



## So...podcast Antoinette Lattouf

*You're listening to So...podcast with John McKenna*

**Antoinette:** Hi, I'm Antoinette Lattouf. I'm a senior journalist at Network10. I'm also the co-founder and director of Media Diversity Australia and I'm about to add author to that list. I'm currently writing my first book with Penguin Random House Australia. I'm super excited to be on the So...podcast, so let's get talking.

**John:** Antoinette, let's talk. That's what I do, that's what you do, but you do one more thing better, you write. I actually want to go straight into the book because I know we're going to talk about Media Diversity Australia but I'm just super excited about the title. I think the audience are going to be super excited about the title. So go for it, what's the book and what's interesting, it's not written yet but this is what it's going to be called.

**Antoinette:** I'm literally writing as we speak. I took a little break from writing to have this chat, so it's very much a work in progress. I'm super excited about it. So the book came about in a probably untraditional way in terms of the process. Usually a writer has an idea, seeks out a publisher or goes to an agent with an idea to take to publishers to try and find somebody who wants to publish it. I guess what happened with me is I was on a television program, a publisher saw me and reached out to me and said, "look, I think you have an interesting voice, an interesting perspective, would you like to write a book, would you like to write a children's book? A fiction book, a young adults fiction." Now when somebody comes to you with that it's quite overwhelming. I was like, "oh gosh, I don't know, I'm pretty busy, I'm not sure". So I'm um'd and err'd for a little bit and it wasn't until I was sick and in bed and had a couple of days "off", because being sick isn't really time off. But I was able to write down a few thoughts and what I really wanted to discuss was where we are in





Australia in terms of our conversation about race and equality, and what happens if anybody dares to challenge the status-quo. So most people would know the self help inspirational book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, it's something that speaks across decades and has been read by generations.

And mine is a bit of a cheeky take on that because it's *How to Lose Friends and Influence White People*.

John: I love it! Love it! It is so cool!

Antoinette: And I guess with that title I'm trying to, I guess, buy into a bit of the global conversation that's happening as a result of Black Lives Matter, that obviously began in the United States but kicked off some really important and uncomfortable conversations here in Australia. So while it's a little bit personal, I talk about my experiences of being an advocate for more cultural diversity in the media, I also looked to some other people who've had really awful times when they've attempted to bring to the national discussion or the national conversations their experiences of systemic racism or injustice, based on someone's background or colour of their skin.

We've got Adam Goodes, the former AFL player who was literally booed off the field and out of his career. And I guess by exploring some of my experiences, what's happening around the world, I'm trying to provide a guide and a bit of hope for people on how to navigate but having some honest conversations that it's controversial. It makes people uncomfortable and a lot of people don't want things to change because the system in society is working for them and their privilege. So that's what the book is tackling and potentially going to lose me a few more friends along the way.

John: You know what? I reckon you're going to gain heaps and I wish I could do you a high five and knuckles but I'll do elbows online with you.





Antoinette: Well that's very COVID safe, elbows are very COVID safe, so that works well.

John: Also works out well with my disability because it's all I can do, so that's cool.

Antoinette: Double win.

John: It's interesting when you talk about diversity in media. I talked to my father the other day and he was saying, "why do all newsreaders have blonde hair?"

Antoinette: Good question, Dad. Interestingly, and that takes me back to the moment I decided that we had to do something about it and started Media Diversity Australia. So I was at the gym and anybody who's ever been in the cardio section of the gym where all the treadmills and bikes and cross trainers and whatnot are, there's always a bank of television screens. One next to another and it was the morning, so it had breakfast television across all the networks on the screen. And I remember looking at each screen, ABC, Channel 7, Channel 10, Channel 9 and just seeing a sea of blonde and wall-to-wall whiteness. And then when I looked around at the gym, and I live in Sydney and it was just a regular suburban gym, in my gym was what Australia is made up of. There were of course Anglo-Australians, but there were Asians and Indians and Arabs and Indigenous people, Pacific Islanders, and I looked at the room and I looked at the television and I thought, this is completely disconnected. There's no representation. It is a sea of blonde hair and a sea of white faces and they're tackling a lot of issues that relate to all of Australians. So it was literally I had that, a bit of a heads up, profanity is coming but it was kind of the f\*\*k this moment where I was like, "that's enough".

John: Good on you! Yes!





Antoinette: At that time I think it as 2016 and I thought, we celebrate and pat ourselves on the back for being a multi cultural country but we're only multi cultural to a certain point. There are certain institutions where that diversity isn't allowed to prosper. So yeah, your Dad's question is a very pertinent one and also the impetus to do something about it.

John: For sure. Media Diversity Australia, that's a not-for-profit is it?

Antoinette: Yeah, so it's a not-for-profit and the weird thing about it, I guess weird, but we're all working journalists or media professionals. So it's something that we do often in an unpaid capacity or where funding is ad hoc. We do it in addition to our jobs because we want to advocate for change and provide solutions for change and pathways for more culturally diverse people to get into the industry, and also to succeed and have editorial impact.

John: So when we talk diversity, obviously we can talk culture and we can talk race, obviously disability comes into it and other people's ability of different types.

Antoinette: Yep.

John: At the moment, let's be honest, there's a great man at the moment, Dylan Alcott, who is all over television with regards to the tennis. I love how he speaks in relation to he doesn't bang on about his disability, he will touch on it; he wants to be seen as a commentator and a sportsman, and I respect that. So he's one of these people, in my mind, that he's done quite well. Also I'm going to throw another name at you and whether you recall the name Stella Young.

Antoinette: Mm hm, yeah.

John: Stella and I did television back many years ago on community television channel 31.





Antoinette: Yes.

John: And another very empowered person who spoke about disability and her amazing Ted Talk was around disability being inspirational porn. So we've got to stop looking at disability to make you feel better or whatever. So it ties in all of this, doesn't it.

Antoinette: I think a valid criticism, I mean diversity is an umbrella word. It includes diversity of age, diversity of socio-economic background, ability, culture, language, religion, region. Whether you come from metro, rural or regional Australia. So I guess for the purposes of what we do, our focus is cultural and linguistic diversity but we partner with gender organisations or disability organisations. I guess for us, to be effective we wanted to focus on one thing and then provide partnerships with specialised organisations to tackle the other. But what you mentioned about Dylan is really interesting. As you say, he doesn't make a big deal about his disability. It's obviously visible, it's obviously part of his identity and I suspect it's the same for people in the disability community. You want to be heard for your voice, you want to sit at the table not just to be inspirational, not just to talk about – like I look forward to not having to talk about diversity and racism because that means that our society is more inclusive. The more we only get invited onto panels or only do things to talk about disability or racism or sexism or whatever it is, means that we still have a long way to go. And ideally you've got experiences on whatever, like family relationships, mental health, economics. You have lived experiences in other things that you can talk about, it's not just about playing the one card and I think right now it's at that, and you've mentioned inspo-porn or you're only trotted out to talk about the one thing and I think we're more multi-dimensional as human beings and have more to offer.

John: I'm really encouraged when you're looking at employment and jobs where the word lived experience comes into it.

Antoinette: Absolutely.





John: It's a nice phrase at the moment where we can look at your qualification, we can look at the piece of paper you have but are you bringing to the table your lived experience, and I think that's nice. And whether that be for employment or even at a governance level.

Antoinette: Yeah, absolutely. And I think when people say to me, "well maybe all those blonde reporters, or whatever, all those Anglo journalists, maybe they're the best person for the job". Maybe they can cover any story, because a journalist is trained to check facts, interview people, put their bias and prejudice aside, but what's lacking is lived experience. If you have a room full of people where everyone is able bodied, everyone is middle class, everyone is of an Anglo background, everyone comes from the inner city, almost everybody went to a private school, then what lived experiences in that room to empathise, to have contacts with people, to have connections to stories, to have insights into issues, I argue it's completely limited. So when you're sitting around at an editorial table and if all the people in the room have similar lived experiences or almost parallel lived experiences, where their gaze is or where their contacts are or their fingers on the pulse are probably going to be in the same area.

John: Exactly.

Antoinette: So how are we going to really hear from under represented groups, marginalised groups, people who often miss out in the national conversation or miss out in terms of government policy? They're the people who need to have a voice and that's why they need a seat at the table. That's why just having carbon copies of the same person is problematic because the media is part of our democracy, it's the pillar of our democracy and a democracy needs to represent all Australians and right now our media is failing all Australians.

John: Media Diversity Australia, share some of the wins the organisation has had so far.





Antoinette: You want me to share some of the wins? Okay. Well some of the impact we've had, we've released a report last year, which was four years in the making, and it was the first time we actually gathered data. We don't have any data in Australia, unlike the UK, the US and Canada where we can actually go, 'okay what's the make up of our media and how does that compare to the Australian population'. And we were able to, in figures, show just how big the disparity is. So people are like, "well, why do we need that, because we can use our eyes and ears and we can know it's not representative. But we don't know if things are going to change in five years' time unless we have this data to compare it to. So I guess for us, having that and making headlines in Australia and also overseas really kicked off an important conversation and one that people can't look away from because now we have the figures and we'll repeat the research.

I guess we've started in New South Wales and now we're also in Queensland and Victoria, looking to start chapters in other states. We have a summer scholarship program where we place final year students in newsrooms and they get paid. We have a Media Diversity Australia Award to reward people for excellence in reporting on culturally diverse people and people with disability. So to make journalists care about those stories. So we've had a few little wins. I think the real win will be when we repeat that research and hopefully we see the figures get better and the representation get better.

John: A couple of words I've got which are my favourite words, I've got many favourite words but if I use the word conscious and unconscious bias here's a prickly one for you. We talked about media and mainstream and culturally diverse, where a person is really culturally aware of their background and very proud of their culture, can that get in the way about how they're presenting the story? And if it does, how do they manage that?





- Antoinette: Look, we all have unconscious and conscious bias. I think this is one of the things that comes up. It came up in Black Lives Matter, with black reporters reporting on that. Can they report on that without having too much prejudice? But the same could be said for every time a white journalist covers somethings that Scott Morrison says because he's a white PM. Any time a white person covers the Christchurch terror attacker, because he's a white man. And I think having a diverse newsroom and good editorial checks and balances, but you have other people to pull you up on things. So if you have a blind spot, if I have a blind spot, I have a colleague with a different lived experience or background to tap me on the shoulder and go "hey, how about you do this", or "how about you also interview this person". So I do think that all humans naturally have their own biases but if we have a range of people telling our story then we're going to do a better job of (a) helping one another address those biases, and (b) also helping to identify them. Again, that if anything reinforces the need for greater diversity. Not that white people can't tell white stories or black people should only tell black stories, but that we are stronger if we have a mixture of perspectives and lived experiences. And of course the editorial checks and balances to make sure that we aren't running a line that's just sympathetic towards our cultural group.
- John: Let me throw in the word professional mentoring. Am I right in thinking that this could also play a role, and I'm sure you've had mentors in your life?
- Antoinette: Yeah. Look, it can and I think for our industry it's not just about mentors for younger journos, what we lack is just generally women but also women of colour more particularly in positions of leadership. So taking people from a couple of years experience and helping them to go into big on air roles or big editorial roles, because that's where you can have significant impact. And so far any progress that's been made in our industry has been white women, so it hasn't been diverse men or diverse women, it's just been white woman. So any diversity strategies has just favoured white woman. And it's great to see more women in





management but it just hasn't gone far enough. So mentorship helps but I just think it needs to be mixed. Not only early stages, also mid career, right up to the top levels because that's where you can really change the culture of an organisation.

John: I think in reality, Antoinette, it doesn't finish, mentoring.

Antoinette: No. I'm still getting mentored. I've had a mentor, her name is Monica Attard. She's a multi award winning journalist. Former Russian correspondent for the ABC, now she heads up a journalism school at a university. She's amazing. She's been my mentor for 12 years. She's mentoring me throughout this book and I hope she'll mentor me for as long as she's able to. I don't ever stop learning and I think we can all improve and we're stronger when we have allies, and she's been an amazing ally and supporter of mine.

John: We spoke about the book, *How to Lose Friends and Influence White People*. Looking at the crystal ball, the book's out there, it's finished, you've got a bit more money in your bank, which is cool, what are people going to be telling you, what sort of feedback are you going to receive after they've read the book? In your answer, people are going to say "yeah love it". There could be people say "it's crap, I don't like it".

Antoinette: Yeah, look and that's something I wrestle with on a daily basis. I go from being super excited and passionate and typing away thinking "this is great", to absolutely mortified and almost paralysed by fear if I think about the trolls that are probably going to come after me on social media. Or the critics who could write damning reviews. So yeah, it's certainly hard putting yourself out there, particularly because a chapter in my book is going to examine some of the repercussions for people in the past who have put themselves out there. So I'm going into this very aware of the backlash and just what a backlash can do to your career. But you know, I just think nobody who was safe or played it safe has really had a significant impact in society, if you look back at history. I don't think I'm doing anything that's going to revolutionise the world but





unless I'm uncomfortable and taking myself out of my comfort zone then how can I be asking other people or expect other people to do the same? So yeah, it's a bit of vulnerability and it terrifies me but it also excites me.

John: The words losing friends, interesting one. Obviously it's really good to have it in the title but you lose a friend or a person goes out of your life and it's not always about what your beliefs are it's just there are other circumstances.

Antoinette: Yeah, of course.

John: Interesting isn't it.

Antoinette: Look, friendships ebb and flow and you have friends for different periods in your life. I guess this is more about those who make a conscious decision to cut you off because of your beliefs. And I'm exploring where that has happened in my professional life, including with family. And I think intergenerationally what we've seen with misinformation, say around COVID, the baby boomer generation and their children who are often young adults or late teenagers, sometimes mums stop speaking to their sons. We've seen this happen in the United States where someone's a really big supporter of Fox News and QAnon conspiracy theory boards spouting some anti-vaxxer or white supremacy views, and the children of these people are really struggling to get their parents back away from that misinformation. And in some cases, and there's one case I read about recently where a son stopped talking to his dad because he felt like he had lost his dad to the misinformation online conspiracy theory world. So sometimes it can be quite lose to home to people where you have ideological differences, because social media polarises us so much more and feeds us so much misinformation, it's happening to families. So yeah, it's not only friends in the friendship sense, it can be friends in the family sense that you lose as well.





Like I, for example, have been deleted off two of my cousins' Facebook pages and that was after they made an announcement that anybody who supported Black Lives Matter didn't have a role in their life. Then I promptly got deleted. So that was – and this is the sorts of people I used to go for dinner with every few months. So that was a very clear connection of a friendship that was lost.

John: Obviously this book is going to have amazing, powerful messages in it. I want to put out the challenge to you, when the book's done let's get together and talk about how to make it more accessible. Now when I'm talking about accessible I'm not just talking about other languages I'm going to be talking about let's do something in Auslan for the Deaf community. Let's talk about something in plain English version for people with intellectual disability.

Antoinette: Yep, sure.

John: Because I think the messages are powerful and I'm just going to take the privilege on my podcast, you to go, "yeah John, why not, let's give it a go, we'll catch up afterwards".

Antoinette: Let's do it. There is going to be an audible version.

John: Lovely.

Antoinette: So people, for those with vision impairment there will be an audible version but obviously accessibility extends far more than that and I'd love any of your expertise into how to make this as accessible as possible.

John: Sounds good. Antoinette, I've had an absolute blast, a hoot, conversation with you. People are going to want to know more and how do they keep up to date with the book? What do have to tell them and where can they go to learn more?





Antoinette: Yeah. If you follow me on Instagram or follow Penguin Books, they will be making announcements. I'm about midway through writing, furiously writing to hopefully get this on shelves within months. At the latest, early next year. But the conversations are happening every day. The impacts of these things are happening every day in our society and in our news and in our politics, so stay tuned. I hope I don't lose you as a friend after reading this book. [laugh]

John: Not at all. I'm feeling connection over the internet with you. Your energy, your smile, I'm loving it. Thank you for coming on to So...podcast. Before I say goodbye I just want to remind everybody that all of my podcasts are available on Spotify and fully transcribed and people can read the story, also available on YouTube. [www.johnmckenna.com.au](http://www.johnmckenna.com.au) is the website. Antoinette, I don't want to say goodbye but I know we've got busy lives.

Antoinette: It's just bye for now, John. It's just bye for now.

John: Thanks so much for coming onto the show.

Antoinette: Thank you. Bye-bye.

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