

Dear White

LET'S GET *(un)*COMFORTABLE
TALKING ABOUT RACISM

Women

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

The
Workbook

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foreword by TERRI E. GIVENS

Thank you so much for engaging in our book, podcast, webinars, or workshops! We're glad they brought you here.

Here's a little on how to use these supplemental materials:

We deeply believe that we can make lasting change easier if we do a few things:

(1) Lean into our humanity and tap into our empathy - largely by listening to and reflecting on people's stories.

(2) Understand the history that has shaped our current world.

(3) Commit to at least one new action that you'll focus on - because the science has shown that it can take somewhere between 2 weeks and 2 months to form a new habit. Pick one action to integrate in your life, and then you can start on another!

Accordingly, our aim with this document is to give you opportunities to engage more deeply with each of these categories. We'll share a few more stories here for you to reflect on, ask you about your familiarity with the history around these stories, and create space for you to brainstorm what actions fit who you are!

Through it all, if you want to reach out to let us know how it's going, don't hesitate to contact us at hello@dearwhitewomen.com. Also, if you're looking for more of these stories as entry points into different conversations, you'll find a lot more on our weekly award-winning podcast *Dear White Women*. Follow us wherever you listen to podcasts and keep the conversation going!

Ready to get started? YAY!

STORIES

Brittany

When the father of a Kindergarten student went to shake the teacher's hand on the first day of school, she pulled her hands back and said in her sweet voice, "Oh, no thank you, I don't shake hands." The father instantly understood, noting the headscarf on her head, and apologized for making it uncomfortable. Brittany Schultz, the Muslim teacher, said that she often finds herself explaining the customs of her religion, and that she appreciated how gracious he was in accepting her traditions.

Did you know that Muslim men and women don't touch people of the opposite sex, out of respect? Islam is the second largest religion in the world, following Christianity, with nearly 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. Given how many people are Muslim, AND given how much misunderstanding there is about this faith, take a few minutes to check out this site for some basic facts about Islam: <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/islam>

In contrast to this particular parent's understanding response, Brittany has been flipped off, called a terrorist, and told by strangers to "go back to your country." The challenge with going back to her country? She's a White woman from Texas who grew up in a Christian household. As an American woman who converted to Islam in her adulthood, Brittany is already very much in her own country. "People want to know if I'm American or not. I get a lot of people speaking really slowly to me, asking 'Ohhh are you from another country?' People seem more nervous and scared around me [now that I wear a headscarf]."

It's entirely possible this reality about Brittany's identity has surprised you. When you pictured a Muslim Kindergarten teacher, what image came to mind? Had you considered the possibility of a White American woman being a Muslim? What is your honest internal

reaction when you see a woman wearing a headscarf? How might your internal reaction be coming across to others?

Brittany said that when she first converted and started getting this sort of verbal abuse, it really bothered and hurt her, but now, 10 years on, she lets it roll off her back. She's realized that people who make comments just don't know better, and may even be saying things because they're scared of something different, something that they don't understand. In a show of graciousness, she says the more she checks her own biases, the more she realizes she too has been scared of things she doesn't know much about.

In Brittany's case, she wants to make sure people know that it's purely a beautiful personal choice to signify her relationship with God and not that her husband or father ever forced her to wear it. In the Islamic faith, the hijab—which means veil, or covering—is a symbol of modesty. It goes along with other personal choices, like wearing long sleeves, not gossiping, not being overly promiscuous in act or dress; men can also choose to cover up by wearing beards on their faces and modest clothing. According to Brittany, Muslims will occasionally shake a person's hand so as not to hurt the other person's feelings, but generally, Muslim women only shake hands with or touch other women; the same goes for Muslim men. They also tend not to maintain eye contact with people of the opposite gender as a sign of respect and modesty.

Now that you've heard a little bit more about practical interactions with people of Islamic faith, what might you do instead of extending a hand when you meet or greet someone? One option is to wait to see if the other person offers to shake hands, to give them the opportunity to show you if that's something she might do. You can also hold your hand to your chest in a polite manner, like this [image](#) shows.

Reflecting on this section, what's something that you learned? What's something you've learned about yourself? What action will you take based on this - whether it's spending 30 minutes reading up on Islam, or checking your personal assumptions about where someone

is from based on their attire, or holding your hand to your chest instead of reaching out for a hug or handshake if someone is Muslim?

Nazaneen

Nazaneen didn't know the English alphabet when she immigrated from Iran to Michigan at nine years old. Moving from the Middle East to a very White community, her family became the token Middle Easterners, with one Black family and one Korean student rounding out the town's diversity. The experience taught her how quickly people adapt to their environment. "After a while," she says, "in my head I was blonde with blue eyes and my name was Jennifer."

What sort of town did you grow up in, when it came to racial diversity? Based on historical patterns of migration in the United States, it's entirely possible you grew up in an area that looked predominantly White; you may also have grown up in areas that had a lot of racial and ethnic diversity. What did you notice about where different races of people lived, or what your school cafeteria looked like? If you grew up in a predominantly White community, do you remember ever thinking that the token minority members didn't face racism, because it seemed they got along well with everyone?

How well did you know people of different racial identities growing up? Did it surprise you to read that someone of Middle Eastern descent grew up picturing that she was White, reflecting what she saw around her?

So it was all the more shocking when people said strange and outrageous things to Nazaneen. "One of my close friends asked if I was 'Islam' [versus believing in it, or asking if she was Muslim], which was really awkward." While she doesn't think most people wanted to be mean, Nazaneen says she "learned racial slurs from White kids, and when one kid called me a camel jockey I had to ask adults what they meant."

What generalizations do you see society making about Muslim people? Certainly, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, many people turned against those who appeared brown and started making grand sweeping assumptions about Muslims and violence - when in reality, it's a very small faction of extremists who propagate violence, much like it's a small faction of extreme Christian followers who propagate violence as well. What are some hurtful phrases you've heard about people of Middle Eastern descent? We hadn't heard the awful phrases that Nazaneen shared until she shared them. Can you think of any hurtful words that can be thrown at people of your religion, or your skin tone? How would it feel to be called that? Considering that Nazaneen was called racial slurs by White kids, what words / phrases / beliefs might you be exposing your children to?

But it wasn't her parents she talked to about the slurs because she recognized they'd given up everything to come to the United States. And as immigrants themselves, they wouldn't be familiar with the terminology anyway. "You don't want to share stories like this with your parents because you're embarrassed, and besides, they'd tell you not to be friends with those people. But as teenagers, you just want to fit in, to blend in," she admits. "So you chalk it up to people not knowing better because they just don't have exposure to foreign cultures, and you forge ahead."

Look around your community, and think about reasons why people are coming to the United States. How are immigrants treated in your community? What are the organizations that

are helping immigrants, especially refugees, get settled? Often times the first 90 days in a new country is the make-or-break period for refugees to get settled in new communities, so getting help in that initial period is crucial. Are there organizations that you can volunteer with or support in other ways? Or are there ways that you can organize within your community to support national organizations, such as [No One Left Behind](#), an organization devoted to helping those refugees who helped the United States in international conflict leave their countries and settle in the United States?

What are the actions that you might take now, after reading this section? What other questions do you have?

Anonymous

Our friend's father is a Native American [we'd normally include his name and nation but the family requested anonymity]. As descendants of a prominent warrior, their family has a legacy of adventurous and progressive spirit. In that spirit, his father left his nation, eventually went to college, and became a lobbyist for the National Education Association.

When you think of Native Americans, where do you picture them living? The United States has 574 federally recognized nations, with approximately 22% of the 5.2 million Native Americans living on tribal lands; there are a large number of Native Americans who live in urban or suburban communities in the United States.

One evening, our friend's father—wearing his long hair in a braid—and a fellow Native colleague, walked through a big city's hotel lobby to join a work convention on the top floor when they noticed a security guard following them. Once they were in the elevator, the security guard started interrogating them, asking where they were going, why they were there, and if they were sure they were in the right place. When the doors opened and they all emerged into the conference room, they were spotted by their (White) colleagues who saw what was happening. While our friend's father had been relatively nonplussed by the harassment, their White colleagues felt defensive and much more aggravated on their behalf.

Have you ever been asked why you were going somewhere, or why you were someplace that you had every right to be? Have you ever witnessed someone else being asked the same thing? What was your reaction, both to yourself and to others, being treated like this?

Our friend thinks his father's more accepting attitude toward discrimination has been cultivated over the years. In our friend's experience, many people have difficulty telling the difference between a Native American's appearance and a person of Latinx descent. While in our friend's case, their family name sounds Hispanic, that's only because the colonization of New Mexico led to name changes; there has never been a reason for them to speak Spanish, but people make assumptions about others based on their appearance and name.

What assumptions have you made about others based on their appearance, especially if they are Latinx? Native American? Or about others based on their names? If you're like most Americans, you may have never even met a Native American in real life, and your knowledge about Native American culture, as we discuss in the book, may be stuck at the turn of the century - the 20th century. How does this lack of familiarity with Native American culture and people lead to assumptions being made about who they are, or how they show up, in society?

Alan

New York City is the land of diversity, and the restaurants are top notch. Alan headed out with a friend to a renowned BBQ chain, which was filled with Black patrons. After they placed their order, his friend Candy answered a call from her mother. As they were chatting, Alan overheard Candy say, “Mom, we’re the only two White people in here!”

Uncomfortable pause.

The problem? Alan Mak is Chinese. He is very obviously not White.

Whoa, right? What do you think helped make Alan’s cultural identity invisible to Candy, in that moment? Now taking a step back a little, have you ever considered that some Asian identities seem aligned with the White majority, when in fact, they are so different? Think about the Asian people you might know - what is your comfort level with Asian “minorities” compared to say people who might be Brown or Black or Native American?

We asked Alan how that whitewashing made him feel: “I just started laughing, like, no Candy, YOU are the only White person in here,” Alan shared. But at the same time, it reinforced the internal struggles he’s had since he was young.

Alan grew up in the predominantly White suburbs of New York, aware that he was usually the only person of color in the room. He felt like his sensibilities aligned with those of his

White peers, having grown up with so many of them—he dressed just like his White friends, spoke just like them, and liked rock music. That said, his ethnicity and facial features did not align as White, nor did his home life. He spoke Cantonese (the Chinese language spoken in Hong Kong, which is different than Mandarin, the Chinese language spoken in the mainland) with his family, and would often head into Flushing, an area with a high concentration of Asian people, to pick out a chicken he would later pluck and gut in his kitchen to make a culturally Chinese hot pot meal.

From his youth all the way to this day, Alan questions if people treat him the same way they treat his White peers. However, unlike being bi-racial, where it was understood that people like Sara or Misasha would have cultural clashes within our households, the struggles with identity weren't spoken about in Alan's world.

Had you considered that people of Asian descent struggle with their identities and where they belong in American society? When you think about Asian people, what are the beliefs or assumptions that come to mind for you - do you think perhaps that they might not speak English as their first language? What traditions do you or your family keep up inside your household that might not be obvious to others from the outside?

Given the awkward dance about people's assumptions about who he is as an Asian person, Alan found that over the years, he developed certain adaptations to blunt potential for racism—making fun of himself before someone else could make fun of him, for example. Even as an adult, he caught himself getting ahead of potential COVID-related discrimination by saying, as he shook someone's hand, "you're not worried I'll give you COVID?" Ha ha ha. Not.

With the likelihood that COVID-19 is here to stay in one form or another, we want to ask if you've ever heard someone in person refer to it as the "China Flu" - and if you have, what do you think you'll do the next time you hear it? Also, have you ever asked an Asian person where they're "really" from? In our experience, it's a common question, and yet it lays bare the assumption that people of Asian descent don't fully belong here. We keep asking

ourselves this question: what does it mean to be an American? What do YOU think about the answer to that question?

We're so glad you've taken the time to think through a few more of our community stories, and that you're on this journey with us to help uproot systemic racism.

As we often say, change comes from two directions - top down, and bottom up.

We hope you'll keep up with self-reflection and critical thinking, so you can make changes that'll ripple out to affect top-down changes through our votes, our spending habits, our advocacy, and more.

If you want to deepen the conversations and **bring us to your organization**, email us at hello@dearwhitewomen.com.

Please help spread the word about our book and podcast on social media (Insta @dearwhitewomenpodcast and Twitter @dwwpodcast) - tag us and we'll share your posts!

Thank you for being part of this work!