STRANGER/SISTER

HATE CAN'T STOP A SISTERHOOD.

a documentary film by Kirsten Kelly & Katie Taber

Discussion and Resource Guide

for Corporate Screenings

strangersister.com

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About The Film

Stranger/Sister (39min)

A FILM BY KIRSTEN KELLY AND KATIE TABER

The United States is experiencing a surge in hate crimes as a tide of white supremacy gathers momentum nationwide. Muslim and Jewish communities are particularly at risk. ***Stranger/Sister*** is the story of two ordinary women, one Muslim and one Jewish, who dare to believe they can join hands to stop the wave of hate. Overcoming a long history of distrust between their two religions, they build a movement that turns strangers into sisters, challenging our assumptions about how to fight hate in America. Intimately following women from Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom chapters in Austin, Chicago and across the Nation, the film follows the Sisters as they build a powerful network of hope in a time of chaos and hate.

Transform Films Inc. is a documentary production company that tells stories of hope, compassion and the quest for a more just world, presents ***Stranger/Sister.***

Odyssey Impact is a multi-faith media non-profit that builds impact campaigns and brings together changemakers in order to address the most pressing social issues facing our world. Odyssey Impact drives social change through innovative storytelling and media, connecting faith and secular communities.

Director's Statement

In the weeks following the 2016 presidential election, we were stunned by the deep societal fractures revealed by the divisive campaign. This unease deepened with the Muslim ban that was enacted shortly after the inauguration. We felt we were witnessing the beginning of a dark chapter in our nation's history. And as the number of hate crimes rose at an alarming rate in the following months, like so many others, we asked ourselves as filmmakers how can we respond?

We came across a story in the ***New York Times*** about the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. Here was an unlikely alliance of women responding boldly, despite their differences, with an example of building intentional friendships - one Muslim and one Jewish woman at a time. As Sisterhood Co-founder, Sheryl Olitzky often states, "It's hard to hate someone that you really know".

We began filming at a solidarity vigil the Sisterhood was holding in New Jersey in response to the 2017 Muslim ban. The school cafeteria was humming with women, and some men, of different faiths, backgrounds and ages. Everyone in that room had come together, across lines that seemed to divide them, to provide emotional support to one another, pray, and directly challenge the idea that "the other" should be feared and shunned. Vigils like this were happening with over a thousand Sisters nationwide.

For two years we filmed numerous local chapters of the Sisterhood, across several regions of the country. We witnessed the transformative power of creating relationships with those you consider "the other". The care and cultivation of these Sisterhood bonds, the commitment to intentional relationships, deep listening, and the power these practices have as a pathway out of fear and hate was deeply inspiring to witness.

We could not imagine that more than three years later, as we prepare to share the film, the country would find itself roiled by crisis. That Americans already exhausted by years of division, now in the grip of a pandemic, would face a reckoning of racial trauma and justice that has been a long time coming. So much pain has been laid bare in this moment. Watching the film now, the flashpoints of hate we include in the story strike us as early warnings of the current tumult.

Never has it felt more important to embrace the lessons of the Sisterhood. Near the end of the film, a group leader speaking to Muslim and Jewish sisters about the Israel-Palestine conflict explains, “In conversations such as these, we want to lead with what we’re not certain about. We’re listening not to react, but to go deeper into a relationship with one another.” More than we could have anticipated, these words ring out with a stinging moral clarity. This kind of listening, in such a fractured time in history, is a radical act.

The story of the Sisterhood has planted in us the seeds of bravery needed to look closely at ourselves, examine our biases, listen hard, and reach out as allies to “the other.” We witness how the mission of building supportive friendships in solidarity with each other, across lines of difference, can be a powerful way to create change. We hope this story inspires audiences to move through the uncomfortable fear and embrace curiosity, trusting that there is so much we all share and that our differences, rather than a threat, can be a source of joyful discovery.

What We Learned on our Journey from Stranger to Sister: An Interview with Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom

Co-Founders Atiya Aftab and Sheryl Olitzky

Sometimes in life a door opens and we choose to walk through it not knowing what lies ahead. This was certainly the case with Sheryl and Atiya.

"I began my interfaith journey while travelling in Poland," said Sheryl. "I witnessed atrocities there that overwhelmed me. When I returned home and saw the rising tide of hate against the Muslim and Jewish communities, I knew I had to do something. I realized that if I reached out to my Muslim sisters we could come together as one and be a force for change to stop the hate that was growing around us."

"Sheryl was tenacious!" said Atiya. "She never gave up on me, even though I initially didn't respond. Her courage, persistence, and sincerity compelled me to accept her out-stretched hand. When we finally met, we connected immediately over coffee. My Muslim values encouraged me to prioritize this initiative. Quranic edict (49:13) states that God made humanity in nations and tribes— meaning in difference — so that we may know one another. **Here was a woman I literally just met, who vowed to stand up for me as a Muslim. I felt compelled to stand up for her as well."**

"When Sheryl and I decided to move ahead and gather five Muslim and five Jewish women together to begin a dialogue, we hoped it would lead to friendship," said Atiya. "But we had no idea what to expect. Our goal at the time was to create a space where sisters could get to know each other and feel comfortable asking each other difficult questions. It would have been easiest to gather in our houses of worship since we both had strong ties there."

"Yes, but we knew we were stepping into unchartered waters and wanted to remove any barriers to coming together," said Sheryl. "For some women, entering a mosque or a synagogue could be intimidating or uncomfortable."

"So we consciously chose to gather in our homes," said Atiya, "where we could break bread together and see how each of us lived out our faith traditions."

"During our initial gatherings, we realized we shared many values in common," said Sheryl.

"Not to mention the commonalities of our lifestyles," said Atiya. "We have similar food traditions. It's not easy to find marshmallows that don't contain pork gelatin! We discovered we share many of the same challenges of preserving our traditions as religious minorities in America. We both knew firsthand the issues that arose when we took our children out of school to celebrate a religious holiday. We also faced similar challenges as women in our houses worship."

"After getting to know each other, we wondered how we could put our values into action," said Sheryl, "and create something that was more powerful by the mere act of doing it together."

"When Sheryl and I learned about a traveling photography exhibit entitled ***Besa***," said Atiya, "we knew we wanted to bring this important story to a wider audience."

The photographs depicted Albanian Muslims who saved Jews fleeing Nazi terror during WWII. Their chapter hosted a community event, exhibiting the photographs and screening a documentary film, entitled ***Besa: The Promise.*** The story brought to light the fact that Muslims and Jews have had a largely peaceful relationship in their over 1,400 year history together.

Sheryl and Atiya realized they were standing on the shoulders of peacemakers who came before them. ***Besa*** was the first of many examples they found that cast light on existing bridges between their two communities. They opened a door and, together, walked through it. **A journey that began with two women blossomed into a movement that neither could have envisioned in their wildest dreams.**

"You Like Hummus? I Like Hummus!": Relating Across Differences

By Janet Penn
Director of Resource Development and Training, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom

After years of interfaith dialogue, Amanda wonders about the substance of her Children of Abraham conversations. Implied is her concern that to do the hard work of breaking down barriers, she needed to get beyond, "You like hummus? I like hummus too!" Heba wonders what we have to fear. "We don't share religious beliefs, why do we have to share political beliefs?" Throughout ***Stranger/Sister***, the leadership team grapples with inherent mistrust and fears of alternative agendas, both from the "other" community, as well as from within their own community. They recognize it isn't easy. Sheryl and Atiya are soul sisters, yet, ten years into their relationship, they have not yet broached the subject of Israel and Palestine.

> ***"It rests upon us strengthening our courage to hear points of view that challenge our own beliefs..."***

What is it about difficult conversations that makes us want to avoid them? Consider a belief you hold dear, perhaps related to a family tradition, or a value close to your heart. If someone strongly disagrees or challenges one of your beliefs, your instinct might be to defend your position or avoid conflict and gloss over the differences. Yet there is a third path, one that just might help us achieve "a more perfect union." It rests upon us strengthening our ***courage*** to hear points of view that challenge our own beliefs, supporting our ***curiosity*** to ask questions that seek to understand a different perspective, and nourishing our ***compassion*** to see a human being behind their position.

How can we cultivate these "three C's:" courage, curiosity, and compassion? Questions are a good place to start. A well-worded question can help us gain new understanding. Rather than total agreement, our goal is to identify shared values, making it less likely for us to demonize the "other".

Questions of curiosity focus on asking about: [1]

- **A person's personal life experiences**, e.g. What or who has shaped your perspective or beliefs? Can you tell me more about what your religion means to you?
- **Values, hopes, and fears**, e.g. When you think about your beliefs, what is most important to you? What are your hopes and fears, both now, and for the future?
- **Areas of doubt or uncertainty**, e.g. Is there an important value that you hold around your religion that may conflict with another value that is also important to you? As you think about your beliefs, do you have any dilemmas or gray areas that you'd be willing to share?

The challenge comes in listening to the answers. Keeping in mind the goal of understanding, **we can listen on three levels**[2]:
Facts, e.g. Make sure you accurately heard what the person has said.
Feelings, e.g. Identify the meaning behind the words.
Values, e.g. Reflect upon the underlying values and essence of what was said.

Call to Action in Your Community:
Your individual conversations can have a ripple effect across your community. **Consider engaging in a conversation with someone in your community with whom you disagree or are seen as "other" in your community.** Use questions of curiosity and listen for facts, feelings, and values. Now imagine if others in your community did the same. How might this enable your community to work together to solve a common problem, despite your differences?

1 The categories and sample questions are based upon the manual, Fostering Dialogue Across Di vides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project (now called Essential Part ners). It is available for free download on their website: www.whatisessential.org.
2 The Compassionate Listening Project ©2018, www.compassionatelistening.org.

Discussion Questions:

1. Are there any core values in your religious tradition that support and encourage, or discourage, relating to others across differences?

2. When you think about the three types of "questions of curiosity," how might you ask a question to someone who holds very different religious beliefs?

3. When you think about the "three levels of listening," how might you listen differently to someone with whom you disagree?

4. On the Civil Rights trip, Todd Allen says we need to engage in the stories of ordinary people who did extraordinary things. At the same time, the leadership team grapples with the tension between how stories can help us relate to a person but also dodge facts and realities. What "questions of curiosity" could you ask to address this tension?

5. Members of the leadership team are often asked, "How can you trust them?", implying shared cultural assumptions about the "other." What are some "questions of curiosity" you might ask to overcome this mistrust? Has hearing the story of the Sisterhood made a difference for you?

6. How can groups with different agendas work together on a shared goal when they don't agree with some of each other's objectives?

Resources:

1. Tips for respectful conversations (Anti-Defamation League): https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/can-we-talk-tips-for-respectful-conversations-in-schools
2. Fostering Dialogues Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide, (Essential Partners), www.whatisessential.org.

Interrupting Hate in Your Community

By Janet Penn
Director of Resource Development and Training, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom

A founding principle of the Sisterhood is that it's easy to hate someone you don't know. But when you spend time learning about their beliefs, values, and hopes and fears for their families, strangers may be transformed into friends, and friends into sisters. In ***Stranger/Sister***, Sheryl and Atiya develop a deep and abiding friendship, despite being in different life stages and from different religious groups that are often pitted one against the other. But, as is the case with most families, it's clear that Sheryl and Atiya's bond transcends what separates them, calling them to stand up for each other when confronted with hate.

But lived reality outside the Sisterhood is often very different. Fast forward not three minutes into the film and we're confronted with supporters of the Muslim travel ban, some carrying automatic rifles, angrily facing off with counter protestors. Throughout the film, scenes of Sisterhood gatherings are interspersed with a mosque burning in Texas and the deadly shooting of Jewish worshippers during prayer in Pittsburgh. What is the personal impact on Muslims and Jews seeing these images? As a Muslim non-citizen, Malisa is afraid to go to a rally for fear of being put on a watch list. Amanda and Shadia talk in hushed tones about the busload of White men driving to Austin for an anti-Sharia rally. While they grapple with not wanting to create more hate through counter protests, they know the mosques will be full that evening during Ramadan and wonder what they should do. Amanda's daughter walks in as they say, "Keep the kids close." "Which mosques?" she asks quietly as her mother holds her tight. We see the fear in both their eyes. Similarly, Rachel shares that her young daughter recently said, "Mommy, I'm not worried. I'm not scared, but what if a bomb goes off during services (in our synagogue)?" "I didn't know what to say to her," says Rachel.

According to Mehnaz Afridi, Director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center at Manhattan College, "Robert Bowers, the alleged gunman who reportedly shouted, 'All Jews must die,' before opening fire in the (Tree of Life) synagogue in Pittsburgh, appears to have regularly posted anti-Semitic conspiracy theories on an extremist social media site, including accusing Jewish people of trying to bring 'evil' Muslims into the United States." In the film, Joe Levin, co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center, states there were 938 hate groups in the United States in 2017. Think about that for a moment. 938 hate groups. How do we square this hatred with a founding principle of the United States, "One Nation, Under God?"

Call to Action in your Community:
Joanne Bland, one of the civil rights activists showcased in the film, says "Social movements are like jigsaw puzzles. Everybody has a piece. If your piece is missing, is the picture complete?" What piece can you play in interrupting anti-Muslim or anti-Jewish sentiment in your community? Which groups in your community might be demonized or targeted? **What is one concrete step you can take to ensure that no group is demonized in your town?**

Discussion Questions:

1. Joseph Levin, Jr., co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center say that fighting hate is a community effort. What does that mean to you?

2. While most religious texts support non-violence (e.g. "turn the other cheek"), how do you deal with accounts in the Christian Bible, Torah, and Qur'an that advocate violence?

3. Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who expressed hatred about a group of people when they didn't know anyone personally from that group? After watching ***Stranger/Sister***, what would you say to them?

4. In the face of rising hate promulgated by White supremacists, what can you learn from the relationships between the Muslim and Jewish women of the Sisterhood and how you can stand up and fight against hate?

5. What would you do if you were Amanda and Shadia and you knew there was a busload of men coming to your town for a rally against your religious group? How would you feel? Would you bring your family to your house of worship? Why or why not?

Resources:

1. Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide (Southern Poverty Law Center): https://www.splcenter.org/20170814/ten-ways-fight-hate-community-response-guide?gclid=Cj0KCQiAtqL-BRC0ARIsAF4K3WHsSl5MV9zwO1GZVELlf-Ju3Qf-Cy1zKGMDGRWdpO87a-HiUZ821ndcaAgQREALw_wcB
2. Countering Islamophobia, (Unitarian Universalist Service Committee): https://www.uusc.org/resources/tools-for-taking-action/humanitarian-crises-resources/countering-islamophobia/
3. Anti-Semitism Today - Table Talk Conversations (Anti-Defamation League): https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/antisemitism-today
4. A Path Forward: Confronting Hate in America (Tanenbaum Center five-minute Video): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfxYE_oy_rQ&feature=emb_logo
5. Five Ways to Combat Anti-Semitism-NOW (Tanenbaum Center): https://tanenbaum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Five-Ways-to-Combat-Anti-Semitism-NOW.pdf

SPLC
Southern Poverty
Law Center

Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide

A presidential candidate wins election after denigrating Muslims, Latinos, women and people with disabilities. A young white man opens fire and kills nine African Americans who welcomed him into Bible study at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, telling his victims, "I have to do it." A Muslim woman is seated on a bench in front of a coffee shop in Washington, D.C., when a woman begins screaming anti-Muslim epithets. A swastika and other anti-Semitic graffiti appear at an elementary school in Stapleton, Colorado. A lone gunman carrying an assault rifle and a handgun storms a well-known gay club in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 people and wounding 53 others.

Bias is a human condition, and American history is rife with prejudice against groups and individuals because of their race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. As a nation, we've made a lot of progress, but stereotyping and unequal treatment persist.

When bias motivates an unlawful act, it is considered a hate crime. Most hate crimes are inspired by race and religion, but hate today wears many faces. Bias incidents (eruptions of hate where no crime is committed) also tear communities apart and can escalate into actual crimes.

Since 2010, law enforcement agencies have reported an average of about 6,000 hate crime incidents per year to the FBI. But government studies show that the real number is far higher — an estimated 260,000 per year. Many hate crimes never get reported, in large part because the victims are reluctant to go to the police. In addition, many law enforcement agencies are not fully trained to recognize or investigate hate crimes, and many simply do not collect or report hate crime data to the FBI.

The good news is, all over the country people are fighting hate, standing up to promote tolerance and inclusion. More often than not, when hate flares up, good people rise up against it — often in greater numbers and with stronger voices.

This guide sets out 10 principles for fighting hate in your community.

1. Act
Do something. In the face of hatred, apathy will be interpreted as acceptance by the perpetrators, the public and — worse — the victims. Community members must take action; if we don't, hate persists.

2. Join Forces
Reach out to allies from churches, schools, clubs, and other civic groups. Create a diverse coalition. Include children, police, and the media. Gather ideas from everyone, and get everyone involved.

3. Support the Victims
Hate crime victims are especially vulnerable. If you're a victim, report every incident — in detail — and ask for help. If you learn about a hate crime victim in your community, show support. Let victims know you care. Surround them with comfort and protection.

4. Speak Up
Hate must be exposed and denounced. Help news organizations achieve balance and depth. Do not debate hate group members in conflict-driven forums. Instead, speak up in ways that draw attention away from hate, toward unity.

5. Educate Yourself
An informed campaign improves its effectiveness. Determine if a hate group is involved, and research its symbols and agenda. Understand the difference between a hate crime and a bias incident.

6. Create an Alternative
Do not attend a hate rally. Find another outlet for anger and frustration and for people's desire to do something. Hold a unity rally or parade to draw media attention away from hate.

7. Pressure Leaders
Elected officials and other community leaders can be important allies. But some must overcome reluctance — and others, their own biases — before they're able to take a stand.

8. Stay Engaged
Promote acceptance and address bias before another hate crime can occur. Expand your comfort zone by reaching out to people outside your own groups.

9. Teach Acceptance
Bias is learned early, often at home. Schools can offer lessons of tolerance and acceptance. Host a diversity and inclusion day on campus. Reach out to young people who may be susceptible to hate group propaganda and prejudice.

10. Dig Deeper
Look inside yourself for biases and stereotypes. Commit to disrupting hate and intolerance at home, at school, in the workplace, and in faith communities.

This is an excerpt of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Guide. Learn more by accessing the complete guide here.

Jerusalem: Reflection on the Sisterhood's Statement on Israel-Palestine

By Atiya Aftab
Co-founder and Chair Emeritus, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom

When we met over 10 years ago, Sheryl and I were confident that we - two women from different backgrounds - who committed to learn about each other's lives and faiths and engage in good works could change the world. We centered the Sisterhood as an organization that created spaces where Muslim and Jewish women can get to know one another and build friendships. Our premise is that Muslim and Jewish communities share an over 1,400 year relationship and our religious communities face similar challenges as minorities in America.

Sheryl and I were committed to our friendship, and we knew from the beginning that if our organization was founded on confli t, it would not last. Muslims and Jews should not see each other only through the lens of contemporary politics. Despite a multitude of commonalities, many around us would try to draw us into politics by asking us about our position on Israel and Palestine. Our research and experience showed that groups who were founded and focused on debating the Israel-Palestine conflict collapsed. We were determined to try something different.

"Our premise is that Muslim and Jewish communities share an over 1,400 year relationship and our religious communities face similar challenges as minorities in America.

Personally, I was very comfortable with this approach. As an activist with a political science degree and one interested in national and international politics, I had many outlets to learn, discuss, and debate the conflict in the Middle East outside of the Sisterhood. Awareness and interest in Palestine was in my DNA. My earliest memories of performing prayer at home was my father's ending prayers – praying for the people of Kashmir and Palestine. I was active in this area while in college and over the years I attend several marches in Washington D.C. for Palestinian causes.

The Palestinian cause was a Muslim cause for me. Jerusalem is the site of the Noble Sanctuary. It is the third most sacred place for Muslims - where Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad ascended to the heavenly realm enshrined today by the Dome of the Rock. So even though I am not Palestinian, Jerusalem has meaning to me as a Muslim. As I have become more educated on the matter and older and wiser (I hope), I see the complicated conflict in the Middle East with more nuance, and I see it as a human rights issue that should matter to everyone who cares about justice and peace.

Eventually, Sheryl and I knew that we needed to tackle the topic, but we needed to proceed with trust, friendship, and wisdom to be successful. We have had 6 annual conferences, since 2014, where we have had workshops for our participants on the Israel-Palestine conflict. We realized however that we needed to engage this issue head on as a board – as leadership – to hopefully set an example for our organization. During our board meeting, in November 2019, we embarked on a deeper exploration into the conflict.

The time was ripe because of the physical journeys that we undertook over the last years. The Sisterhood has sponsored five Building Bridges trips. Our first trip in 2016 was to witness the site of genocide in Bosnia, meet with survivors, and also meet with Muslim families in Albania whose parents had saved and hid Jewish families fleeing the Holocaust. We traveled next to Azerbaijan, in 2017, and experienced a Muslim society recovering from the erasure of their Muslim identity by Communists and meeting Jewish communities that lived in this Muslim majority country for hundreds of years. Our third trip to was to the American South, where we learned firsthand about the vestiges of slavery, segregation, the Civil Rights struggle, and the continued challenges of the African American community.

Summer of 2019, we traveled to Berlin, Germany to understand the Holocaust and the plight of Muslim refugees. When moved on to Poland — to Auschwitz — there were no words. We held the first ever Muslim-Jewish women's prayer service in Auschwitz for all of those massacred including relatives of our Jewish sisters and including Muslims who we learned were also murdered at Auschwitz. Our most recent Building Bridges trip in January 2020 brought us to the Mexican border to learn, volunteer, and witness the issues happening there. We went through checkpoints within the US border. We faced the wall. We saw where a young Mexican boy was shot dead throwing a rock toward a US border guard.

It was no longer possible to not talk about Israel-Palestine. We were ready to acknowledge each other's pain, disappointment, and dashed dreams regarding the land both of our faiths held sacred. In February 2020, a few weeks after we returned from the border trip, we gathered for a two-day board retreat to be guided by Combatants for Peace and the Center for Nonviolent Communications as our facilitators. We faced our organizational, individual, and collective relationships to this conflict, within the context of a broader examination of both local and global injustices, as well as our commitment to a response to the ongoing effect on the people living in the region. Valentine's Day culminated with the following Statement of the Board of Trustees:

"The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom holds a wide spectrum of views on Palestine and Israel. We recognize the complexity of these issues and the passion they invoke. Our mission is to foster relationships between Muslim and Jewish women and teenage girls, to build bridges, and to fight hate. Inspired by our faith traditions, we believe any response to the confli t must be based on human rights, security, and self determinations for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

We commit to working with individuals and organizations, especially those in the region, devoted to non-violent means of achieving peace and justice. We are compelled to engage with those working to transform the confli t, empower those most affected by the occupation, and foster the relationships necessary to build a just and peaceful future."

It was a cathartic gathering. It was raw. It is the beginning, and I know I am blessed to have all of these sisters in my life. We can change the world one person at a time and one step at a time with patience, love and faith.

Building Bridges: A Journey Through the Civil Rights Movement

By Todd Allen, Ph.D.
Messiah University

Dear Viewer:

In the Spring of 2018, I had the blessed opportunity to travel as the lead facilitator for the Building Bridges Civil Rights Tour sponsored by the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. As you view the film ***Stanger/Sister***, you will see a portion of our journey in the South, but more importantly you will learn the story of how women, then and now, coming together in times of increasing tension and division, can change the world.

On our trip, I wrote two letters to my Sisters, one at the beginning and another at the end. I share excerpts of these letters with you now as a reflection on a journey past, as well as an encouragement for the journey that lies ahead. Along the way I also provided a series of daily reflection questions, some of which are captured in the discussion questions below. Finally, I'm often asked what's THE book I should read or THE film I should watch to learn more about the Civil Rights Movement. The answer is there really is no one best book or film (though ***Stranger/Sister*** is a pretty good start), but I do offer a few suggested resources for your edification.

Our purpose on this journey was to learn and be inspired by the history of the Civil Rights Movement so that we would return to our homes transformed, empowered, and confident to peacefully stand up against hate and to create positive change in our communities and in our shared world. Through this film and resource guide we invite you into this journey towards social justice.

What Do These Stones Mean?
April 22, 2018

In my work in teaching the Civil Rights Movement, I am still amazed at how little we really know of our shared history. For some, the narrative of the movement has been reduced to two names (Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks) and four words (I Have A Dream) and even this history is told in very distorted ways. As an educator, I believe that my role is not to tell others what to think or how to think about this history. Instead, it is my responsibility to position people in places and spaces that give them some things to think about, perhaps for the first time. While there are so many lessons to be learned along the way, I encourage reflection on the following three themes:

- The Civil Rights Movement as a story of ordinary people who did extraordinary things.
- The Civil Rights Movement as a story of sacrifice, with some making the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in the cause of freedom.
- The Civil Rights Movement as a story of faith in action.

I present these themes not as the end all be all of how to best understand the Movement, but instead as a helpful framework from which to begin.

> ***"As you explore this history, past and present, I encourage you to do so in community with others where you can learn together, cry together, agree and disagree together, but whatever you do and wherever you go, let it be TOGETHER.***

As you explore this history, past and present, I encourage you to do so in community with others where you can learn together, cry together, agree and disagree together, but whatever you do and wherever you go, let it be TOGETHER. As recent events of racial unrest in our nation have shown, there are many who do not wish to approach this past because they feel it is too painful or too shameful. **As one seeking to do the work of bridge building, may you increasingly come to know the reality that true and lasting bridges can only be built as we move together through our collective pain and shame onward to freedom.**

"Our Common Humanity" (A Letter From a Memphis Hampton Inn)[1]
April 28, 2018

My Dear Sisters:

When I entered into the journey with you, I was a stranger. By the trip's end, I left as a friend, co-laborer, and an honorary Sister, and for that I am grateful. While I learned much on the journey, perhaps the most valuable lesson for me can be found in the words of the late poet Dr. Maya Angelou in her poem ***Human Family*** when she reminds us that "we are more alike my friends than we are unalike." A repeated theme throughout the work of the Sisterhood is the need to reflect upon our common humanity. This is not to deny, ignore, or gloss over our differences nor the subsequent isms and phobias that arise as a result, but if the history of the Civil Rights Movement has taught me nothing else, it has taught me of the dangers of thinking of oneself more highly than one ought. **The Civil Rights Movement is about challenging those systems and ideologies, prejudices and practices that elevate the humanity of some, while denigrating and denying the humanity of others.**

I promised you on our first night together that I would not tell you what to think, but that I would work to place you in spaces that would give you some things to think about. I pray that I remained true to that promise. What you need to know is that you did the same for me...your example of hospitality placed me in spaces to think. Through your questions, comments, observations, smiles, tears, prayers, praise, and silence you were providing me with many things to think about, and for that I am eternally grateful.

From our singing of "Amazing Grace" (one of my favorite hymns by the way) to my inaugural visits to both a synagogue and a mosque, I witnessed the universal beauty of giving honor to G-d in ways that were particularly expressive yet universally edifying, and unifying.

1 Many of the Sisters were taken with Dr. King's "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" written in 1963 while jailed during the demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama. This letter provides both a rationale for the movement and a message of encouragement for future social action. While not confined to a jail cell, I wanted to leave the Sisters with that same sense of encouragement for the future.

While I will not pretend to have understood all that my eyes have seen and my ears have heard, these times of worship in particular and our journey in general, reminded me of the need to practice proximity (getting close to one another) and humility (desire to learn from others) if we are to ever cross the bridge to understanding and reconciliation.

Recently I've found myself reflecting upon the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in "No Religion Is An Island" when he says, "My first task in every encounter is to comprehend the personhood of the human being I face." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke often of the Beloved Community, which "will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives." The Beloved Community was not some utopian ideal or dream rather it was and still is an achievable and attainable state of being if people are committed to making it so. The question before us remains: What about our living needs to change both qualitatively as well as quantitatively if we are to see the personhood of one another? What must change in us if the Beloved Community is to be realized?

"...reminded me of the need to practice proximity (getting close to one another) and humility (desire to learn from others) if we are to ever cross the bridge to understanding and reconciliation.

On a visit to the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson I was challenged by two quotations in one of the exhibits that I think can move us closer to the qualitative and quantitative change we must seek. Dr. Leslie-Burl McLemore, a civil rights activist from Jackson encourages us "to have truthful, meaningful conversations with each other. We may not always agree, but we need to keep talking to each other." On the journey to deeper understanding of one another, we will see each other at our best and maybe at times, at our worst. We will laugh together. We will worship together. We will break bread with one another. We will be broken by the emotional intensity of the journey. **All this and more we must commit to do TOGETHER for it is this practice of togetherness we will fi d the strength to live into the work of peace, justice, and reconciliation in the days ahead.**

Where do we begin? Remember...I promised that I would not tell you what to think...that includes not telling you what to do, but with one caveat. I say that you and I need to begin at the beginning which may look different for us all. Dr. King encourages us with the reminder that "faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase." What steps will you take today on the road to justice and equality?

I mentioned that there were two quotations that challenged me on my visit to the museum in Jackson with the second coming from Dr. Bob Moses, a key organizer in the statewide campaign for citizenship rights that came to be known as Freedom Summer in 1964. Dr. Moses cautions us, "Don't think necessarily of starting a movement. Do what needs to be done, set an example, and hope your actions will click with someone else." This is the spirit of the Movement. This is the spirit of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. This is the spirit so desperately needed in this nation and world.

To G-d Be The Glory! Your Honorary Sister,

Todd Allen

Discussion Questions:

1. How have your lived experiences shaped the way(s) you think about race in the United States? How would you characterize the state of race relations in the nation? What makes it difficult to talk about race in the United States?

2. Do you think the discussion that the Sisters had with one another on the Israel-Palestine conflict, as seen in ***Stranger/Sister***, could serve as a model to discuss race in the United States? Do you think this model would make discussing race relations easier?

3. What do you know about the history of the Civil Rights Movement?

4. What are the bridges of division that we as a nation have still to cross? How are the Sisters bridging these divisions? What are ways that you can contribute to bringing people together across lines of difference?

5. How does your faith tradition call you to seek justice?

Resources:

Viewing:

1. Hampton, H. (Producer). (1987). *Eyes on the Prize vols. I & II.* Blackside.
2. Landau, E. (Producer) & Kaplan, R. (Producer). (2013). *King: A Filmed Record...Montgomery to Memphis.* Kino Lorber films.
3. Lee, S. (Director). *4 Little Girls. 40 Acres and a Mule.*

Reading:

1. Holsaert, F. et. al. (eds.). (2012). *Hands on the freedom plow: Personal accounts by women in SNCC.* The University of Illinois Press.
2. Mckinstry, C.M. & George, D. (2013). *While the world watched: A Birmingham bombing survivor comes of age during the civil rights movement.* Turtleback Books.
3. Olson, L. (2002). *Freedom's daughters: The unsung heroines of the civil rights movement from 1830 to 1970.* Scribner.
4. Ransby, B. (2012). *Ella Baker and the black freedom movement: A radical democratic vision.* The University of North Carolina Press.

Personal Reflection: Building Bridges: Civil Rights Tour

By Heba Macksoud

Board Member/Communications Expert, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom

In April of 2018, I decided to leave all four of my young children at home while I travelled with 50 other women, most of whom I did not know – to experience the significance of racism, bigotry, and hate in its historical context and to hear from the people who were directly impacted by it. I wanted to also let those people, leaders in their own communities who were educating others on history, know that I cared and that I intended to take this knowledge and spread it to others.

Although I had learned about the Civil Rights Movement when I was in school, I felt that it was important for me to refresh my knowledge in order to raise my four children to be ethical, deep thinking people who could possibly make positive change in the world. I always knew that I had to supplement my children's academic education with my own knowledge as well as through volunteerism/activism, which is why I enrolled them in summer camps that embraced this instead of traditional fun-style programs.

One of the most impactful things for me, personally, was hearing from the founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center - an institution dedicated to eradicating hate in all its forms. I learned that movements need grassroots teams working from the ground up (which reinforced the work we, the Sisterhood, are doing), there are way too many hate groups in America (and none of them are Muslim-led), and there is a domestic attack perpetuated in this country every 34 days – which means we should continue to fight back against HATE and get more people on the side of perpetuating LOVE. Throughout the trip we heard stories of reconciliation and forgiveness through faith. We cried, we laughed, and we hugged daily.

That trip taught me that peaceful activism is VERY powerful and important – no matter how long it takes. I found that when bad outcomes happen to people who simply don't deserve the punishment they received (i.e. George Floyd and Breonna Taylor) it is important to channel that anger into peaceful activism, which is why the Sisterhood is so important to me. In the two years since that trip, I can join my sisters in protest, talk to them about how I'm feeling, organize a fundraiser with a powerful outcome, and feel like I'm "creating change" rather than just home feeling bad and not sure what to do. Remedy is all about community. Say something for everyone and don't let hatred grow, because as MLK once said, "If you can't fly, then run...but whatever you do, you have to keep moving."

The Role of Gender in Fostering Interfaith Relations: Why Women?

By Janet Penn
Director of Resource Development and Training, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom

The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom exemplifies the philosophy of anthropologist Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." **Atiya and Sheryl did not initially set out to change the world. They set out to build a friendship and to stand up for each other in the face of rising anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish hate.**

Atiya and Sheryl invited ten other women to join them. Less than a decade later, the Sisterhood is now over 8,000 women strong. Independent research has shown that every sister tells, on average, 45 other people about the importance of developing relationships with the other group and two-thirds are more committed to protecting the stranger. As Todd Allen said on the Civil Rights trip, two ordinary people, over coffee, did extraordinary things. As a result, they have potentially challenged the stereotypes of 320,000 people!

The 19th century Unitarian Minister, Theodore Parker said, "We must believe that the arc of the universe is long, but that it bends towards justice." Cultural norms and social institutions transform over time when groups of people come together and advocate for justice. At times, these changes are codified into law. The legalization of gay marriage and the granting of voting rights to women and Black people are just a few examples in the United States. The Sisterhood is working to make mutual respect and cooperation between Muslims and Jews the new norm through developing emotional bonds, finding shared values, and engaging in community service and social justice work. As women, they develop deep emotional bonds that allow them to engage in difficult conversations about their differences.

> ***"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.***

Throughout history, women often suffer disproportionately during armed conflict and, as a result, have a strong vested interest in promoting peace. During the Second Liberian Civil War (1999-2003), "ordinary" Muslim and Christian women in Liberia came together, and using a variety of non-violent means of civil disobedience, successfully pressured the warlords and government leaders to "...negotiate a sustainable and just end to the war."[1] As the primary caretakers of their children, the Liberian women used the power of their sisterhood to ensure that their children would not shed any more blood in their name.

> ***"Think of one way you can reach out to women or men from other groups in your community to establish a relationship. What might you do together to make your community more inclusive and welcoming?***

Call to Action in Your Community:
Sheryl and Atiya exemplify Mead's philosophy that individual actions can make a difference. Think of one way you can reach out to women or men from other groups in your community to establish a relationship. What might you do together to make your community more inclusive and welcoming?

Discussion Questions:

1. What are other examples of women's groups that have led social change movements?

2. Do you think women are uniquely situated to lead social change movements? Why or why not?

3. Why does the Sisterhood focus on women? How does this impact the relationships that they form?

4. Megyn Kelly asks Atiya and Sheryl, "What about the Catholics? We want in!" Are there any advantages or risks in limiting participation to Muslim and Jewish women?

1 https://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2016/02/Frank-Swoboda_Edited.pdf

5. Towards the beginning of the film, Sheryl says that she and Atiya chose to focus on women because "women are from Genesis, men are from Leviticus. Women navigate the world through relationships and men through rules and responsibilities." What does she mean by that? Are there any risks in making this generalization?

6. Natasha says she knows what it feels like to be the "other" and can't help but feel compassion when her Muslim sisters are targeted by a bomb threat or school evacuation. How can you show empathy when an "othered" group is a target of hate in your community? What else can you do to ensure that they are safe and protected?

Resources:

1. Women Who Pursue Peace and Justice (Tanenbaum Center): https://tanenbaum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Women-Who-Pursue-Peace-and-Justice.pdf
2. Questions for Consideration: https://tanenbaum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/QUESTIONS-Women-Who-Pursue-Peace-and-Justice.pdf

A Framework for Christian Viewers Watching *Stranger/Sister*

By Jennifer Howe Peace, Ph.D.
Tufts University

When Atiya Aftab and Sheryl Olitzky, the two founders of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom are interviewed on TV, the reporter says, "What about the Catholics? We want in!" Atiya responds by referencing the value and power of Jewish and Muslim women connecting as members of minority religious traditions. As Christians in the US, we are members of a majority religious tradition. One of the privileges of being in the majority is that we can take for granted that our traditions and practices are largely supported by the wider culture in everything from which days of the year are considered national holidays to how we think about what constitutes a religious observance. Because of this, an important starting point for Christians who want to engage in interreligious relationship-building or justice work, is an understanding of some of the distinctions embedded in being part of a majority vs. a minority religious tradition.

> ***"an important starting point for Christians who want to engage in interreligious relationship-building or justice work, is an understanding of some of the distinctions embedded in being part of a majority vs. a minority religious tradition.***

As you watch this film there are many resources you can draw on from personal experiences, church teachings, and Biblical texts to think about your posture towards interreligious engagement. Over the years, I have come to think of interreligious engagement as an obligation of my faith as a Christian[1]. As you watch ***Stranger/Sister***, think about the motives that drive the women's participation in the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. What motivates or inhibits you from connecting with people from various faiths? What do you think about the similarities and differences between you and the women in this film?

This guide offers you a framework I developed for thinking about responses to sameness and difference.[2] Use this framework to explore both what you see in the film and what you notice about your own reactions while watching.

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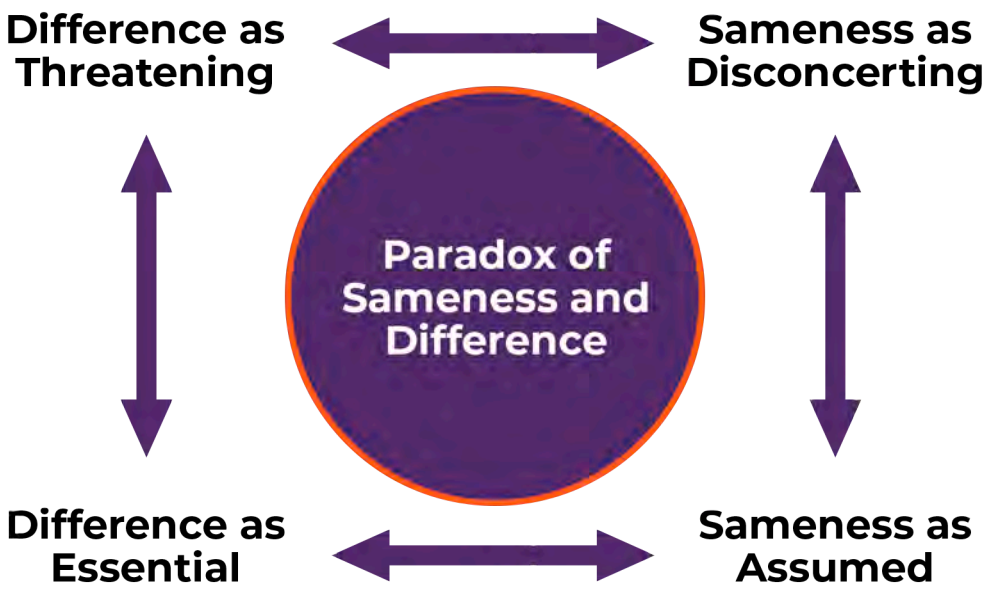
1 For an explanation of my theology of interfaith engagement see, "Just as I have loved you: A Christian Hermeneutic of Love as a Resource for Interreligious Engagement," in Words to Live By: Sacred Sources for Interreligious Engagement, Or Rose, Homaryra Ziad, Soren Hessler, eds. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018.

2 The outline of this framework was first developed for a lecture I gave at the Kauffman Institute on November 15, 2018, titled, "Responses to Difference and Sameness: A Christian Reflection on Interreligious Engagement," delivered as part of the Triennial Interfaith Dialogue Conference at Grand Valley State University. A recording of the lecture can be found here: https://www.gvsu.edu/interfaith/jewish-christian-muslim-dialogue-29.htm Accessed November 22, 2020. A published version of this framework appears in Deep Understanding for Divisive Times: Essays Marking a Decade of the Journal of Interreligious Studies, Lucinda Mosher, et. al. eds, (Newton: Interreligious Studies Press, 2020).

5 Postures for Relating to Sameness and Difference:



I call these five responses ***postures*** to emphasize that like any posture that we can hold with our bodies, we are capable of moving into and out of these various positions. People may find themselves in one posture when it comes to a particular issue and in a very different posture in another context. Postures can shift slowly over the course of several years or more rapidly—in the course of a single interaction. An important overarching point is that while people can get "stuck" in particular postures, these postures ***are not fixed qualities that define a person.*** Another key point is that when we catch ourselves moving from one posture to another, it often leads to an experience of transformative learning.

Difference as Threatening: There are biological and evolutionary reasons why something new, unfamiliar, or different might be perceived as threatening. Particularly in childhood, our experiences, our socialization, and the reactions of trusted adults around us have a lot to do with when, why, and how often we adopt a posture of difference as threatening. In this posture, all other belief systems are not only false but a threat. Typically, people who adopt this posture have had little or no positive engagement with people outside of their own religious group. Where do you see examples of this in the film? Where do you see examples of this in yourself?

Sameness as Disconcerting: In the "sameness as disconcerting" posture, religious differences are accepted as inevitable and are generally seen as non-threatening. However, similarities may come as an unwelcome surprise. For example, a Muslim scholar and colleague described her disorientation when she saw monks in a monastery in Romania prostrating in prayer. As she writes, "Prostration, resting on palms and knees and placing the forehead on the ground, is the quintessential Islamic act of worship...To see my 'own' form of worship performed in an unfamiliar setting unsettled me."[1] ***Where do you see examples of this in the film? Where do you see examples of this in yourself?***

Sameness as Assumed: The "sameness as assumed" posture is characterized by the assertion that we are all fundamentally the same. The core question in this posture is, "Why spend our time focusing on differences that don't ultimately matter?" The strength of this posture is the value it places on what connects us. The challenge, or blind spot, in this posture is that it can be experienced by others as a form of assimilation, or even annihilation. "We are all one" does not leave much room for difference or dissent. A subtle assumption of this posture is that only by conceding to our sameness can we find unity or harmony. Power dynamics are important to consider. Who is asserting sameness? What if those listening don't agree with the speaker's characterization? ***Where do you see examples of this in the film? Where do you see examples of this in yourself?***

Difference as Essential: In the "difference as essential" posture, difference is seen not as a threat to unity; rather, it is what gives a community its texture and depth. Irreducible differences are to be safeguarded. Religious differences are to be celebrated. I can be Christian, and you can be Jewish or Muslim or a secular humanist (and so on), without taking anything away from anyone else. Like each of the previous postures, this position both reveals and obscures certain realities. One blind spot is that similarities may be resisted, downplayed, overlooked, or outright rejected. A second potential pitfall of this posture is the tendency to oversimplify or essentialize identities, as if there is a single or standard way to be Jewish, Muslim, female, a person of color, and so on. ***Where do you see examples of this in the film? Where do you see examples of this in yourself?***

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1 Homayra Ziad, "Oh How You've Spun Me 'Round, Darling" in Jennifer Peace, Or Rose, Gregory Mobley, eds., My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation, (New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 118.

The Paradox of Sameness and Difference: The paradox of sameness and difference is the posture with the most power and potential to heal. The paradox of sameness and difference asserts a fundamental kinship that comes from acknowledging our undeniable similarities alongside our irreducible differences. ***Where do you see examples of this in the film? Where do you see examples of this in yourself?***

Interreligious engagement requires introspection alongside critical thinking. When we recognize and thoughtfully refle t on our reactions to a given encounter (even if that "encounter" is mediated through a film as in the case of *Stranger/Sister*) it can lead to a shift from one posture to another. The movement between postures is a powerful place of learning, understanding, and transformation. ***As you watch this film and discuss it with others, where do you see examples of postures shifting in the film or in yourself?***

A Trauma-Informed Approach to Screening *Stranger/Sister*

By Rev. Storm Swain, Ph.D.
United Lutheran Seminary

Documentary film screenings engage the visual, auditory, emotional centers of the brain for everybody, and, as a screening host, it is important to be aware that the topic of a documentary is likely to relate in some way to the lived experience of persons in the room. An audience member experiences both the **content** of the film, and the **context** of a film screening. During a screening, a person who has experienced traumatizing experiences may be triggered by the documentary, and their bodies may experience a fight, flight, or freeze response.

> ***"With the right conditions, traumatic experience can be addressed, worked through, metabolized, healed, and provide an impulse for social change and personal growth."***

Anyone could be a survivor of traumatic experience, and not everybody's trauma response looks the same. Trauma does not mean someone is sick or weak; it means that someone is both a survivor and is vulnerable. With the right conditions, traumatic experience can be addressed, worked through, metabolized, healed, and provide an impulse for social change and personal growth.

Odyssey Impact has prepared suggestions for taking a trauma-informed approach to your screening of ***Stranger/Sister***. In engaging any documentary film, we need to attend to the three following spaces:

1. **The Holding Space:** The host should build trust and establish safety before a screening to create a space that is as safe as possible for all audience members.

2. **The Suffering Space:** Audience members who identify with subjects of the film may find themselves grieving losses anew; for others, for whom the subject material may be new, empathy with the suffering of others can foster accountability and inspire action in new ways. Hosts need to be open to audience members experiencing the film in different ways.

3. **The Transforming Space:** Through solidarity and discussion, hosts can help engage audiences to reconnect with the ordinary goodness of life and community, through compassion and action.

The following sections offer hosts the opportunity to think critically about how they can seek to cultivate spaces that attend to audience members' traumas with compassion.

1. The Holding Space

Traumatic material warnings are not enough when the subject is in the room. When screening a documentary that contains emotionally provocative content, we need to be conscious of the likelihood that audience members may have experienced or witnessed, or been connected to someone, who has experienced the situation or similar to that being screened. This trauma-informed reality needs to shape our awareness, attitude, and actions before, during, and after a screening.

As a host, we need to attend to the context of a screening to make the experience of the content something that can be witnessed and processed in ways that are not overwhelming. The Holding Space is both environmental and relational, which in a trauma-informed approach seeks to establish a safe space for gathering, viewing, and discussing a documentary film, in a way that may lead to post-traumatic growth (small or large) rather than re-traumatization.

A trauma-informed approach seeks to build, even before the viewing of the film, a relational holding space that reminds people that they are not isolated, but in community, and it is okay to be vulnerable. Cultivating a holding space informs audiences that there are trusted others and intentional actions they can take to prevent or cope with being overwhelmed.

Knowing that a documentary engages almost all the sensory areas of the brain, attention to the sensory experience surrounding the film is important. For those with a history of trauma, this may be crucial in making the screening a safe space. For screenings in settings like educational institutions, community organizations, or houses of worship, this would mean attention to seating, lighting, sound, entry and exit, distractions, bathrooms, food and drink, etc.

The space should be set up well before attendees arrive, and the screening team should familiarize themselves with the space, and work out a plan before a screening, which includes decisions like - what lights to turn off first/last, and what to keep on.

Ideally, you would want to have a screening in a room that can be darkened but with some visible light for people to orient themselves when looking away from the screen, and safe enough to see to leave the room while the documentary is playing. Ideally the room should have multiple exits, and the seating should be set in a way that people can choose to leave their location without drawing too much attention to themselves.

If feasible, there should be a space adjacent to the room where the film is to be screened that people can be without leaving, perhaps with water and food, which provides normality and agency. This may also be a good space for quiet conversation.

It is important to research appropriate local resources for support, referral, and calls to action. If there will be outside presenters, especially representatives for support, it is critical to have these individuals introduced by local trusted persons. This will contribute to setting the scene, or framing the space before starting to play the documentary.

It is important to frame the screening well, through:

1. Building Trust by sharing identity and identification in context. For example: “Welcome to... [location]. I am...[Name and title]. You will notice, as you look around the room, that available exits are... and in case of an emergency exits are... [orienting to the physical space]. Bathrooms are... and there are [beverages/and appropriate food (e.g. not popcorn)] available [in another location]. This screening is of... [name of film and brief public description]. It is produced by/or shown in partnership with... [name of organization, with brief content of mission].” Those framing the space would do well to make comments inclusive and not objectify those with a trauma history. For example, “Those of us who...” rather “Those of you that have experienced...”

2. Establish Safety by providing a road map that tells people what is going to happen and orienting them to the context. For example, "Our plan is to... [screen, provide space, panel/discussion/etc.]. I encourage you all to take care of yourselves, monitor your response, and if you feel overwhelmed, get re-grounded with your feet flat on the floor, look around and check out your surroundings, including behind you. You may find it helpful to consciously breathe in and out, three times, making sure you breathe out for one count longer [as that activates the parasympathetic nervous system]."

2. The Suffering Space

A trauma-informed approach recognizes that many more persons are survivors of traumatic experiences than may have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Beyond those who have suffered events that could have caused a loss of life, serious injury, or some form of sexual violence, many have survived other potentially traumatizing events, adverse childhood experiences, or a series of continual threats that have overwhelmed their physical, psychological, social, and spiritual resources to cope against such a threat or event.

For those who have not had the benefit of trusted others with whom they could share, remember, and work through the thoughts, feelings, and reactions associated with the traumatic experience, there may be a greater risk of being unconsciously triggered by a sight, sound, or other circumstance in a documentary film. This may activate the traumatic experience and risk re-traumatizing the person. Even those who have had the privilege of working through trauma can also be surprised and triggered unexpectedly.

> ***"Even those who have had the privilege of working through trauma can also be surprised and triggered unexpectedly.***

Several practices can mitigate against being unexpectedly triggered, and other practices can help when it happens. In fact, a number of trauma survivors find it helpful to be able to experience the sense of solidarity with those who have suffered similar circumstances, and not only "lived to tell the tale," but have allowed their story to be a gift of survival to others. They also may find it helpful to face their feelings in a safe space, in a gradual way, without becoming overwhelmed.

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Cultivating a suffering space in which to view ***Stranger/Sister*** can be aided by the following ten suggestions:

1. A screening is not therapy, therefore, practices around a screening must be appropriate to the context. Whether a screening is in a classroom, community center, or house of worship, any suggested intervention or practice is best offered generally to the group as information or education, and no one should be compelled to participate, nor singled out to disclose any traumatic history before or afterwards.

2. A brief explanation of what to expect by a trusted person, or someone who seems trustworthy, can go a long way towards countering an unexpected and unconscious response. This is best done in a non-anxious way where the presenter is settled or grounded in their own body, in touch with their emotions, and will not communicate anxiousness to the viewers.

3. When screening documentary films that focus on personal or communal violence, it is a good practice to have an experienced supportive community resource person, such as a local clergy person or a mental health professional, available for informal conversation should someone be triggered unexpectedly by the film's content. It is to be expected that some members of a group may self-select not to view a film they know might trigger traumatic associations. Oftentimes, knowing

4. Many people watching a documentary will have a strong emotional response, which is not uncommon or undesirable. Being triggered is an instinctual response that can precede emotion when a person unconsciously perceives they are under threat, perhaps in the same way they encountered during a traumatizing experience. They may react by wanting to (or actually) fleeing, getting ready to fight, or freezing up, and feeling incapable of action. These are all common ways our body instinctually copes with threat. Also, common are a crying out for those who could offer protection, or an instinctual reaching out for those in their care (this response is often called the "tend and befriend" response). The key thing to note is that these responses are faster than thought, and even emotion, and therefore do not necessarily seem rational or connected to present reality. These adaptive survival responses were necessary when they needed them, but when they remain, they can become emotionally destabilizing and demoralizing to the survivor.

   Many people who experience "triggers" of reactivations of trauma become quite adept at managing or predicting them, and others may not know they are in distress. If a person self-discloses or is noticeably triggered by traumatic content, such as being unable to move after a screening, or in a discussion group, or leaves the room during the film, it is often helpful for a support person to and sit or stand near them, without intruding on their intimate personal space (establishing safety). Keeping at that person's same level or below, keeping a calm, firm, and non-anxious tone, and grounding yourself may be helpful. Knowing that a traumatic reaction can both precede and interfere with thought, it is helpful to either introduce yourself or remind them who you are, and what your role is, where you are (orienting them to the present), and what you plan to do (building trust).

   For example, "Hi [name]. I'm [my name] from [organization], here for the screening of [film,] here at [location.] You look a little overwhelmed, so I'm going to sit here with you for a while, if that's okay, and just keep talking for a bit. You don't need to answer, but you look like you're holding your breath, and you may find it helpful to just take a big breath, and blow it out [modeling such breathing yourself]."

5. Keep interventions focused on the here-and-now, coping with and orienting to the present rather than exploring the past. You do not need to know what triggered the reaction, and any later question should be open-ended and invitational. For example, “Do you want to tell me what’s going on with you here?” It is okay if they don’t want to talk, or aren’t ready to do so.

   Responses can range from flashbacks and other forms of re-experiencing to dissociation, where a person feels cut off from emotion, sensation, or may even feel disembodied. It may be helpful, if possible, to assess whether the person is experiencing too much or very little. If you are alongside someone whose coping resources are (temporarily) overwhelmed, it can be easy to feel anxious yourself.

6. Grounding yourself is part of being alongside someone who needs to be grounded. Whether a person is feeling too much or very little, it is helpful to direct their awareness to their here-and-now sensory experience. For example, “I’m wondering if you can hear my voice/ feel the seat beneath you and at your back (orienting). It would probably be helpful to open your eyes and notice that…” “You might find it helpful to flex your feet, and push them into the floor a bit, so you can feel the ground solid beneath you.” “How about we take three deep breaths, and blow some of the stress out (grounding)?”

   It is important that you do not presume you can touch the other person, even if your intention is to give them a supportive hand-on-the-back or arm. You do not know how touch was connected to the traumatic experience and you do not know how touch will be received or interpreted.

7. When someone who has experienced a traumatic trigger is able to talk, continue to affirm their agency and orient them to the current reality through questions that help them move from that instinctual reaction, and regulating their emotional experience, to thinking about what is next. For example, “Would it be helpful for someone to get you a glass of water?” to “What do you need, here and now?”

8. It is not appropriate for an untrained person to delve into the content of someone’s traumatic experience as this may risk re-traumatizing them. However, they may wish to share something of their story and have you respectfully listen, and witness this, and affirm their ability to cope.

9. When it seems appropriate to start orienting to “What’s next?”, it is helpful to assess resources in the person’s life to process their experience. For example, “Who do you have that you can talk to about what happened here?” If they do not have anyone, then referral to a local resource (mental health practitioner, trusted and experienced clergy person, etc.) may be called for.

10. Orienting the person to leaving is a helpful way of engaging their own ability to care for themselves. For example, “What will you do today/tonight after you leave here?” “What might you do to take care of yourself?” “What do you need to do to be ready to leave?” Some way of closing the conversation is helpful for both of you. “I trust that you’ll do what you need to do to take care of yourself. All strength to you. I’ll let you collect yourself before you go. Bye, now.”

3. The Transforming Space

When a documentary is coming to a close, it is a good practice to more visibly enter the screening space, to the side, perhaps by standing, and watch the credits yourself. This continues to psychologically hold the space for the viewers without making an abrupt transition.

If you are able, start to turn the lights up slowly behind the viewers first, rather than turning them on all at once and startling those who may be still drawn into the experience of the documentary. If you have to turn lights on all at once, give people a verbal warning before you do so.

Moving into the central place to address the viewers, it is helpful to take a large breath – in and out - (or three) before you begin talking. This communicates taking care of yourself, and grounding yourself in the moment. Reaffirm the road map or plan of engagement that you outlined at the beginning of the movie to remind people or inform latecomers. Reaffirm the choice to stay or leave, and the ability to take a break before discussion may start.

A trauma-informed approach to viewing ***Stranger/Sister*** seeks to build a safe holding space with trustworthy people to facilitate the process, attend to suffering that arises, and discover life-giving transformation in community and conversation in an effort to build resilience in individuals and communities.

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Meet the Filmmakers

Kirsten Kelly

Director & Senior Producer

Kelly is an Emmy-Award winning documentary filmmaker who lives in Brooklyn. Recent projects include ***Stranger/Sister,*** ***Healing the Healers: Communal Trauma*** media project (Golden Telly Award, 2019), and ***Healing the Healers: Domestic Violence; The Girl With The Rivet Gun*** (an animated short documentary on Rosie the Riveter), the Emmy-winning ***The Homestretch*** (PBS/ITVS, Co-produced with Kartemquin Films). She is the Senior Producer for Transform Films and an Impact Producer for Odyssey Impact. Previous film projects include the award-winning ***Asparagus! Stalking the American Life***. Her work has been supported by the ITVS, CPB, AmDoc, MacArthur Foundation, the Sundance Institute, Fledgling Fund, Chicken and Egg, Illumination Fund, Good Pitch and Bertha Foundation/Brit Docs. Kirsten is a Fellow at the Sundance Documentary Institute and a graduate of the Master's Directing program at The Juilliard School.

Katie Taber

Director/Producer

Taber's recent documentary projects include producing ***Siempre, Luis***, which follows Luis Miranda, the father of Lin-Manuel Miranda, as he attempts to mount a production of "Hamilton" in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. ***Siempre, Luis*** premiered at Sundance 2020 and will stream on HBO this October. She directed the Wavelength Productions feature ***How to Be Normal***, the coming of age story of a young man who, as a child, underwent a unique and controversial treatment for autism. Other projects include the PBS special ***Into the Night: Portraits of Life and Death*** and the award-winning ***Milwaukee 53206***. She has worked on films for the PBS series FRONTLINE including ***Life and Death in Assisted Living, Dollars and Dentists***, and ***The Child Cases***, and she was a co-producer on the four-part PBS NOVA series: ***The Fabric of the Cosmos***. Taber co-produced the Emmy-award winning feature documentary ***The Homestretch***.

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