understand the reality of resistance and backlash. So we take pulse checks, we undertake staff surveys, which has helped us actually frame up what the top five resistance factors are, backlash factors are in our workplace. And I'm here to say that they are as active and as alive as they were three years ago when we started the journey as they are today. And the key piece for us is to recognise that we need to constantly find ways to continue to surface, address and, as Michael outlined in his presentation, directly address and engage those resistance factors, and to challenge them, call them out, keep the conversation going.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Luke, can I just ask as a quick follow-up do you use the term backlash?

**Luke Cornelius**:

Yep, we use the term both backlash and resistance. I noted that Michael doesn't draw a distinction between the two. I think the point I would make about that is I actually do see a distinction in this sense, and it's to do with the gendered nature of violence within our organisation. There are certainly the men who sit in their room with their arms folded. That's resistance. Backlash is very much that active targeting of proponents for change, and particularly of women in the workplace. And I see a distinction between resistance and backlash.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

So backlash being more aggressive, could we put it that way?

**Luke Cornelius**:

Look backlash is that aggressive end of the spectrum. It even extends to, if not physical violence, certainly emotional and power-based violence.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Thank you. Pia, same question. What are you doing here?

**Pia Cerveri**:

I'm the Women's and Equality Lead at Victorian Trades Hall Council and we were invited here because we deliver training. So Jodi Peskett, my colleague, is very sick as well and was unable to come in today, but she and I have developed training in family violence as a workplace issue and gendered violence as a workplace issue, which we deliver. We deliver that mostly to unions but also to workplaces.

So attached to that training we also have a campaign plan, which is our vision for bringing the union movement along on this journey to create gender equity in workplaces, and we believe that that will be the most powerful way to create change because you get the collective effort of the workers to see the purpose in doing that.

In saying that, we do experience backlash, but at the same time we have strategies through that process where we deal with it. So we have a lot of experiences around how well that's worked. Sometimes really well, sometimes it's delayed well – like, it takes a little while before somebody comes back to us. Sometimes we experience really heated exchanges, but we also lay the groundwork. I guess the main thing that we look at is framing it as the right to be safe at work. So if you're talking about that with unionists particularly, they understand that right and that principle and we frame it within an OHS framework and also within an industrial entitlements framework. So once we have that conversation with a lot of unionists, some of that resistance will actually dissipate because they very much understand that language around the safety rights of workers.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

And so that's a really practical example of something that you'll see a lot in the resource and something that we've heard today. That framing, Pia, is about considering the audience and then telling the story based on the audience. Is that fair?

**Pia Cerveri**:

Yep, absolutely.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Excellent. And also interesting – let's put a pin in it and come back to it if we have time – I think you would perhaps consider, say, the union movement is dedicated to change and social change and yet, as you've said, there's still resistance to change in this area even within a progressive movement, let alone in other movements or workplaces.

Monique, so obviously you come here from Our Watch. What's your experience with resistance, backlash, etc?

**Monique Keel**:

Is this one working?

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

That is working.

**Monique Keel**:

Yes, great.

So as a prevention practitioner and before that working in violence against women response, we encounter backlash in many forms. As everyone said today, it's inevitable. So as PVAW practitioners (we call it here) the experiences of backlash range from the completely hostile in our training and often in group … small group situations, which is that backlash end of the continuum down to the more sort of denial end of the continuum. And that's often around the gender equality work that we do. So as you all know that we look at gender inequality as the key driver of violence against women. So whenever we talk about preventing violence against women, we talk about gender inequality. So sometimes we get the backlash around the stats on violence against women and sometimes we get it on the gender inequality work that we're doing. And so sometimes it's actually quite difficult to pick what's going on because people might be really vocally saying, “No, we don't condone violence against women” and yet then completely not coming on board with the work around gender inequality that they need to do to do that work. So yeah. All forms.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Yeah. No, absolutely. And I think you're alluding to something that's coming up over and over again, is that the discussion’s not always rational obviously, particularly when we're talking about, you might be, “Yes, yes, I'm all against people hitting women, but I don't want to talk about gender equality.”

**Monique Keel**:

Yep, definitely.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

So Michael, I'll ask you a slightly different question ’cause I think we know why you're here. You are a very prominent male voice, if I can put it that way, in this space in social media and the media in general. What kind of backlash do you encounter and do you think it's different to the backlash you see your female colleagues encountering?

**Michael Flood**:

Yeah, look, I think as people have said, anyone doing work on gender inequality and violence against women gets resistance and backlash, and I'm very happy to go with your argument about backlashes at one end of the continuum of resistance. So I've certainly been attacked in various ways. So on a number of occasions I've had to go into my boss's office at university and explain the letter that they had received saying that I was dishonest, that I was anti-male, that I was a kind of, you know, feminazi and so on. You know, “What's this about, Michael?” I've had similar letters sent to the Minister for Education, to the body that funds the research I've done, to … so in other words, attempts at kind of professional attack. I've also had death threats and threats to my children, more so when I was directly engaged in debate with men's rights and fathers’ rights activists, less so when I wasn't engaging them in debate.

So it's certainly got ugly at times. But it also seems to me that the attacks I get, say, compared to someone … you know, someone amazing like Clem Ford, I suspect they're far less frequent, they're far less intense and they're far less sexualised. You know, she gets kind of routinely sexualised, misogynist rape threats and so on, as do other feminist activists in a way that I just don't. So I don't pretend that I'm getting heat in the way they are. I hope I can take some of that heat away from them.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Michael, can I just interrupt for one second because I think it's interesting to note, and I've heard this before from a lot of activists in this space, that often the credibility, the professional standing of men in this space will be attacked and there's an attempt to undermine it. Often with women in public spaces it will be sexualised, personalised, highly gendered – you know, fat slag, you're a slut, all of that kind of stuff. And not saying one's even worse or better, but it is different. And I think that's an important part of the conversation about how we manage it.

Did you want to address the backlash distinction? Or you’re happy to go with Luke on the backlash/resistance? We're good. All right.

So I will go to our Slido questions. Whoever that is anonymously – I suspect it's my friend Amy saying “Nelly for PM”. I'm quite disappointed to say it's not at the top of the likes.

The top question is: “In facing organised anti-feminist backlash from men's rights advocates, when should we directly engage with them in debate and when should we ignore them?” If I can paraphrase, do you engage with Latham or not? Luke, we'll start with you. So if you've got your really vehement, you know, frankly irrational, aggressive backlash, do you engage? If you do, when?

**Luke Cornelius**:

Yes, you do need to engage but you need to think carefully about how, and you need to bear in mind that the whole world is watching. So the first piece of advice I would have is don't reflect or model the approach or the language that is being used against your program. So the key piece is to always focus on how does our response model the world that we want it to be.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

I think this is such a critical point ’cause to me, what you're basically saying is aggression begets aggression, violence begets violence, if we can put it that way. When you say don't reflect it, give me an example.

**Luke Cornelius**:

Well, as a white privileged male, I actually find it really hard, myself personally, to overcome the irresistible urge to rip a moron’s head off and leave a steaming pile. It is very tempting. I want to shout out to my team, many of whom are here today. A lot of people have a ‘count to 10’ rule. I have about a ‘count to 20’ rule before I hit reply on the email. But the other piece is, I actually reach out to people who aren't white privileged males and seek their advice and input –

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Just gonna swap that, Luke, ’cause that microphones really getting on my nerves.

**Luke Cornelius**:

– into how best we might respond and actually model the workplace that we aspire to be. The key piece here in terms of dealing with backlash is you need to remember you're not on your own, and you can absolutely leverage those who are with you and [fades out].

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Yeah, I'm sorry. That's not on, is it? It was on?

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

This is the patriarchy. That's what's going on here.

**Luke Cornelius**:

So the key piece is to recognise, avoid that default male model of leadership – you're the champion, you're out there taking the lead – actually acknowledge the people who are around you and take the opportunity to value and reflect their advice. That actually builds a much broader base for engagement and it also sends a powerful message to the rest of the workplace, who are watching, in terms of how you model an appropriate response in that space.

But to round all of that out, I'd say absolutely you need to engage. Absolutely you need to challenge. Absolutely you need to point to that positive future that we're all working for.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

I think that modelling thing, if I just return to it as well, part of that for any of us who engage in that public debate, that it is so hard to resist. Let's … I'll give you that example: “Oh, you fat slag.” I'll tell you what, for a comedian it is really hard to resist the joke back. And those jokes, and we've all seen them, usually rely on, “Oh, you must have a tiny penis. No-one wants to have sex with you.” To me that is just replicating exactly what we're talking about.

Pia, what do you reckon? In terms of that full-on full-fledged backlash, do you engage? Do you always engage? If you don't, how do you choose?

**Pia Cerveri**:

I think it really depends on the context. So as Luke was talking I was thinking of a few examples. So with the union Yes campaign for marriage equality, the mantra was, “Don't engage with the locked-in no. Support the people who are saying yes and get the other people in the middle over the line. So just talk to those people.” So that was a really interesting and useful strategy and it didn't waste a lot of energy just going head-to-head with the people who were saying no.

In our example with training, we often get feedback afterwards from women, particularly young women, coming up to us and saying, “I don't understand how you can still be pleasant and polite when people are talking like that.” But the point for us is that people have chosen to be at the training. They've come to the training with goodwill, good intentions, good something.

If we just hammer them every time they say something that's not right on, then we lose people, and if we act like that towards people, the people who are somewhere in the middle will become intimidated and won’t be able to speak to us, or might leave as well.

So we've dealt with it in that context by questioning, just trying to ask some questions, try to develop a bridge towards that person, some empathy, ’cause often what we find when we scratch the surface, so one example that springs to mind is a guy who was really angry, but when you scratched the surface he had things going on in his personal life, including a close family member in prison who was male, who he did not feel was very empowered. So once you start to break it down a bit, this is a person who is saying, “How can you tell me I shouldn't be empowered when I'm not empowered?” Try to break it down a little bit. And then we got somewhere with him because once we started to understand that, we could have some respect and empathy for his circumstances separate to the gender equity, but in terms of his personal circumstances, and talk it through.

So we encourage discussion in our training. We don't want people to just stay on the topic because you can't. It brings up a lot of emotion. It brings up a lot of thinking, it brings up people's childhoods, we've had a mother say, “I just wish I'd known this stuff when I was raising my boys. They always wanted to play with dolls and I didn't let them.” It brings up grief, it brings up a whole lot. So if we can’t go with people in that moment, then we'll lose them. And overwhelmingly, the feedback we get is of a really great quality, that people say “We've got something to use here. We've understood it. We have been able to shift.”

I do think, though, if there is a backlash of a level that's of a dangerous type, like if there's a threat or an assault, then obviously we need to have really clear boundaries around that. And we have had one session where we've asked somebody to leave, but we've also followed-up with that person later down the track, for better or worse.

So I think in our context, we need to be prepared to go with people a little bit. But that doesn't mean taking abuse. We don't cop abuse; we set limits and boundaries. But if we just said, “Right, that's it, don't talk to us like that, get out of here,” it just will have no effect. And we're trying to get into workplaces and unions because unions also get into workplaces. And most people are working, so we are trying to do a mass change across the whole society. So of course we have to have some empathy for the people we're working with in that context.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

And Pia, one thing you and I have discussed before, which I think’s really interesting, and it might reflect the age of our children, but that technique of saying, “But why?” you know, rather than “This is the stats. This is what's happening” that, “Like why? Why do you think? What's your experience? Why do you think that?” When people feel heard, they're far more likely to be open to change.

**Pia Cerveri**:

I would agree. And totally different from if I was at the pub. I wouldn't have that conversation necessarily.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Yes.

So Monique, what do you think? Do you … ’cause I know at Our Watch you get a lot of hardcore backlash. What's your policy? Do you engage with all of it/some of it? How do you decide?

**Monique Keel**:

So Our Watch has a large campaigning and media component, including a website called The Line for young people. And our media section gets a lot of backlash, a lot of really sort of verging on vile backlash to the more moderate types of backlash. And we have a policy, a social media policy, which is actually referred to in the new resource that was launched today, and which we used to guide us in the way to respond to that backlash.

So what I would say is, there are contexts in which you would engage with this sort of backlash, but that it's important not just from an individual perspective on knowing when to engage and when not to engage, but also from an organisational perspective to have some communication guidelines. And I know most organisations have communication guidelines. Whether or not they all include how to respond to backlash, to gender equality and violence against women work, I'm not sure, but that would be one thing to consider in your workplace.

And also sort of in the middle ground in our team we also talk about how we're going to deal with backlash and that sort of backlash in training. So our team does a lot of training and we don't get probably the complete end of … that you were asking about initially, but we do get a lot of people in training who will continue to press their wish to have a non-gendered agenda happening in that training. And so while we do what Pia said, of engaging and listening, ’cause that's a really important part, ’cause as Pia mentioned often there's a personal story behind the reason that they’re vocalising their dislike of whatever you're talking about. But also we have strategies in place to park those conversations for later.

So we show respect to the people and we say, “This might be something we can take up in the break” and we have strategies within the team on how to deal with it. ’Cause I think at an organisational level, it's really good to know how to respond. But when you're actually doing the work on the ground – be it in a meeting or in training or just going out to talk to other workplaces – it's good to know what other people are doing to respond to that sort of backlash and have some strategies because even though it's inevitable, you're sometimes surprised at what it looks like. So it's good to have a few strategies up your sleeve.

### MC Nelly Thomas:

Absolutely. And I think one thing, particularly in terms of Our Watch, given the reach of your mailing list, for example, if you didn't moderate comments and so on, like the reach of your website, you could actually be giving a platform to those kinds of comments, if I can put it that way. While engagement’s fantastic, there's also a point at which you’re potentially being toyed with.

**Monique Keel**:

Yeah. So we have a very clear moderation policy and we don't have a sort of a free-for-all forum where people can engage like that. That's not part of our strategy and it's not part of what we see ourselves doing and it turns off people also who might want to get onto that forum and engage –

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

That’s right.

**Monique Keel**:

– and ask genuine questions about gender inequality and because … for instance, The Line’s for young people. We need a safe space for them to get on and engage too and if there's a whole lot of trolling and hate going on then they're not going to engage on that forum either.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Yeah. So Michael, what do you think? Do you engage to engage with these men's rights activist groups or not?

**Michael Flood**: It's complicated. Your question initially was about, you know, in-your-face, aggressive kind of backlash. And in fact I think the most dangerous advocates and organisations sometimes are those who are articulate and calm and well-presented. So I think, for example, of Warren Farrell who wrote The Myth of Male Power and is an influential men's rights advocate. He's lovely. He’s a lovely guy. I had dinner with him. But that makes him much more dangerous. Likewise, Men's Health Australia and Greg Andresen are slick, they're got at web design and so on. That makes them much more dangerous. Just my first point is that –

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

That they're harder to identify, if I can put it that way? Like, if someone's yelling abuse and whatever, they're clearly –

**Michael Flood**:

Harder to identify. And certainly Men's Health Australia and other men's rights organisations have been careful to avoid the kind of anti-women misogyny that is more visible online. That does make them, I think, dangerous.

So second, I'd say that we do need to directly criticise those organisations and talk about their misogyny, talk about the ways they blame victims, talk about the way they do male victims of domestic violence a disservice, and so on. In other words, we need robust feminist critique. We want to take away their legitimacy and credibility and funding and support. So they are our political enemies, make no mistake.

Third thing I'll say is in relation to debate, direct debate can be dangerous and it's some of the reasons why climate change scientists don't go on panels with climate change deniers because it can give people the idea, “Oh, look, there's two sides. Climate change does or doesn't exist.” Slavery – good or bad, who knows? So participating in a panel can give credibility to two sides when there aren't two sides. It can be used for their own internal political legitimacy and it can waste your energies.

At the same time, if regressive voices are to be given space, then I think it's political useful to engage with them. So I was asked to go on Triple J's Hack TV show on “Is male privilege bullshit?” OK? And there were going to be men's rights, you know, anti-feminist advocates on there, so I went on there as well. But, you know, there'll be other circumstances where I'd make a different decision. So I think it's a question of political strategy.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Well, and if your default’s to engage I’ll give you a counter example – and this is absolutely true. I was asked to go on Andrew Bolt's show. And I knew it would be Andrew Bolt hosting a conservative commentator and me, and they would gang up on me, if I can put it that way. And I declined. I thought, there's no win in that for me. They also wouldn't pay anything, which I thought was absurd. But there's no win in that.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Like there's a time where … well, no one does watch it, that's the other thing. But … actually, unfortunately, people do. But there is a time … I personally don't think engaging all the time is worth your effort. I don't know if that's taboo to say in the audience but.

One of the other questions, okay, from Liam: “Where is the line between talking of the benefits for men in gender equality work and pandering to men with structural power to avoid the focus on needing to change?”

**Luke Cornelius**:

There are no benefits in pandering to the established privilege. I would say you absolutely do need to make the case for change, and you need to make the case for change ’cause that is actually about empowering your base, because the backlash and the resistance happens in meal rooms right across our organisation. And for want of us having made the case for change, for want of us informing the broader workplace around that case for change, and more particularly providing that language that allows people to call behaviour out and characterise behaviour and commentary for what it is, that's a critical part in terms of building your base for engagement, and within that context equipping people with the ability to call out the privilege and to squarely address and provide another pathway for people rather than pandering.

I mean, it goes a bit to Michael's observation about engaging with the pandering or doing the pandering, are you giving credibility to that view? And that’s something you absolutely need to pay attention to. So key piece is, make the case for change. Do that in a way which empowers your broader workplace to be part of that, and to be part of that challenge, and part of that, if you like, proponent base for actually shifting the workplace. I mean, people say stuff. Particularly reactionary people will say stuff to get a response, and they'll say stuff to prosecute their own personal interest, and they get a rise out of the power that comes with that. And the key piece in our work around this space is to work out how to take that power away.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Pia, do you think in terms of … ’cause I think one of the things that the question’s getting to is the idea of talking about, for example – and Michael raised this – the restrictive gender roles are toxic for men and women. Arguably not equally, but put that aside, toxic for both of us. Is there a danger that in trying to kind of sell gender equity on the basis that it'll be great for men too, that we lose the basic equity arguments about, “But it's just not fair.” Like, there doesn't have to be something in it for you.

**Pia Cerveri**:

Well, I wouldn't sell it as better or as good for men and women. So that's not how I ever put the argument. So it depends again on the context. If we're talking about the work I do in the union movement, we talk about it in terms of occupational health and safety and entitlements, which are rights. So we don't really get into whether it's nice for people or better for people or whether it's good for men or bad for men. We just talk about the framework, which is that you have a right to go to work and be safe, so that includes not chopping off your arm with dodgy machinery that hasn't been safeguarded; that includes not having to go on a home visit to a client where you don't feel safe; and that also includes experiencing gendered violence in the workplace. So we just put it in with that bucket and also talk about it as an entitlement.

So I guess we would take a pretty no-nonsense approach. We're not trying to, I wouldn't say we're trying to appeal to people, to make things nice for anybody, if that makes sense. It's really just about bringing it into the standards that we already look to. So that's the way we would angle it in that context.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Can I ask you – and I'm sorry I'm putting you on the spot – that specific question about let's say in that context someone says to you, “Well, how is pinching someone on the bum the same as getting your arm cut off?”

I mean, we've all heard this – I mean, not that exact example, but those, “Well, how are they the same?” –

**Pia Cerveri**:

No, there are examples like that. Well, there’s a ...

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

You know, “Why can't … wolf whistling's not the same as raping someone.”

**Pia Cerveri**:

Yeah. There's a lot of examples like that, like, less about the touching but more about compliments.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Or jokes, as we heard before.

**Pia Cerveri**:

Or jokes, yeah. So we would just break it down and say, “But it's the same.” So we've obviously got bullying legislation and violence in the workplace legislation that's more generic. So we would just link it back to that, which covers those sort of topics and do a “put yourself in those shoes”, do an activity around that to get people thinking about it at the same time, but also taking it back to existing frameworks that already exist such as, you know, that you can't bully people. And people know why. So this is when I'm talking about the union movement specifically, who work to a lot of frameworks that are about progression in the workplace for workplace rights. So in that sense, that's probably the main way we would tackle it, I would say.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

So you’d keep framing it in terms of the common language of workers’ rights and health and safety and that –

**Pia Cerveri**:

Yeah, but we might say … we might do … ’cause we do a lot of activities that's getting people to think about power-over because everyone has experienced power-over at one time at least in their lives, power over them. So we would maybe use that moment to then bring that activity in to get people to think about it, if that worked in that moment. It depends. Because also sometimes someone's doing that to get attention, to get leverage, to get a laugh. So we'd also gauge where they're going with it and we might shut it down as well. It depends. So we would just try and gauge it and then be flexible about our response, but definitely to shove it down and not to pander in any way and not to try and placate or beg them to come along with us.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

And Monique, in terms of the work that Our Watch is doing, obviously you're working with young men, well, all young people. So do you think, going back to the question, have you discussed the fact that is there a risk in focusing on the benefits to young men of gender equality to get them to come along or how do you handle that issue?

**Monique Keel**:

So because our work's based on the national framework *Change the Story*, and one of the drivers which people will be aware is about stereotypical constructions of masculinity and femininity being one of the gender inequality drivers of violence against women, we can always bring it back to that. So we don't pander – I don't think pandering gets us anywhere – but what we can do is look to the work that we do and looking at the benefits that there will be for young men and women, and for their families and friends, in addressing particularly that driver. I don't think there's a benefit, perhaps with that group, in looking at some of the other forms, such as some of the structural inequality at that level because really, the comments that come through on the line, and the way that the line and some of our other work is structured, is really talking to young people about the things that they're interested in. And often those topics do come up around masculinity and femininity and there are definite benefits for young men in addressing that form of gender inequality.

So then we do that focus but I wouldn't see it as pandering. I see it as a legitimate part of our work around addressing that driver.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Fantastic. Thank you.

And Michael, in terms of the discussion, let’s move it slightly to “Is there the potential that it can be co-opted and how do we resist that?”

**Michael Flood**:

Yeah. I very much agree with what's been said so far. There's certainly a risk in appealing to men in terms of benefit, a risk of downplaying the patriarchal privileges that those men will have to give up; a risk of kind of diluting the feminist analysis, which is important there. At the same time, though … so the first thing I'd say is our appeals to men in this case have to be primarily ethical or political. They’ll have to be that it's the right thing to do, that gender inequality is wrong, unfair, oppressive and so on. So our appeals have to be primarily ethical. But I do think we have to also appeal to men's reconstructed or anti-patriarchal self-interest, the interest they have in progress towards gender equality, pragmatically as much as anything else. But, yeah, there are risks –

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

And do you mean in terms of, the most obvious example I would have thought is mental health?

**Michael Flood**:

Well, the example that people often go to, and certainly White Ribbon and other organisations have gone to, is in terms of benefits for the women and girls in their lives. And there's a good kind of feminist critique of, “Well, why should men only care about the women and girls they know? Shouldn't they care about women and girls in general in terms of their rights to bodily autonomy and so on?” So again, I think there are –

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

And what if they don't like the women and girls in their life?

**Michael Flood**:

Well, indeed.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

And I mean that seriously. Like, what if they don't treat the women and girls in their life well?

**Michael Flood**:

Yeah. So I think there are ways to do this carefully. So I think there are kind of obvious political dangers and ways to do this well.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

This is not from them, this is from me, to the four of you: do you use the words patriarchal or feminist when you do your training or public discussions?

**Monique Keel**:

At Our Watch we talk about the gender drivers and we talk about gender, so we don't call ourselves a feminist organisation and we don't generally use the word ‘patriarchy’, though I would say it comes up in pretty much every training that we do. People talk about feminism in our training and we're happy to do that. I think the way that the framework's been framed and the way that we frame our work is to keep a clear focus on gender. And I think by using that word, and staying with that word, it enables us not to get sidetracked sometimes by the naysayers who then want to have a conversation about feminism. So no, we don't.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Yeah. And Pia, do you?

**Pia Cerveri**:

Yeah. We talk about … so in different degrees and at different times we talk about patriarchy, feminism, capitalism, colonialism or colonisation of countries around the world and the history of power in the western world, basically.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Yeah. And that terminology’s not as resisted in your workplace. What about you, Luke? Do you walk in going, “I'm a feminist, you're patriarchal”?

**Luke Cornelius**:

[Laughs] So we have a gender equality strategy. So it's not a diversity and inclusion strategy; it is expressly a gender equality strategy. And the action plan has some specific gender equality-related targets in it. So we don't shy away from gender and gender equality. We also, within the context of our learning and development, as part of our leadership capability uplift, we expressively talk about male privilege. And we have a number of exercises within that context which are designed to surface male privilege and help participants’ appreciate unconscious bias and how male privilege washes through so much of the routine that happens in our workplace.

Can I just go to the ‘pinch on the bottom and the arm being chopped off’ piece?

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

You’re welcome.

**Luke Cornelius**:

There is a very clear analogy, and that's this: none of us want to be in a workplace where a colleague has been raped. None of us want to be in a workplace where a colleague’s lost an arm. That's why our focus on so-called low-level sexual harassment is just as important as our focus on whether or not the safety equipment around a piece of heavy machinery is working. So a pinch on the bum is exactly relatable to a failing in any other health and safety context.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

That's a good answer. [Applause]. Yes.

**Luke Cornelius**:

Which if addressed will lead to very serious consequences.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

I'm going to just stay with Luke for one second ’cause I think this is a very interesting one. The issue of biological backlash, which I know you get in the police force – so the idea of, you know, maybe there's less female managers ’cause testosterone is competitive. I'm sure you must get, “Women aren't strong enough to handle a six foot four burglar.” What do you call those people? Thief. You know, the kind of biological, “No, no, I'm all cool but, you know, there's the … we are different.” What do you say to that?

**Luke Cornelius**:

One of the most powerful pieces of analysis contained in the VEOHRC review into the underlying drivers of sex discrimination and harassment in our workplace was an analysis around the male model of policing. And that analysis identifies very clearly for us just how harmful the male model of policing has been for us, not only for women in our organisation but also for men. And when that is approached from the perspective of operational safety it's reflected every day when we deploy. I mean, I personally, as an operational police officer – which was some time ago, I would acknowledge – I absolutely appreciated when we had a female colleague on the team because I knew the chances of escalation in violence would be seriously diminished. And time and again – and at the moment I'm running our professional standards command – time and again, those areas where violence has escalated in the use of force context, either generally where police are said to be using excessive force in relation to a citizen, oftentimes it occurs within the context of an alpha male-based response. And having a more diverse workforce absolutely enhances our capability to reflect and more effectively respond to the community that we serve and maintaining a dominant alpha male, male model of policing view of the world in that context is not going to serve our community, and it absolutely is not going to serve the advancement of the policing profession.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Just sorry to back that up ’cause this was part of the question I didn't mention: you actually have empirical data to support that, don't you? I mean, the more diverse the workplace has become in terms of gender and other groups, the de-escalation of harm.

**Luke Cornelius**:

Yeah, absolutely. But it's not just around de-escalation; it's also around the nature of the workplace itself. I'll go back to backlash. It struck me as passing strange that in the initial stages of our work, some of the most significant backlash was coming from our female colleagues. But when we actually looked at the workplace those females colleagues were in, they were absolutely the minority. So they were one or two in a workplace of 20, 80, 100. And these were women who absolutely had a target on their forehead. Their male colleagues were looking to see that the women in their workplace were backing them up.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Mm. You can feel tested.

**Luke Cornelius**:

It was absolutely a defensive response. Now, I have to say in workplaces where you see a ratio more in keeping with the 32% that we have across our organisation, you don't see that as prevalent. Certainly, having that increased diversity and in those workplaces where actually, and we do have a couple where we have achieved gender equality, we do not see the behaviours which have been very much the focus of both the VEOHRC review and our response to it. Diversity absolutely promotes workplace safety and it absolutely promotes a healthy workplace culture.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

It works, yes. Someone can tweet that.

I've gone a little bit over time, so I'm going to take that as Luke’s last comment. Pia, I'm going to throw this as your last question to you, and one that's very popular: those who are working in PVAW – so prevention of violence against women sector – are often facing resistance to gender equality within their own organisations and they often have poor work conditions and pay. What are you gonna do about that? Sorry [laughter].

It's getting furious likes.

**Pia Cerveri**:

Well for me, working in the union movement, that is a huge focus of the union movement to address gender inequity in general, to address the gender pay gap. We campaign on it frequently. We are campaigning on it at the moment with numerous other unions. And so in terms of our… in my case my actual workplace is not … it still falls under the system in which we work so of course it falls into the same traps that any organisation does around where power lies, how decisions are made, etc. But in saying that, there's also ways in that where we're campaigning constantly to try and I guess show what the, what I'm trying to say, walk the talk – demonstrate what we're trying to ask of other workplaces to do. So it's a constant, ongoing campaign, basically.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Rights and conditions.

I'm going to come to you, Michael, and then back to Monique. Michael, I just thought you'd like this question and it's related to Pia: is this the … is there a risk that this sort of individualised kind of idea of self care … so we know a lot of people in the sector have said, you know, “Look after yourself. Make sure if you're feeling overwhelmed, you take a hot bath and you get a massage and whatever” – I do all those things – is there a risk that that sort of individualises, puts it in a neoliberal kind of framework rather than making it a bigger … you’re putting it back on the person, basically?

**Michael Flood**:

Look, there is, and I think there's another way of framing care in much more social justice terms. So, yes, let's be all for hot baths and chocolate – did anyone mention chocolate?

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Oh, I’ll take that as well.

**Michael Flood**:

But we need to recognise, yeah, the collective and structural circumstances that shape our ability to care for ourselves and, you know, the state of our health, and try to change the social conditions that shape our lives.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Not enough to just tell people to do yoga.

**Michael Flood**:

No, no.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Yeah.

**Michael Flood**:

And just back to that stuff about feminism too, I also think we very much need to reclaim the F word. I think there are reasons why it may be strategic to not frame this in feminist terms –

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Who said up the back, “Wooh!”?

**Michael Flood**:

– but I'm also conscious that feminism too has come to mean everything and nothing in some ways. And there's some ways in which feminism has been co-opted and defamed and in fact we need to assert a kind of a robust, energetic, political – dare I say it – radical feminism.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

I know you're not watching it but there’s a guy on Married at First Sight who called himself a feminist. I swear to God I nearly vomited. But I really did. And he literally said he should lead the family and then said … anyway, don't. But I totally agree with you. I am very public about using that word.

Monique, I'm going to end on this, and I think it's a really critical, difficult question: how do we make sure that we're talking – and let's put aside extreme end of backlash,let's go to that middle that we've been talking about – how do we make sure we're talking with resistors and not at them?

**Monique Keel**:

Thanks for the difficult question, Nelly. I think it's about communication and being open and listening. So Pia talked about listening in her training. We do the listening too. We try to keep an open mind. It's really easy to just feel your blood boiling and think, no, I don't want to do this. But practising communication styles, reading the Women's Health West has a tricky questions document, how to answer those questions. Read up, practice with your colleagues, just keep communicating and engaging. Finding their point, the common points. So for the unions, I noticed in the resource it was talking about the shared value of … Pia, now I've forgotten I started the sentence. Fairness, yeah. So talking about fairness, talking about not wanting violence in anyone’s lives, be it men or women or children. So finding that common point and then working with that. That's the way.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

Absolutely. Now, I've been allocated some time to sum up but I've used it, so I'm not going to do too much summing up. But I will just repeat one thing that I saw on a doco that has stayed with me for years and years and years, and it was preventing male violence against women training. And they had a, not hidden camera, but they had a camera. And there was an active resister bordering on backlash who just kept constantly going, “But what about this?” and “But what about men?” and “But what about …?” And the trainer said to him, “How's this working for you?” And he got to the point after a series of questions where he went, “Well, I've lost my wife, I've lost my children, I've got an AVO, I'm facing jail. I'm ...” Now, I'm not saying everyone's going to have that revelation, but it’s really stayed with me, of instead of countering him with facts and figures, of going, “How’s this working out for you?” It's just an interesting thing to think about.

What a great panel. We could talk all day. But please join me in thanking Dr Michael Flood, Monique Keel from Our Watch, Pia Cerveri, and Assistant Commissioner Luke Cornelius. Thank you so much for your time and effort. There will be lots of resources available for you all after the event. Of course, a takeaway – this one, and there's definitely references and other things to follow up on. Thank you for your questions and your generosity in coming today. We're now going to have lunch. And just before you go, once again, please join me in thanking our organisers, Liz especially down the front and Monique wandering around somewhere, and their teams. And when’s our next forum?

**Female Speaker**:

31st May.

**MC Nelly Thomas**:

The next forum’s 31st May, so we’ll see you then. Bye everyone.