

The Job Hunting Podcast

[72. Have we learned nothing? Systemic gender biases, double standards, mental and physical dangers affecting women in the workplace - featuring Hannah Piterman Ph.D.](#)

- Renata: Hello and welcome to The Job Hunting Podcast. A warning that this episode is not for little ears, so if you have little ones around you, you may want to pop your earphones or listen later. And we will be discussing issues such as sexual assault. If this is a trigger for you, consider skipping this episode. If you need help, reach out to a reputable service provider near you. In Australia, you can call 1-800 RESPECT or Lifeline on 131114
- Renata: My friend Hannah Piterman spends her time between Melbourne and Port Fairy, and this is the only reason that has kept you from not meeting her earlier here on The Job Hunting Podcast. When in Melbourne, Hannah catches up with friends, colleagues, and clients, and when in Port Fairy, a gorgeous little seaside town about 3 hours away from here, Hannah writes. If it sounds idyllic, it's because it is.
- Renata: We warm-up, and slowing we get to the crux of the matter and the issues that have been top of mind for both of us and many women around Australia for the past couple of weeks. Honestly, these issues never go away. They are always bubbling along, and now and then they burst and explode, causing so much damage, and we believe we will learn from the experience, only to find out a few weeks or months later that we have learned nothing, it seems. That is the perception. That is what's keeping women angry and frustrated.
- Renata: We start our chat discussing the beginning of the COVID pandemic with a gender lens, warming up for a heated discussion about the allegations of rape and sexual misconduct permeating Australian politics. If you are listening overseas, please persevere. You will be surprised how similar the Canberra issues are with issues you may be seeing close to home. I have learned that the range of women's problems, from daily microaggressions to rape, happens across country borders, class structures, and age brackets.
- Renata: As this podcast is released on Monday, it will coincide with International Women's Day. But I don't feel like celebrating. I feel exhausted, frankly. We were both a bit weary, a bit tired, a bit angry; honestly, this is the conversation women do not want to have anymore. No more! And year after year, here we are, it's groundhog hog day for women, it feels like. From New York to Canberra, to Adelaide, to Rio, to Nigeria, look at the news worldwide. I'm so grateful to Hannah that he joined me for this chat. I remember feeling very lonely once, and I hope this podcast reaches out to you and that when you listen, you feel like you are among friends. Maybe you won't agree with everything we say. Possibly by the time you hear, things we discussed which were unfolding at the time will have been resolved or be more transparent, and some of the contexts will have shifted. As a friend, take what we say with a grain of salt.

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- Renata: If anything, it's great to see good people coming together to embrace a movement towards good leadership, inclusive workplaces, and a workplace culture that makes everyone feel safe and able to perform at their best.
- Renata: Let me tell you a little bit about Hannah before we begin. She is a well-respected consultant, helping leaders and organizations pivot away from deep-rooted cultural and gender biases. Hannah was instrumental in developing the Women in Leadership Series of Events and research reports and the Australian think tank and industry association CEDA or the Committee of Economic Development of Australia. That's how we first met. Meeting Hannah was a milestone in my career. Not only we became good friends, but she has been very influential in how I finally felt comfortable coming out of my shell, and embracing my latinidad, my uniqueness, and seeing those unique traits are strengths instead of weaknesses. And I love her very much for helping me do that.
- Renata: On My blog, I have complete details about our chat. Wherever you're listening, if you have access to the episode show notes, I have added links to the articles and people we have mentioned if you want to do further research. I've also included Hannah's bio, contact details, links to her articles, and most recent book, *Unlocking Gender Potential: A leader's handbook*.
- Renata: Yeah. So nice to see you. It's been a long year. And I think one of the last things that I did before the lockdowns was to go to your place for dinner.
- Hannah: That's right. It was a long time ago.
- Renata: But it seems like years ago. It was probably a bit more than 12 months ago. It was at the beginning of 2019. I know this because I had just started working at Watermark. So it must have been February 2019. Oh, sorry. 2020. See, I'm going crazy. Right?
- Hannah: It was two years ago.
- Renata: No, no, no. We had dinner at your place with Maya and Vicky early 2020, February 23. And then the pandemic hit.
- Hannah: And then the pandemic hit. Yeah. I don't think we were aware of it.
- Renata: No, we didn't talk about it.
- Hannah: No, I don't even think we thought about it.
- Renata: No. We were talking about other things. Yeah. It didn't even cross our minds. I don't think we discussed it at all. We were talking about other things.
- Hannah: No, no.
- Renata: You see. And then the world turned upside down. We lost touch a bit, and you went down to Port Fairy to spend most of the lockdown.

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Hannah: I went to Port Fairy. I know exactly how it happened. There was nothing, and then there was something. We knew it was sort of happening. And I know I went to an opening, a friend of mine had an art exhibition. And then she had dinner in a small room in a restaurant. So there were about 18 of us. And we were sort of joking about it, but it was still a joke. We didn't really register. And then the next day, I had something else, another visit another afternoon. And then we went to another exhibition for some reason. So that was a really packed weekend. And I would see a client on a Tuesday before. And on Monday, she rang me, and she said that she might have COVID. She travels.

Hannah: And I know that I must've been already registering it because I remember thinking, this woman travels a lot. I remember thinking when I was seeing her physically. This woman travels a lot. And it came to my mind and went out again. But anyway, it ended up, she didn't have COVID. But I was thinking she was tested for COVID, and it turned out to be influenza A. But I was thinking of all the people I had seen over the weekend, during the week, other clients, friends going out to this exhibition, two exhibitions. And I thought, what if she's got it? And what if I've got it. I sat tight. And after that, I know somebody who wants to come to me from Monash University. And I said, well, maybe you better drive, not go on the train. And then I said, and this was before all the zoom. I said, maybe we better just do it by phone. And then the reality started. So, you know, it's sort of nothing and then vague, and then it really hit. I think it hit me when somebody I knew was having a test. So, yeah.

Renata: The funny thing - it's not so funny. Actually, it's quite sad - about COVID, or let's say it's interesting, is that especially here in Australia, but mostly you see this happening at scale in the US, for example, is that COVID started out as something that privileged people we're getting. People that traveled, that went to Europe, and we're coming back to Australia, we're going to the US and coming back to Australia, and those were the ones that had COVID at the beginning. And then now, what we see is that underprivileged people are getting COVID. Those who have low-paying jobs, essential workers, people that are working, and can't not work, especially in the US. You see that a country without a big welfare system like Australia, not so much Australia, if you think about some of the Northern European countries, for example, that can afford to have an amazing system without a lot of lockdowns.

Renata: And those countries are doing quite well. We're doing quite well because we have a very strong lockdown culture, especially in Victoria. And then you have in the US almost everything going wrong because you don't have either welfare or a culture that supports the loss of liberty with the lockdown situation that we have here in Australia. And then you have the poor people and the underprivileged people getting COVID. So that's what I have noticed. And I've read about it too in the changes in COVID over 12 months. But if you go back to March, especially here in Victoria, people that were getting COVID were the Brightonites that were coming back from the Alps and then going to big parties and spreading it all to their wealthy friends. And you don't see that anymore. It doesn't happen anymore. Now, if anybody's getting COVID in Australia, it's because they're working as security guards

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or hotel workers where people are being quarantined when they arrive in Australia. So it's the opposite of what we saw 12 months ago.

Hannah: Well, it's sort of brought to the gig economy, people who are paid these casual rates, but they have to have three jobs. If you are working in aged care and going from one age care institution to another, and then maybe cleaning floors somewhere else, because you are paid so lowly. But in order to be able to put food on the table, you actually have to have these three jobs, and this was causing infection and reinfection. And these people, I mean these institutions, we're not paying, we're not training people. Especially in those aged care institutions, they didn't even have PPE masks. We collided with this gig economy, and we collided with a society that had been seemingly doing well and everybody having a job. What sort of job and what sort of conditions? I mean, there'd been bubbles all along. I mean, income inequality has been on the increase [inaudible]. But it was ignored and wasn't taken up, and people were sort of managing. And this COVID really confronted society. Absolutely.

Renata: It's interesting to think about the past 12 months and the pandemic in relation to gender and how much it has impacted women more than men. So right at the beginning, I think it was around May that the term pink recession was coined. Do you remember that?

Hannah: I certainly do.

Renata: And I started reading some articles back then, and I was adding them to my - I have a weekly newsletter to job hunters. People that listen to this podcast can sign up and people that are interested in career issues. And I think the first article that I read about this was about very early on. A study was showing that female academics had stopped producing articles or doing any sort of work like peer review, publications, or putting forward publications for peer review articles, right at the beginning of COVID.

Renata: Why? The assumption is these women are at home, possibly also the fathers are at home, but they are taking most of the chores of being a parent, so doing more of the work at home, taking care of kids and meals and grocery shopping and whatever. And they felt that the female academics were underperforming compared to their male peers. And then Annabel Crabb wrote a very interesting article, right at the beginning as well already showing there was some discrepancy here in Australia and in talking about pink recession, I'm going to add all those links to the show notes in the podcast for those who are interested. And then it just kept on happening, and we started getting the concerns about the lockdown affecting domestic violence. And, we have a common friend who works in that space here in Victoria.

Renata: And we know that all of a sudden she went from having the organizations she worked for, almost to the point that pre-COVID, the state government wasn't going to fund that organization anymore, so all of a sudden that organization getting a fresh amount of funding because of the pandemic, and the need to support women. And how afraid everybody became about domestic violence during the lockdown. And then things are now shifting towards childcare. So this week in America, there

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was this think tank that produced a report about childcare being now, the number one reason why people are not going back to work, everything related to the new way of people working - working from home, working with kids around - I mean it's good and bad. There are good things and bad things about working from home. If you're a professional person who is working in the corporate sector, white-collar worker, it's probably a good thing, but it has its setbacks.

Renata: Like the need to have childcare, otherwise you can't get anything done. So what have you noticed from your end? Because you pay more attention to this probably than I do. What have you noticed?

Hannah: Well, certainly there has been a pink recession. And then again, the collision or the recognition with the fact that women do provide the domestic labor they have, and during COVID, this came to the fore. They provide emotional labor, and they're the ones who multitask with family needs and family responsibilities. And even though they may both be working full time, it's the woman who carries the responsibility and the load of the family. He might do the shopping, but often, he relies on her to provide the list. It's that sort of dynamic that COVID just really exposed. And also, industries that have female-dominated, like healthcare, service industry, retail, tourism, they're the ones who suffered, and they are female-dominated.

Hannah: So women were losing their jobs, and women are also paid less in feminized industries. So all those factors in which women have a less entitlement to the societal resources or less entitlement in our society. Somehow these female work and female labor and industries are somehow accepting lesser rights and lesser conditions, and a lot of them are casual jobs. So women are not coming out of COVID having benefited very much. Maybe except the fact that they are working from home, and that has its difficulties, but it also means that the rush in the morning and getting their kids to school, then they'd travel to work. And then, you know, at the other end, getting home, picking kids up, that was much easier.

Hannah: That changed a lot. For my daughter, who's got two small kids, she actually liked it. She's an art teacher and an artist, but she hadn't painted for 10 years because she's busy at work, two small kids, and then she started painting again during COVID, which she hasn't been able to do before. And this has been fabulous to the point that now she's taken a day off work, a day for painting, where she was working five days a week, she now works four days a week and paints one day. And so through COVID, she's sort of rediscovered her love for the art that she used to make. So, yeah.

Renata: That's interesting. I read this week as well that in the US - and I guess we can just extrapolate that this is probably true in other countries where people work or have professional workers - workers are 5% happier than they were in 2019. And it's probably because of that flexibility and that opportunity to work from home. However, the number of people that are applying for mental health days or personal leave days has increased as well. So you have people like your daughter who are finding that the COVID has ignited or enabled something good to come out of it. And

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then you have another group of workers who are feeling isolated or having mental health issues probably brought upon by that isolation and working from home.

Renata: Or conflict, or family issues, or work-related issues even that is brought upon by working from home as well because managing teams at a distance are not for everyone. And people haven't really been trained. We didn't have the systems in place to do it in this way. We didn't really expect to do it in this way, and it has worked. I mean, things didn't completely fall apart. I think we're all quite surprised at how much we were able to accomplish working from home. But it's true that we've done that without the structures and the policies in place. We're kind of making it as we go. So there are lessons here that we need to learn and then crystallize in the workplace policy.

Hannah: We've learned it on the run. But many of these issues were going on pre-COVID. Mental health issues, bullying and harassment at work, sexual harassment. If you're being sexually harassed at work, the propensity for that might have decreased if you're no longer with the bully or the perpetrator and you're at home. But I guess COVID has highlighted certain issues, and it's an inflection point. And I guess it forced us and enabled us to reflect about what's going on in society? What's going on in our workplaces? What's going on in our home life? How the professional and the personal marry? And, what's the future for our society? Because I don't think we're going to go back to where it was before.

Hannah: And we do have to create a new future. And some people can't wait for it to go back. They just can't wait to be back to work. Whereas other people have said, 'I don't want to travel one and a half hours a day. A colleague of my husband's used the time that she travels to do exercise and look after her health. She lost 20 kilos in six months. She did nothing more than say, 'that time that I was traveling. How can I use it for my time?' Which she never had. She never had my time. And in that me-time, her health improved significantly. So, there's something about this long commute. And usually, it's one person, or sometimes it's two people, but a lot of scenarios, women are working part-time or more flexibly, and the male works full time. And he doesn't actually see his children's side, that emotional labor and that domestic labor for women is just a given, that's what she has to do.

Hannah: And so perhaps, if they're both working from home more, he might discover something about his children. And I'm making a generalization, I mean, sometimes it's the woman who works full-time, and there are stay-at-home men, but the propensity for stay-at-home men is very, very low. Even when men are offered flexibility, they don't take it up because guys who take it up are seen as not senior management material, they give out a signal, that is the signal. Whereas a woman who has children, she's forgiven. Her, as a man who wants to look after his children and work flexibly, is sort of outed as not being interested in a career. So men are terrified of actually accepting flexibility options even if they are offered. So during this COVID, everybody was sort of working at home and working flexibly, and maybe some men think, well, you know what? I really enjoyed playing with my kids in the afternoon, even though I worked late at night.

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Hannah: Then go back to not seeing them, arriving at home when they're asleep, and leaving before they wake up. I don't want that anymore. And weekends just running around, trying to make up when I'm really exhausted and I need to sleep. But I feel I have to make up otherwise, I'm not a father, or I'm not enacting my role as a father. I call myself a father, but I'm not practicing being a father, and I feel guilty. Some men feel guilty, and women are always feeling guilty too, because, whatever they do, society always says that somehow women need to do better. And I make that point, mainly because women are paid less because of the gender pay gap. And feminized industries being less well remunerated, and somehow the message is that if women did a bit better, that gender gap will close. That's somehow the leaning in, I mean, you just got to lean in, do better, work harder, improve yourself, and that's what it takes, but it isn't so.

Renata: I'd like to talk about two things that you've mentioned just now. The different ways we see men and women at work and the pay gap. But I want to use an example from last year. Post services around the world during COVID have been just inundated with work. So in Australia, Australia Post was working back in March, April, May, as if it was Christmas in terms of its deliveries. And just a few months after that, and during an extremely busy time for Australia Post, the CEO had to resign. And I don't know if you remember this, but when Christine Holgate started as CEO of Australia post, which wasn't so long ago, I think it was about two years ago. Her salary was, I think, a third of the previous male CEO salary. And I remember that really well. It was all over the news.

Renata: The fact that she was accepting a much lower salary than her previous CEO that she was replacing. And there were discussions about was the previous one being overpaid, or was it because she's a female CEO, and she was asked this several times, and she deflected the answers. Australian post, being in not such a good situation, most postal services around the world are not in a very good situation. Things just went ahead, and there wasn't a lot of criticism, and I didn't see much said about that. But I was horrified that it was such a lower salary compared to her predecessor. And then, a few years later, she made possibly a bad judgment there in giving away some gold watches to her high performer, executives that were unseen as something that should be done or whatever people thought in Australian parliament about this. The prime minister made a very strong criticism about her leadership. And she had to resign.

Renata: I was horrified with that criticism coming from the prime minister. I don't remember other CEOs - male CEOs, of course, because we have so many more male CEOs in Australia than female CEOs for those top organizations - ever being so severely criticized for doing something wrong like that. I don't remember even within government, any other CEO, or head of, or secretary of, being so severely criticized in parliament as this female CEO was except maybe for Michelle Guthrie at the ABC, who also was shown the door very early on. She didn't have a lot of time in the ABC. I think a year and a half later, she had to leave the board, asked her to resign. How do you see that, Hannah? You're always watching and observing women, and this is not about women that choose professions that are traditionally underpaid, like

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nursing or teaching or anything like that. These are women CEOs that are being paid less than their predecessors and are not given any chance if they do anything wrong, they're out.

Hannah: Well, you know, add Catherine Brenner, who was chair of AMP. When one woman falls, it is a mark on all women. I told you so, we employ a woman and see what happens. Let's go back to what works for us. I mean this case with Christine Holgate and her being so unceremoniously let go for doing something, you know, it might've been in bad taste, giving four Cartier watches to executives who'd really done a very lucrative deal with the bank that was going to give Australia post, you know, it was going to remunerate Australia post very well. So, she was rewarding them, but the confected outrage of our prime minister, I think that particular example was an exercise in deflection because of all the other governance and issues of corruption that were going on.

Hannah: She was an easy target. Throw Christine Holgate under the bus and have a tantrum in parliament, you know, this confected faux outrage, which really I thought was totally over the top. He threw Bridget McKenzie under the bus, too, with the sports rorts. But I don't think she made that decision all by her little self, and I think the prime minister's fingers were all over the decision to give certain electorates benefits that other electrodes for the political calculus of it all, but others weren't getting it. So, women are easy to throw on the bus, which brings me to the sort of leadership we have. The leadership that talks about closing the gender gap, providing a safe workplace, and then the leadership that behaves in a way that makes women feel vulnerable makes women feel singled out.

Hannah: If there's a mistake, women make a mistake, and she falls. Men make a mistake, and it's an opportunity to learn. We treat men and women differently when they get there. And even to get there, women are scrutinized. Women are judged on higher and harder and more shifting standards than our men. Women are subjected to this notion of filters. And I'm thinking of this notion of executive presence, does she have executive presence? And executive presence is a very subjective phenomenon. The reason is slave to passion, we know that we can justify all these things in some sort of evidence-based way, but our decisions usually are made subjectively. So she doesn't have the gravitas. So when you think about what gravitas means, how she communicates a notion of wisdom. I mean, this is all very subjective. Her communication style is not compelling.

Hannah: Now, what is the compelling communication style? It's usually the way the men communicate, not the way women communicate. Her appearance, you know, remember Julia Gillard outside, our prime minister who was always told that she looked wrong. Every day there was something in one magazine or another about her hair, her jackets, her big bum. Even Germaine Briand, I remember on Q and A said, Julia, you've got a big bum. Now, why are we talking about women's appearance continually? This comprises this sort of nebulous notion of executive presence. So subjecting women to the scrutiny and then judging them when they're there. I mean, women are vulnerable, they're visible. They are visible when a woman is

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there, and therefore that renders them vulnerable. If you're catching them, do something wrong rather than catching them do something right.

Hannah: Women walk a tightrope, and we expect things to change. I did a major study in 2000, I mean, my research was in 2005 and 2006. And this was at a time where the economy was booming. And we were talking about the war on talent. And somebody somewhere realized that, well, maybe we employ women. We could increase our talent pool. So all of a sudden, companies were saying, well, we want to get women, but we can't get women, which was, you know, they weren't looking in the right place. But when I went into organizations to ask, to analyze what was happening, the women were not rising, that it was difficult to get women leaders. What was actually going on in those organizations? And, you know, a quick summary, the 24-hour seven cultures, the culture of scrutinizing women, cultures of not valuing women's intelligence, the cultures where we were hiding their pregnancy if you want to go to get to partnership or seniority.

Hannah: Don't let anybody know you're a family woman, or certainly not have it shown in the workplace. And that was the research, and the book came out in 2010, but I look at what's going on now, and you wonder what has changed? We say the words that we accept families, and we accept men and women as family people, but really we don't make it easy. We don't make it easy. I mean, I know before the last election, when labor was suggesting that we have some sort of universal health care, I think one of the ministers said, are you not wanting to introduce communism to our country. This is a communist plot. So, here we are, you know, a basic human right like having childcare is somehow perverted into this communist plot. This is what's still going on. And we wonder why women are still treated as poorly as they are because the leadership isn't there. We need leadership from now males up there to advocate for women. Not only to advocate for women to actually do something. Take action. And childcare will be one great example to facilitate women's entry into the workforce in a way that isn't killing them.

Renata: Yep. And this is really everything that has happened with this example of Christine Holgate, and everything that you're saying is in very high contrast with what we're seeing in parliament this week and last the week, and probably next week as well in regards to sexual misconducts that are happening right now, and that has happened in decades past. And the Parliament's inability to take any action to make women feel safe or say anything that makes us believe that actions are being taken and that these women are being taken seriously. So in one example, we see actions taken really quickly to correct the wrong of giving out gold watches to high-performing executives. Yes. I see a problem with that as well. I just don't think it warrants a complete turnaround of senior leadership at the Australia post because of that.

Hannah: Renata, can I just say, what about the bonuses that are given to the senior executives? I mean, much more than the worth of a gold Cartier watch. And these are mega bonuses and companies that were saved job keepers to stay afloat. Do you know what they did with the job keeper? They converted it to bonuses for senior executives. And here is Christine Holgate being let out to dry in the most humiliating of ways. Sorry, I interrupted.

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- Renata: No, no, no. You're making a very good point. And then we have this, he said, she said, quite literally that's what's been going on in Canberra situation about the rape allegations, and we don't see where that's going. It probably will be something that's drawn out, and we don't see a lot of action taken swiftly to give women a strong sense that the seriousness of what has happened is taken seriously. And also, so that other organizations that are looking up to that high office see the good model and the best practice of how you take a strong issue like that and you quickly turn that around. So how are you observing this, Hannah? Because I don't want to be in your head when we're watching tonight.
- Hannah: The sort of obfuscation and the prevarication and the tiptoeing is, it actually begets beliefs. Parliament is not a safe place for women. There is no infrastructure to report any - well, I'm not going as far as sexual harassment - but any bullying, any disagreements, any difficulties, there is no human resources department for these staffers. And this is just going back to the, 'he said, she said this sort of subtext of that, the reductionist in it. It's a weasel word. It's a way of saying, well, I don't believe that. Her pain is being questioned. There are two sides to every story, but the way he presented that it was a throwaway line as if this is a throwaway issue.
- Hannah: He didn't give it the gravitas. He could have said it in a way that gives this terrible, allegedly criminal act a gravitas. Instead, it was this, well, this is just collateral damage. This is just, yeah, we move on. It was his whole demeanor, it was his body language, and it was his verbal language, you know? So that really gives a message that, yeah, we need to move on, get on with it. It was ugly, just the way he handled it was ugly. And would make any woman think twice about reporting anything untoward, and women don't. We know from the stats that people, not just women, but women, in terms of those who upon which harassment is perpetrated, outnumber men by far, but people stay silent because careers are ruined.
- Hannah: Opportunities are ruined. Your name is bandied around, and once it's out there, it's never forgotten. Employment prospects are ruined. And this is why she didn't decide to proceed because she was given a choice, maybe not directly, but indirectly she was given a choice. Do you want a job? We've got an election. What are you going to do? That was basically what was offered to her. And she chose to keep her job. She was a young staffer, so there was no other way. It was a black and white situation. You lose your job, or you keep your job, and she chose to keep it. So I'm not very happy about the way this is handled. Now three more women have come up and accused this guy. And let me tell you, this alleged perpetrator has no shame. He leaves with - and this has been said - a compensation package.
- Hannah: He leaves with references. So she suffers, she carries this pain for two years, and when I found out there's something untoward, he was let go for breach of security. That was the reason he was let go and client references, and a compensation package. Well, he's doing very well, thank you, in another employment. Whereas she, as women do, bear the pain of victim status and they have to explain their victim status, and they have to explain their victim status, and they have to act to repair their status, and if she didn't call out, there wouldn't be reparation. There'd just be another woman who'd stay silent and another woman who'd stay silent, so

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she has to take the risk. Now her name will be on Google forever, and it's going to affect her life. But she became the whistleblower, and so the victim has to become the whistleblower because nobody else, everybody else, is a bystander. Everybody knew, and nobody said anything. So many people knew, and the prime minister didn't know. Now I find this absolutely not believable. How could he not know that this was going on when his staff knew, where his other ministers knew? Oh, they say they didn't tell him, why didn't they tell him? Well, there must be some sort of don't ask, don't tell, or worse still, everybody is lying. These lies and obfuscation it's quite sickening in terms of the highest office of the land. So this is the behavior in the highest office of the land.

Renata: And now we know that this first whistleblower initiated what's potentially a movement of 'me too' within parliament that started a whole wave of allegations, including that a cabinet minister allegedly committed rape before entering politics back in the late eighties. And the prime minister now knows who that cabinet minister is and, or member of the cabinet, I should say. And that person hasn't stood down. Now, that's when I think the decision-making is flawed compared to what happened to Christine Holgate. You know you want to take swift action back then to show your leadership and show you cannot do things in a certain way in a government institution like the Australian post. Then you have to take swift action as well when there is potentially a very serious crime involving a member of the cabinet in charge of an important portfolio within your government. And until that is resolved, that person shouldn't be in office. It just doesn't make any sense that you would not use that same ideology to take swift action and protect the community against somebody who could potentially not be fit for office.

Hannah: And that doesn't mean this person doesn't have a right to fair justice, but while it's being investigated, while the situation is being interrogated, it is incumbent on this person to step aside and let justice prevail. And if there is no case to be made, then come back. Of course, it will affect him. It's going to affect him, but these are the consequences, but it affects the standing of the parliament. If you're ignoring it, or you're whitewashing it, or you want it to go away, it's like children wanting, closing their eyes and saying, it's not there. If I could close my eyes, it's not there.

Renata: The problems have been compounded to a point where it starts to show a trend of how the problems are being dealt with, and that doesn't send the right message to women in the workforce. Women who may have faced these issues in the past, and it's still very raw for them, managers who, when faced with issues within their teams, don't know how to deal with it and need modeling, and need best practices, and need to know in that vicarious learning that comes from seeing how others deal with it. So, all of those cues that you get from watching a high office deal with a problem is, I think, really important for our society. So I think that I would expect more from the government. And I know it's a shock, but it's been a few days, it's been a few weeks now, and I still don't see anything happening to make me feel confident as a working woman that this government has my back.

Hannah: Well, is it a surprise that there is a decline in trust in institutions, and it is affecting our democratic processes? If we don't uphold the integrity of our institutions, we

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will see a decline in democracy because it's about whatever you can get away with. And if there's an inconsistency in the way we treat people, and we keep coming back to the example of Christine Holgate, if you've got people like the head of the chairman of ASIC Australia, James Shipton, I think he charged the taxpayer \$177,000 for his personal [inaudible]. And, I mean, it was just acceptable in a culture of entitlement. That's the way we do business. And it took a lot of pushing and questioning by the media before he resigned, and he was probably pushed aside, he and his deputy both. But certainly, did we see the standing up in parliament, the outrage, the performative outrage? We didn't see that. He just quietly, over a few weeks, he sort of moved aside. Whereas with Christine Holgate, there was theatre around a woman, and she became part of the theatre circus of demeaning women, throwing them under a bus. So, it was the double whammy.

Renata: Now, Hannah, I'd like to switch gears and move it towards us because some people might be listening and saying, Oh, it's easy to criticize others. But when we first started talking about recording this conversation, I told you about my experience managing people and how much dealing with my staff - be it because of their personal issues at home, be it because of issues at work. And that included both dealing with staff that were dealing with domestic violence and also staff that were reporting sexual harassment at work. As a manager of people, you have to know that this will be something you need to deal with and that you need to deal with well. You need to be the leader that you're supposed to be for your people, and it's not easy. I say it's not easy because it's not easy for the leader emotionally to deal with these things. But also because depending on where you work, the culture may not be there.

Renata: The support for you may not be there to help your staff deal with whatever the issue is. And, it can be really, really stressful for everybody involved. I know you've done research into organizations and women in the workforce, what is it that we can learn so that we can do this better? I can only say I've done the best I could, but I don't know that I did the best thing that I could ever do. Like, I'm not really sure looking back, I can't put hand-in-heart and say, I am absolutely a hundred percent sure that I did the best possible thing. I just did what I thought was the best thing at the time, considering the resources I had. And frankly, I didn't feel a lot of support around me to help me deal with the situation I was dealing with. I was learning as I was going. I've never had any education to deal with the issues that I was facing. It was really a stressful time every time it happened. And it happened more than once, it's not like, Oh, this one thing happened in my career. No, I'm 48 years old. I've been managing staff since I was 21, 22. I've learned a lot along the way, but frankly, I still think that it's not part of the MBA. It's not part of your formal education. Why is it that we don't deal with this formally?

Hannah: There are organizations who provide training, policies, and procedures. It helps a lot when an organization provides an infrastructure of support where you actually know what to do, who to speak to, you're not alone. And, I mean, we can't be saviors. And if there isn't support, we feel we have to take on the burden of that person, but what can we do, assuming that there is limited support? I think providing someone

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with a listening ear - and I'm not talking about a criminal act here because if it's a criminal act, it's gotta be reported to the police, to the authorities, and every organization should have a protocol for reporting. And if your organization doesn't, then you may have to take on the burden of reporting this.

Hannah: But if there are any difficulties, I mean, life has challenges. And we all have issues that we have to deal with. Life is not a smooth, upward trajectory of success as some people try to paint it, and you hear people present their journeys of success. You think, Oh, I can only feel terrible because their journey has been unencumbered [inaudible] existential issues of pain difficulties. We all face it. I think providing someone with a listening ear, listening to the issue, and doing what you can in your skills and what is legally right or ethically right for that person. And I say, what is ethically right, if you see somebody is depressed, and you are not the psychologist, it is not for you to treat their depression and you tell them I can help you with this.

Hannah: I can help you with your career path, I can help you deal with conflict situations, but if you're telling me you're depressed, then you should have a list of psychologists that you know or suggest that they're getting the right professional help. So you're triaging in a sense. So you know your own capabilities and capacities, and you work within them, and that's the ethical and moral, and in fact, legal thing to do. But within those boundaries, you give the person what you can, and if you can step into their shoes, and if you have any previous experience understanding, they will understand that you understand. And when somebody is being heard, that is really a very powerful dynamic of actually being heard. But the other point is, you as the provider of the service of coaching- and I know as a coach myself - you may also need [inaudible]. Your own coach, your own support system, somebody to shoot the breeze with, somebody else to say, look I'm having difficulty within myself.

Hannah: I don't feel at this time, I don't know for whatever reason you might be having marital problems, you might be ill, you might just not be feeling up to it to say, Oh, I'm feeling that I can't at this moment give my client or that they deserve, or that I should be giving to them. You might actually be giving them a whole lot more, but it's always good to check in with somebody else to discuss issues. Nothing is black and white. Everything has elements of grey. Everything can be seen from different perspectives. Sometimes another perspective only adds to your own understanding, to your own learning. So, without exposing the confidentiality of the issue you're dealing with your client, there are ways to talk about some of the issues so that you can do a better job, but also that you are being fed as a person, that you are being looked after.

Hannah: Because if you're giving, giving, giving, you can become empty very quickly. And it's only in a work situation. You've got other demands of relationships everywhere. So you've got clients, work, family, husbands, wives, partners, children, we may feel depleted, and everything is at a fast pace. We are running. And people even say to me during COVID, I seem to be running, I seem to be going from one zoom to the next zoom, to the next zoom. I'm sort of hiding my food on the chair next to me and popping it into my mouth. Well, we all need to stop and have reflective space to think aloud. It's the talking therapy where we can say our thoughts aloud, and there

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isn't a hard moment. And if there was a person on the other side there that can hold you while you are expressing your confusion, or your despair, or your joy or whatever it is. If there's somebody to partner with you in your learning and your growing, and giving you some of the love that you need, I mean, we all need love, and we all need others to put their arms around us metaphorically, if not physically. So I think this is how we keep our stamina to keep going as professionals.

Renata: I have found that working independently as a coach has allowed me to be a much better mentor and much better support for my clients. The time when I felt really stressed and felt constrained about giving help was when I was working inside an organization as a manager with a team and having to either work with the policies and procedures that were in place or work around the policies and procedures to support my staff. That's when things were really complicated. And if anybody's listening who can relate to this, I completely a hundred percent understand you, if you're having issues like I used to have with staff that are being bullied or staff that have problems at home, big or small. The staff that have come to you with reports of sexual harassment. It's quite difficult when I often felt that I knew more about what to do next than the HR person I was supposed to call and ask for help.

Renata: And that used to freak me out because that's not how it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to give someone a call who will then step on board to help me and help my staff. And that's how I felt that I was let down as a manager, and I probably let people down as well. However, as I got older, when I remember being very young and discussing this with my husband like I had something horrible said to me, or some really unfair situation that I found myself in, and I felt like I wanted to report it, but we discussed it and decided against it. Either because we weren't citizens of Australia yet, and we felt like we were in a very risky situation, or I was ambitious, and I wanted to progress in my career, and I felt that that would hurt me.

Renata: That was 20 years ago. And now I have clients that tell me the same. So I'm saddened by the fact that two decades have passed, and we still have the same issues, where people feel like they can't report something horrible because they know that it will negatively impact their career progression. Depending on where you work, of course, there are some wonderful organizations out there, but depending on where you work, this is pretty the standard. And it happens not only in Australia, it happens in other countries as well. And we keep talking about a movement and changes and things that are happening, and I just feel that they're happening too slow. If you think about four years ago, I think it was, you know, the Kavanaugh situation in the US, you know, when the 'he said, she said' was the same situation that we now have in Australia. We learned nothing from watching that unfold. And now we have the same issue again, and it's like Groundhog day. We're not learning anything from these situations, we're repeating the same mistakes, we're leaving things unsaid and undone, and we're not moving forward fast enough.

Hannah: Well, Renata, you know, in both those situations, it was the leadership. I mean, Trump was getting up and mimicking the victim in the Kavanaugh case. And her name escapes me for the moment, but he was treating the situation as a joke. He was making fun of her, making fun of her evidence. And, well, Brett Kavanaugh,

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whether he was guilty or not, it made a fuss. It made an absolute fuss of the whole situation. And this went on, and you could see it went on worldwide. So any woman watching Trump gets gesticulate and make fun of this poor woman, if they had a case to complain about at that moment, they would have said, I am not proceeding with my complaint because if she gets treated like that by the president of the free world, well, what chance have I got?

Hannah: Today, in our situation in Australia, we have the same leadership. Of course, he's not behaving like Trump, but he's shifting his feet, he's obfuscating, he's denying, and he's pretending he knew nothing about it, and that also undermines trust. Just your other point of deciding, whether you proceed with a complaint and report it, or whether not, it is a difficult issue, but for the people out there, I would say, choose your battles. You choose your battles. And once you decide that this is a battle worth fighting for, you pursue it, and you get people to advocate for you. Together we stand, divided we fall. And in a lot of these cases, divisions are created, and the person who has been abused or sexually harassed is alone and left out to dry.

Hannah: The other point about the organizations not having the infrastructure of support. I was watching [inaudible] who's the Dean of Medicine at Melbourne University, and he's about to take up the position of president at King's College, London. And he really stuck his neck out yesterday on the drum, but I thought, yes, he talked about the grey areas. A lot of these procedures are black and white, and you are constrained. You either go this way, or you go that way. There is no room for mediation, for discussion, for exploration. If you provided greater space for discussion for people actually talking to each other, rather than taking positions, we might actually learn something from each other because we're too busy holding positions. And then things get bifurcated, and then we get, 'he said, she said,' so black and white. And there are many grey areas in all those in all situations, even situations that, on the face of it, look black and white. And we do not explore.

Renata: I think we need to start wrapping up because this is going too long. I'm going to do a lovely introduction to this and tell everybody a little bit about you before adding the conversation to the podcast. But now that we're sort of wrapping up, if people want to reach out to you, can they find you where on LinkedIn?

Hannah: They can find me on LinkedIn. Yeah, absolutely.

Renata: And you have a new article that you've just published. Is it published already, or did you send me a draft?

Hannah: Yes, it's published. It's called 'Society at the edges, populism, polarization, and paralysis.' So, that's a big paper, but if people look up the conversation, they can see shorter articles, but this was sort of a journey of love during COVID. I thought, well, I'd given this paper in New York in 2019, and I thought it's a big paper. I don't think I want to write it up, but then COVID came along, and I thought, well, I will write it up. So it's yes.

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- Renata: And I want to link your work on gender studies as well on the episode show notes because you have written books and articles that women and men might find really interesting. So I'll make sure that those are linked to the episode show notes.
- Hannah: Well, really it's about ethics. It's about ethics, governance, diversity, and race, all very linked in. And we tend to separate them from one another as if they are something that we look at in isolation. Gender, race, ethics, governance are all interconnected. And also the inequalities in society. These are all interconnected. So this already what my paper's about, is the interconnection. And we can't look at gender without looking at race, without looking at income and wealth inequality, without looking at our history. So, it's the whole intersectionality of life. Good to talk to you.
- Renata: I think we'll say goodbye now. And since so many of my friends are moving to port fairy, I'll come to port fairy and visit you very soon.
- Hannah: Oh, please, please.
- Renata: Can't wait to see you, Hannah. Thank you so much.
- Hannah: Okay. Thank you. Bye-bye.