

There are bigger issues at stake than racist taunts

ANTHONY DILLON THE AUSTRALIAN JUNE 03, 2013 12:00AM

ALL I know about Eddie McGuire and Adam Goodes is what I have seen on television. I find them both to be likeable people. I do not think for one minute that McGuire intended to be nasty towards Goodes. The public has been tough on McGuire, and he has been tough on himself.

Why? For the usual reason: we make others feel guilty so we don't have to face our own guilt; and we all carry guilt of some sort.

As with any society, especially one with a history like ours, racism will always be with us to varying degrees. However, I think in Australia racism is minimal. It is unfair to call Australia a racist country, simply because some racism exists. That would be akin to calling us a rich country because we have some millionaires. There are pockets of racism, just as there are pockets of great wealth; however it would be just as wrong to see us as uniformly racist as to see us as uniformly rich.

Activists and apologists are quick to shout accusations of racism and stereotyping when media stories highlight negative aspects of some Aboriginal communities: high crime rates, child abuse. But they fall into the same trap by calling Australia a racist country just because instances of assumed racism are reported in the media.

Interestingly, though common enough in some places, the media rarely reports verbal abuse of non-Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people. Refusing to give an Aboriginal person money or a cigarette can evoke "f . . king white c ... " Racism can run both ways.

While I desire to see all racism eliminated, this is unlikely to happen, given that humans will always find something to fight over.

Given this, perhaps Aboriginal people should focus on what they personally can do to minimise the effects and prevalence of racism. This is in no way blaming the victim, but simply being practical.

When faced with racist remarks, one can simply laugh. This is easy to do once people learn to value their opinion of themselves more than they value other people's opinions of them. But learning new responses is made difficult when there are rewards for being the victim of perceived racism, such as being called a hero, or the power to silence or sue others.

A response to a racist taunt that communicates "your racist remarks have no effect on me and are more of a reflection on you than they are on me" is easy once the motivation of the racist is better understood. A person who engages in intentional racist acts does so because of a low sense of self-worth. Someone who genuinely feels good about themselves sees others as their equal, and has no need to engage in racist activities. People who are insecure with themselves engage in racist acts as a way of protecting their own weak nature. So why waste your time being offended by the words of an insecure person?

It is far better to empower people by teaching them that they have choices in how they respond to racist taunts, than to "protect" them by focusing on prescribing and monitoring what others can

and cannot say.

As long as people are upset by racist comments, racists will use such comments as a way of unsettling them. When the racist sees that their dumb comments get no reaction, they will simply give up and be left to face their own insecurities.

Australia is a great country to live in, as any number of Aboriginal people will tell you. Let's not energise racism by giving it more attention than it deserves. To focus on issues like these detracts from more serious issues of physical abuse and neglect, poverty and unemployment, which plague some Aboriginal communities.

Proof of such distraction was evident when Aboriginal politician Bess Price gave a speech recently to the Northern Territory parliament on the death toll from violence in Aboriginal communities, starting with her own kin. Her powerful speech barely registered in the media. Let's focus on what matters most.

Enforced political correctness is fundamentally un-Australian. It runs against the irreverence and healthy realism about any form of constituted authority that is fundamental in the Aussie tradition and arguably comes as much from Aboriginal Australia as anywhere else.

Anthony Dillon is co-editor of *In Black and White: Australians All at the Crossroads* to be launched Wednesday, 6pm, at Oscar and Friends, Double Bay, Sydney, and in Perth by West Australian shadow treasurer Ben Wyatt, Wednesday, 10.30am, at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University of Technology.