



# The South Asian Empowerment Coalition

## A Space For Us , By Us

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Co-Founded by  
Mannal Babar & Sarah Arshad

## Our Project Mission

- ❑ The South Asian Empowerment Coalition is a workshop series centered around the financial and cultural empowerment of college-aged South Asian women.
- ❑ As Pakistani immigrants, we've experienced alienation in trying to find spaces that actively challenge normalized patriarchal practices and internalized misogyny, function as a safe space, and cultivate tangible problem-solving abilities.
- ❑ We designed this initiative as a way to provide the tools, resources, and knowledge for South Asian women to navigate disempowering cultural practices, attain a greater sense of financial independence, and also feel pride for their South Asian heritage.





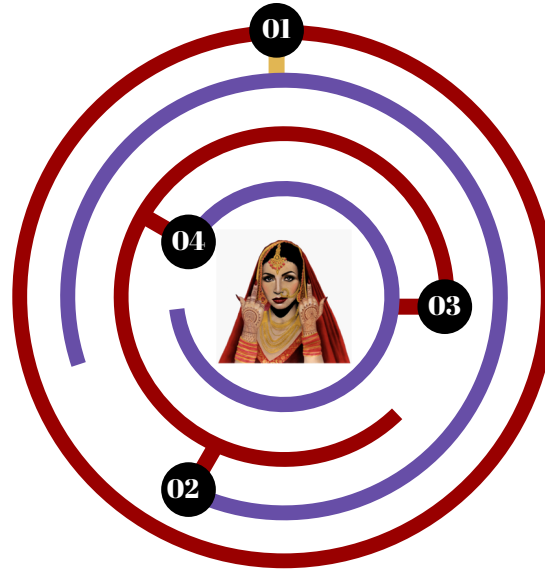
# Timeline & Strategy

**01 Pre-Planning**

August 2019

**02 Workshop #1**

September 2019



**03 Workshop #2**

Early November 2019

**04 Workshop #3**

Mid-November 2019

Sponsored by Institute for Women's Leadership & RW WCC

*The South Asian Empowerment Coalition  
presents:*



*Financial Literacy & Breaking Cultural Stigmas Workshop*

*Food will be served, RSVP below*

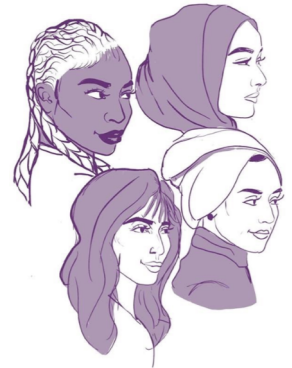
*Wednesday, September 25th, 2019 at 6:30pm  
College Avenue Student Center, Cap & Skull Room*



- ❑ Our first workshop was done in collaboration with MALIKAH which is an organization/global grassroots movement focused on healing, organizing for social change, and building inclusive, safe, and just communities.
- ❑ We talked about how budgeting is a practice of managing our money, but also as an exercise of mental health and financial wellness.
- ❑ Activities included: calculating take-home income, setting personal targets, tracking our progress, and saving for long-term investments.
- ❑ Discussion about our relationship with money, financial barriers, and some additional tools/apps that are useful.

01

# Budgeting & Financial Agency



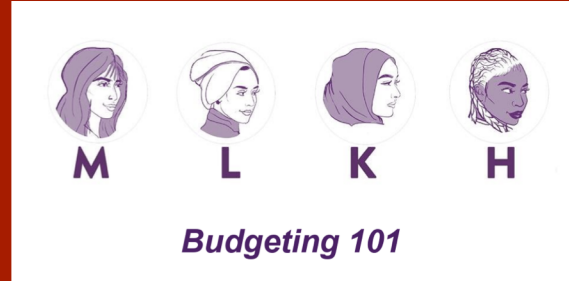




**It's hard to talk about money**

**Budgeting is an exercise in  
maintaining your mental health  
and your financial wellness**

**Goals Worksheet**




- ❑ We discussed how the bodies of South Asian women tend to be up for discussion in family and community spaces.
- ❑ We begin to unpack the personal experiences of our attendees when it comes to being forced to conform to a eurocentric standard of beauty.
  - ❑ South Asian women are socialized to present themselves in a certain manner especially one that's directly tied to characteristics prescribed to preserving their femininity.
  - ❑ This conversation then moved how low self esteem correlates directly to high rates of depression, anxiety and other mental health issues experienced by South Asian women.
- ❑ We engaged in a self-empowerment activity that used verbal affirmations as a tool of self-love and validation. It was designed to normalize the public appreciation of South Asian bodies that prioritizes emphasizing the beauty within South Asian women and culture rather than negative comments

**THE SOUTH ASIAN EMPOWERMENT COALITION WORKSHOP SERIES**

## **MERI BODY, MERAY RULES**

A conversation on body politics in the south asian community

November 7th, 2019  
9pm  
Scott Hall Room 115  
Food will be provided



**My body is NOT up for discussion**

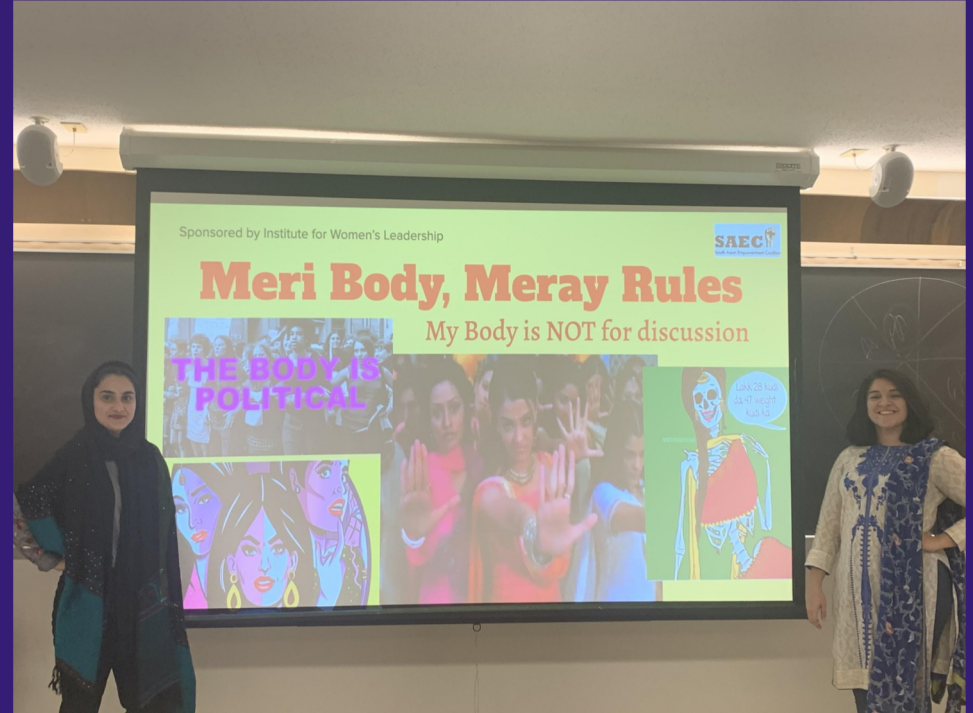
**SAEC**  
South Asian Empowerment Coalition

# 02 Body Politics



*Visibility is acceptance*

**Nearly 5.4 Million South Asians live in the United States**





- ❑ We discussed the historical racializations of Orientalism and Anti-Blackness by recognizing their historical roots in European colonial projects and how they function today.
- ❑ Recognized the processes of racialization throughout literature, art, media stereotypes, government policies, and institutions of learning.
- ❑ Evaluated the way that these processes impact our identities, how we are understood by others, and the different kinds of privileges we leverage as a result.
- ❑ Connected our personal narratives to historical and present realities of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, surveillance, etc.
- ❑ Emphasized the importance of intra-communal

# The Personal Is Political

# 03

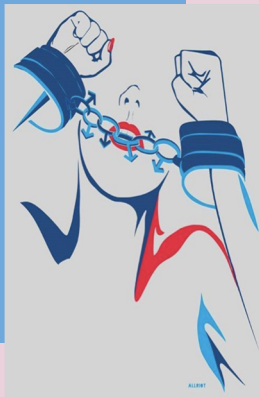




**Exploring Orientalism,  
Anti-Blackness, and  
Racialization.**



# Embodying Feminist Leadership



## Breaking the Silence

## Tangible Tools



- ❑ We often associate leadership with traditionally masculine and feminine qualities, but feminist leadership does not have to necessarily embody one or the other. As we were designing these workshops, we recognized the necessity of using different kinds of approaches. We wanted to relate to our audience in a personable way, but to also get them to think critically about the conditions of society and how they are rooted in our political and historical realities. This required us to utilize our personal strengths to meet the demands of our workshop participants, as opposed to ascribing to one kind of leadership style.
- ❑ Feminist leadership should take into account a multitude of experiences, ways of processing life experiences, and community needs. Some people may feel more inclined to share, discuss, unpack, and heal, while some may want to think about ways to actively combat the harmful stigmas and practices in our community. The goal of our project was not to impose just one or the other, but to leave the audience with the flexibility to practice activism on their own terms.



# Intellectual & Conceptual Foundations

*Our research provided the evidence behind the lack of safe spaces specifically designed for South Asian women to unpack their experiences. It was rooted in fundamental tenets of various political theories designed to generate discourse around issues of gender, race, class and sexuality within the South Asian community.*

**Source: Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1978.**

- ❑ Edward Said's *Orientalism* served as a major resource that framed the conversation about how the personal is political. As South Asians, we wanted to acknowledge the Western dichotomy that distinguishes Westerners as "us" and people of the Global South as the "other." Understanding this distinction helps us make sense of the stereotypes, discrimination, mainstream depictions, and everyday violence that afflicts our community. I specifically contextualized it through the example of the War on Terror in which there was an organized effort to designate Muslims as subhuman, barbaric, misogynistic, uncivilized terrorists.
- ❑ While internal pressures of culturally taboo subject areas in our community are present, we also have to evaluate our external conditions, which includes our political history, power, and self-agency that the Western world has continuously undermined.

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**Source:** Khan, Fariha. “The Dars: South Asian Muslim American Women Negotiate Identity.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 128, no. 510, 2015, p. 395., doi:10.5406/jamerfolk.128.510.0395.

- ❑ This source delves into the existence of women’s dars which are Quranic study groups and a space of shared narratives, agency, and socialization. As we were conducting these workshops, we wanted to cultivate a space in which women felt comfortable to discuss their experiences not just as South Asian women, but across multiple other backgrounds such faith, class, sexuality, etc.
- ❑ Within dars specifically, groups of immigrant women shaped and discussed their lives as distinctly South Asian, Muslim, and American. Many spaces that are branded as feminist tend to focus solely on gender, but omit the conceptions branded by the outside world through other aspects of their identity. This is something that we tried to actively avoid as the South Asian experience is ultimately complex and multifaceted.

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**Source: Masood, Nausheen, et al. "Gender, Family, and Community Correlates of Mental Health in South Asian Americans." *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, July 2009, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19594255>.**

- ❑ This article details the mental health issues plaguing the South Asian community in the US. This was published by the Department of Psychology at the University of Illinois in the Journal of Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Studies.
- ❑ South Asians are the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest ethnic group in the country and the largely positive portrayals of South Asians in the media and in the US overlook a number of problems that plague the community. The topic of sexual and domestic abuse on top issues like AIDS, immigrant related stress among other things impact the mental health of South Asian people but are rarely every discussed.

# The Lessons We Learned

- ❑ Criticizing how our community functions does not mean that we cannot be proud about the beautiful aspects of our culture and identity.
- ❑ When we measure success of a project, we often think about it in terms of quantitative outcomes. It does not matter if 3, 10, or 20 people show up at your workshop. What matters is that they walk away with greater self-awareness, more knowledge, and ways to self-advocate.
- ❑ Solidarity with other communities is vital to the survival of all marginalized people. Our liberation is interconnected.





# Accomplishments



## Solidarity

An empowerment narrative for South Asian college aged women is rarely seen.



## A Safe Space

Saturn is composed mostly of hydrogen and helium



## Financial Tools

Difficult conversations around money were broken into accessible and easier dialogue



## Creating Dialogue

Despite being red, Mars is actually a cold place

## SAEC's Impact & The Future

- ❑ Our project has established a space for young college-aged South Asian women that has never existed before.
- ❑ It's remarkable that we are the first to curate a space focused on emphasizing an empowerment, uplifting and positive narrative of South Asian women
- ❑ It has also put words to experience that many times is internalized and ignored
- ❑ We hope that future scholars will be inspired to continue researching South Asian culture and history. Visibility is key & we need more South Asian women in every single field



## **Our Team Thanks YOU!**



**Mannal  
Babar**



**Sarah  
Arshad**





# Project Bibliography

- ❑ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1978.
- ❑ Masood, Nausheen, et al. "Gender, Family, and Community Correlates of Mental Health in South Asian Americans." *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, July 2009, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19594255>.
- ❑ Khan, Fariha. "The Dars: South Asian Muslim American Women Negotiate Identity." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 128, no. 510, 2015, p. 395., doi:10.5406/jamerfolk.128.510.0395.
- ❑ Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist*., vol. 104, no. 3, Judd & Detweiler, Sept. 2002, pp. 783–90, doi:10.1525/aa.2002.104.3.783.
- ❑ Iyer, Dana Sahi, and Nick Haslam. "Body Image and Eating Disturbance among South Asian-American Women: The Role of Racial Teasing." *Wiley Online Library*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 21 May 2003, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/eat.10170>.