

# Four Years After Goodes, Australia Still Has No Idea How To Talk About Race

Shannan Dodson- Yawuru woman and National NAIDOC Committee Member - 20 July, 2019

## Racism is a very hard, uncomfortable thing to talk about.



Racism is a very hard, uncomfortable thing to talk about.  
(Image: Getty)

When people get uncomfortable they often project anger, frustration or animosity. It's a coping mechanism; a way of dealing with the deeply buried shame, confusion, and issues that just feel too difficult to tackle.

When I watched 'The Final Quarter' for the first time I was angry. I bawled my eyes out, I felt hopeless and cautiously hopeful rolled into one.

I was devastated for Adam -- he was bullied out of the game, out of his workplace. And for Indigenous people it created that resounding sick feeling that is all too familiar.

It reminded me of being called an 'Abo' and the freedom and comfort so many people feel to be openly racist because I have fair skin and they think I'll be a comrade in their hate.

It took me back to the shame people made me feel for being Aboriginal, and hating myself, because people constantly convinced me that I should.

We should have been better for Adam. We should be able to have these robust and open conversations. I know it's hard -- I find it hard to face up to things that are difficult to talk about; we all do.

Think about the last serious argument you had, or the last time someone raised an issue with you -- particularly if your actions had upset them. You probably felt defensive, angry, embarrassed, ashamed, frustrated; felt like you weren't being heard or were misunderstood.

You might have tried to put the other person down, or deflect any of your wrong-doings or shortcomings and blame it on them. You might try to convince them that their behaviour is worse and you're being unfairly called out.

You might come up with a million reasons why they were wrong and you were right.

And the conversation was probably uncomfortable and potentially hit a nerve -- one that you don't want to believe is true (or for anyone else to believe about you either). And you were probably so mad, you just wanted to shut the conversation down and never discuss it again. The walls come up.

This is what happened to us as a nation, and we couldn't get to the point of finding common ground. But as with any conflict, you have to find a resolution, as the conflict will affect you, them, and everyone around you.

We needed that moment where the anger subsides and you can be civil; open to listening. You can have a conversation logically, honestly and calmly.

Saying "I'm sorry I hurt you, I can understand where you're coming from" with no 'buts' or retorting statements can be difficult to do for many people because it's admitting that you have faults (and no one likes to bring that to other people's attention).

But in that moment you need to remember that you don't get to decide when you've hurt or vilified someone. Their pain and hurt takes precedence over your ego and discomfort.

This country is carrying a lot of guilt, trauma and resentment that we haven't dealt with, that came out



It took me back to the shame people made me feel for being Aboriginal, and hating myself, because people constantly convinced me that I should. (Image: Twitter)

in those boos for Adam Goodes.

*"We failed him. It can never happen again."*

I recently had an old school mate contact me and apologise for racist comments she made towards me 20 years ago -- with no request for sympathy or vindication. Just genuine admission of guilt and bad behaviour; that she was wrong.

I didn't realise how much I needed that. Acknowledgement of the constant weight of feeling uncomfortable in my own skin and of being told I didn't belong.

We owe that acknowledgement and understanding as individuals and as a nation to Adam, to slowly lift the weight he has been carrying for all of us. It's never too late and we need to ensure this doesn't happen again.

I hope as a country we can have the courage to take that step. Because momentary discomfort, is nothing compared to a lifetime of feeling shamed, and never good enough.

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