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When I first arrived in Australia over 20 years ago from the United States, one of my first contract roles was in a higher education institution. The topical area was and is considered even today male dominated. My job was to install a specialist communication system that I had also implemented and managed in the US. I only share these details to show that I was hired for my expertise in a limited time basis in an IT related function.

I was quite used to working in male dominated groups, spending much of my work life for 20+ years. I was also involved in women's leadership and change management. I was aware of gender politics and thought the world had moved on. That was until I came to Australia in 1995.

Fast forward 20+ years. I heard Kate Jenkins speaking on a podcast about this inquiry and felt that no matter how long ago or how small my example is, it might add to your thinking around the issues of gender respect.

My anecdote happened when I started the assignment described above in 1995. We were getting the team together to go to a project site when one of the team referred to me as a "girl". I was shocked. I was probably his age or possibly a few years older. In my very direct way, I turned to him and said, "Never refer to me as a girl." I think he was as shocked as I was. But I don't think he ever did it again, at least not to my face. We were fine colleagues for the rest of my time on the assignment, so there were no hard feelings. But I don't think he had even considered how disrespectful he was being because the culture generally then, and now, accepts this infantilisation of women. It's subtle, but it's a verbal power move.

Language is powerful. Words set mental constructs and reinforce them. Women are adults who can take back control of language, or at least call out instances when the power is attempted. Awareness is critical.

Sometimes the key is behaving like the adult in the room. Women need to support each other in their own networks, particularly in the smaller workplaces, or where they are 'the only one'. Say it with a smile, but do say it. Every time. To every person - male or female, boss or subordinate or peer, at work or in social situations - and things can change, one woman at a time. Teach children - sons and daughters - that they have their own personal power and integrity. Help them transit through the stages from girl to young woman to adult woman, from boy to young man to adult man.

Thank you for the opportunity. And thanks for appearing on Katherine Murphy's podcast to keep us updated and suggesting exercising voices for the inquiry.