



Transcript

Episode 02 – Part 2:

I Am Canadian, with Dr. Rehman Abdulrehman

Intro

[intro music plays]

Rosie: Welcome to Changing Lenses! I'm on a personal journey to explore how we can make our world more inclusive and compassionate, and our lives more fulfilling and sustainable. Along the way, I'm meeting some amazing Canadians doing amazing things. By listening to their stories and experiences, I hope we will change our lens to see from a more inclusive perspective, and be inspired to build a better world. I'm your host, Rosie Yeung, and I invite you to join me as we change our lenses together. Because changing our lens, changes what we see. And when we see differently, we can live differently.

[intro music ends]

Welcome and Introduction [00:00:49]

Rosie: Hi and thanks for joining us on this episode of Changing Lenses! Today is Part 2 of our talk with Dr. Rehman Abdulrehman, a consulting and clinical psychologist and public speaker, with a special focus on diversity and inclusion. He combines his significant clinical skills with his lived experience as a both a Person of Colour and an immigrant, to help people better understand microaggressions, privilege, representation, and culture. You can listen to his full bio in Part 1 of the podcast, or check out the shownotes for this episode and every episode, at changinglenses.ca/podcast.

Safe Space Commitment [00:01:29]

Before we rejoin Rehman, I want to remind you of our commitment to safety and trust at Changing Lenses. Some of what we discuss may be sensitive or challenging for us to say, and for you to hear – but I really want us to have an open and genuine conversation. One goal of Changing Lenses is to be a safe and brave space for these conversations, and for us to be our real selves.

So I welcome you, our listener; and you, Rehman; into this safe space. And I invite you to call me out if I say anything inappropriate, or use the wrong terms.

Now, let's pick up from Part 1 of I Am Canadian with Dr. Rehman Abdulrehman, which ended with his comments about Canada's multiculturalism.



Musical interlude [00:02:12]

Canada is not multicultural [00:02:36]

Rehman: In Canada, we claim to be multicultural, and we are not. We are multi-ethnic; we've always had that diversity, but we are certainly not multicultural. We are unicultural. We will look down our noses at the Americans and say, "Oh, they're a melting pot, we are a mosaic." We are not a mosaic, I assure you that.

You speak to any Person of Colour, who's had to put aside their needs and their wants and their interests, of the clothing they wear, the holidays they try to get taken off at work, or at schools. And they will tell you, this is not a multicultural country.

That is rhetoric we are fed. That is a false truth.

Rosie: Oh my goodness. OK. I have to take a breath after hearing you say this. Now can you unpack that a bit more? What do you mean then for people who are like, what are you talking about? Not only is Canada not a racist country, but we're absolutely a multicultural country. So what do you mean when you say we're not multicultural?

Rehman: Well, I'd say that we have the presence of different ethnicities. We say we promote multiculturalism, but we don't. When we do look at multiculturalism, it is usually in a very tokenistic kind of way.

It's patronizing, you know, "We will accept the wearing of quote unquote 'costumes' on a certain day. But even if you were to wear those costumes at certain events and festivals, we'll still see you in the light of a stereotype." Try to integrate that culture of those communities, of those Canadian communities, into everyday practice.

What if we all had (Chinese New Year / Rosh Hashanah / Diwali / Eid) off? [00:04:14]

Like what if we all had Chinese New Year off. Every single Canadian? What if we all had Rosh Hashanah, not, not Hanukkah. That's not the primary holiday of the Jewish community. We all had Rosh Hashanah off. What if we all had Diwali off? What if we all had Eid off?

Now, now, now people's eyebrows are raised. "Well, what would that do to the economy?" people will say. "Oh, how will we survive?"

Rosie: [laughs] Yes.

Rehman: OK well, OK let's say this then. Let's say you're right. You're right. The econ - I don't agree. The economy actually thrives better when we are number one, working less; number two,



encouraging holidays that encourage more spending, which is not a bad thing, across communities. So it's not a thing, but let's say if that was the case. Let's say if it was going to negatively impact.

So let's pick one holiday. Which holiday should we pick? Chinese New Year? No.

Diwali? No, no, no. Rosh Hashanah? Nope. Not that either. Not Eid. Nope. Not that - not National Indigenous People Day, God forbid we choose National Indigenous People's Day, as the one holiday we celebrate! No, we choose to make the biggest deal out of Christmas.

And one has to wonder why are we - "Well, no, no, it's not a religious holiday. You don't understand, it's secular. It's secular," people will say. Yes, but you know, there's a lot of people who celebrate all those other holidays in a secular way. So why would we choose a holiday with a religious origin that's now secular that comes from a Christian tradition or Eurocentric tradition versus one from anywhere else?

Rosie: I'm glad you brought that up because I have been - I have been thinking about that from a religious privilege perspective as well. And not, it would be extremely religious privileging of me to ask you to represent all Muslims and speak for the Muslim community. So I'm purposely saying that out loud so that I don't do that.

But at least from your perspective, do you feel like there's not only racism against you, but a religious discrimination against you? Like, are they separate things, or are they...?

Religious discrimination and intersectionality [00:06:30]

Rehman: Oh absolutely. Absolutely there is religious discrimination. Well, I mean, there's this concept of intersectionality, right? We wear these multiple, we have these intersecting identities. And the more of these identities we have, the more marginalized we become, right?

So what I'm going to say might sound controversial to some people, but a gay White man will get much further - although there is that identity that would identify them as marginalized - will still get much further than a gay Black woman. Because that gay Black woman has a lot more intersecting identities and they're tied to more marginalization.

So a Person of Colour who might be Christian. Well, you know, we talked about how that certainly gets you closer to the fire, but you still can't warm your hands by it. You won't be at the inner circle cause you've still got one piece that's holding you back.

Now, when it comes to religious discrimination, me personally, yes, I face it all the time. I think Muslim women face it the most because - Muslim women who particularly wear the headscarf. I mean, we've got a province here in Canada that is banning the wearing of religious symbols, including the headscarf, or the face covering for those Muslim women who choose to wear it.

And ironically are now, you know, we're saying that we should be all covering our mouths with that - That's OK, we can have a face mask for COVID, but not for any other reason.

Rosie: [laughs] That's right.



Rehman: But yes, it does exist. Research actually demonstrates that the two most targeted groups of, or communities in Canada that face discrimination are, Muslims and Indigenous people.

Polls in the United States have found that for younger demographics and even communities of colour, including Black people and Latino people, high percentages of those, the lowest rates, I think were 27 or 36% of Latino and Black people, have negative views of Muslims or have Islamophobic -

Rosie: Really?

Rehman: Yeah. And I think it goes to that perspective that I talked about, is that we are more likely to accept people if they accept our way of life. But it still doesn't get you completely into the inner circle. But certainly religion and some religions more than others are certainly an intersecting identity that marginalizes people further.

Rosie: And I wonder how much of that - I mean not specifically races or religions that are discriminatory against Muslims.

But even just historically, like going back to colonists and how they were able to control people that they colonized, like I'm just thinking about dividing and conquering, right? So when we talk about privilege as well, I'm a Person of Colour, I identify as a Chinese person. I have experienced discrimination in my life, but I also have Chinese guilt. Like the equivalent of White guilt, but as a Chinese person, because I can see that I'm a lot better off than darker skinned people of colour, including people who are from South Asian countries, people who are Muslim.

And as a Christian - So I identify as a Christian, and I just looked this up today cause I didn't know myself, but the latest survey I found was from 2018 where it said, I think like 55% of Canadians identified as Christian. So that is, that's still the majority. And then they, you know, talk about discrimination and they lumped in basically every - not everybody, but they had Christians at 55%. They had no religious affiliation at 29%. And then they lumped in a whole bunch of religions under Other as 40%. And among them were Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and so forth.

Rehman: Yeah, where are the Other?

Rosie: Yeah, the Other, right? And it's like, it's not a small number. There's millions of people in that Other category.

I'm like, when do they, when do they start, you know, something as small as that, like, to me that that's an example of a microaggression, right? Just the fact that they get lumped into Other. Or you know, going back to your point about why can't we have holidays, like paid stat holidays, to celebrate a whole bunch of other religious events or special days and religion or festivals that belong to a certain culture.

And in my mind, I'm hearing the snide comments and jokes that throughout my 20 years of working of, "Oh, I wish I was a Jew and I'd have all these paid days off." And, you know, as if people who get those days off are slacking off somehow, or like we went to the beach and there are all these fun times paid by the government that, you know, Christians don't get.



And not that even most people who get those Christian holidays are even celebrating, or consider themselves Christian. But there's this weird stigma. And I don't really know why people should see it that way. It's like, "Oh, we can't give anything extra to those people because somehow they're getting an advantage."

Rehman: Yeah.

Rosie: And yet it's like...[sighs]

"So...just like us?!!!" [00:11:25]

Rehman: Yeah. If people want to try this out, here's an experiment as you move closer to the holidays, or if there's any ever an opportunity that brings apologies, just lie and say, you don't celebrate Christmas and watch the reaction you get. People are like, "What?!" And you think, "Well, I'm not a Christian."

"Well, neither am I! I mean, maybe my family was, but - why not Christmas?!"

And I was like, "Well, it's not a religious or cultural holiday of mine?"

"But it's Christmas!" You know? Like that's, that's the answer you get, "But it's Christmas! But what about the kids?!" [You know, like, they need Christmas to survive.] "But, well, what do you do with the child- What do you do on those days off?"

"Well, I work or we hang out and watch TV and eat food."

"So just like us?"

Rosie: [laughs] "Just like us!"

Rehman: Yes. Just. Like. You.

Rosie: Oh, my gosh.

Rehman: "You don't even put up a Christmas tree?"

I mean, these are comments from really educated individuals. And again, it speaks to what I would call the White Norm. And Rosie, you may identify as Christian, and I mean no disrespect, but if you were to test those limits and say you didn't practice Christianity, you might see that you might face a little bit more of those barriers.

So I think having that, I think because Christianity is tied to a Eurocentric or a white perspective, it makes people feel more comfortable if you were to adopt those values. And the research actually shows too, organizations and people tend to hire people with more White-sounding names. Considerably so.

So, and again, that's where culture... And to me, religion is not just about religion, but it's about culture that goes with that. And I think once you have those differences and you make that clear, you don't fit in.



I'll give you a really good example. And I think that sometimes, sometimes people are really well-meaning. These microaggressions that people have, they're well-meaning, they're not trying to offend people. But I think it speaks to the lack of information or the knowledge and in general society about who people are or people's understanding of what a Canadian experience is.

The "cool" Muslim [00:13:39]

So one of my students, this is some time ago when I was practicing at a hospital. So I was supervising this one student for quite some time. And this student is a really fantastic person, had traveled the world, had traveled to Tanzania where I was born. Had traveled to the middle East, was familiar with my religious and cultural background.

So we had a lot in common and we had often discussed about travel and things like that. Now, when the student was actually finishing, they brought me a gift. And the gift was actually a bottle of wine. And the bottle of wine is called Rorschach. So it's like a psychology reference there.

And they said, "I wanted to bring you this gift." And I said, "Well, I really appreciate the gift, but I'm a Muslim and I don't drink." And they said, "Oh, but I thought that you did cause you seemed kind of cool."

Rosie: Oh no.

Rehman: [laughs] So...you know? Like...

Rosie: [laughs] You're a cool Muslim, not, you know, those non-drinking, not cool Muslims.

Rehman: Right. Like so somehow... "I thought you were, so I thought you were OK with it. I thought you must be drinking cause you seem so relaxed" or, you know. And I was like, eee, where do I begin with this? Cause it was really well-meaning, and this was a person who is well-traveled and well-educated, and I think very highly of that individual. But it speaks to a lack of awareness or a perception on how we perceive people from different cultural or religious backgrounds.

Rosie: Yes. You know, that's a really good point too, cause I think, in the workplace...

Now I came from a professional services background, and one of the things that professional services people love to do is drink. Cause we kill ourselves with work and then we'd make ourselves feel it's OK by drinking. As a psychologist, you might appreciate that [laughs]. Because, just, you know, we make more clients where you basically.

But, you know, I had a good friend who's Muslim and it was - not a struggle for him, cause it didn't bother him. But it was always a thing where like, "Oh, let's go for a drink!" And just, no one could seem to remember that he didn't drink. Even though, you know, it came up multiple times, this is not something that suddenly changed. We just, I was like, "Oh, Oh right. You don't drink."

When the world isn't built for you [00:15:55]



Rosie: And then another, in a different workplace, another good friend of mine who is Muslim was telling me something I honestly hadn't thought of. Just how hard it was for her to find lunch food, like fast food, that was halal. And how it's like, you know, back home, I think she's from Pakistan, it was never a problem. Cause you know, there were a lot more, a lot of Muslims, so food was generally halal, not the other way around.

Rehman: Yeah.

Rosie: And here it's like, you couldn't eat McDonald's, you couldn't have KFC, or something. In Pakistan she was very used to just going out and grabbing it. But here you couldn't because you're never really sure, even if they said it was halal, if it was halal. Right?

I think that's just another - yeah, another example of when you're in privilege, you just don't have any clue that these are things people have to think about or go through every day. Something as simple as buying a lunch, it's not as easy because the world isn't built for you where you live.

COPY AND PASTE REHMAN'S ONLY FROM HERE [00:16:47]

Rehman: Yeah. Ultimately, this is about education and empathy, you know, like there's a true sense of ignorance. People aren't always like racist thinking. There's always rude people. I mean, the technician who called who was rude and I'm sure was probably having a bad day as well, but, you know - but there is a sense of ignorance.

And are we working? Are organizations, are our communities working to educate, are we working to educate ourselves? And then are we having enough empathy to be able to be the ones who take the initiative to educate instead of waiting to be educated. And that's often the thing is the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the people who are marginalized to now. Can you please tell us how we are, how we should address racism as a White community?

Well, is that my responsibility or is it your responsibility to take the initiative and learn? And if we meet somewhere in the middle, we can go along way. But the initiative actually has to start with leadership or people who are of greater privilege.

Rosie: OK. I'm going to go out on a limb as the person from Toronto, Ontario. And I know how everyone outside of Ontario feels about Ontario, cause I have worked across Canada. And I didn't realize that Toronto wasn't the centre of the earth, until I went to Calgary or those places. So I'm gonna ask what could be an ignorant question, but as a Brown person, Muslim, living in Winnipeg.

Rehman: Yeah.

Rosie: Do you find a difference geographically? And I know you've traveled as well. So do you find differences in the level of racism and discrimination in different parts of Canada?

U.S. versus Canada - bigger two ways [00:18:17]



Rehman: Yes, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. But you want to know the interesting thing is I found the greatest difference between Canada and the United States. And I know we think about the United States as a place of great discrimination and particularly now. And I think anytime you have a greater population, you're going to have a greater population of people who have a particular something or the other, right?

So greater population, you have more people who like chocolate in the United States than you do in Canada. And the same where you're going to have more racists in the United States, as you will in Canada. But actually I faced much more warmth and comfort in some American cities than I have in Canadian cities.

And I think it's because they have the discussions down there.

Rosie: Ohhhh.

Rehman: And it makes people more aware. And I don't know that Canadians like to have those discussions. I think, you know, we like to be complacent and we like to blame the United States and say, you know, we're better than them, we don't have -

We don't have that problem cause we don't talk about it. We do have the problem, you just don't identify it. And People of Colour tend not to want to bring up those topics because they are often silenced when they do. You know, "you're being too sensitive", "they didn't mean that", "Oh, you're playing the race card again", oh, you know. And so, well, and that's why people kind of just look at each other quietly when racist things happen. When People of Colour will notice it and they look at each other and they notice it and that's all you can do.

Rosie: Yeah. And so it's interesting your comment about the States, because like, was it even after 9-11, you found you had the experiences of places in the U.S., where there was more warmth and welcome than in Canada?

Rehman: Yeah. I mean, it's, it's this general, like, it's funny, like - I, and people in my family have had much more active levels of anger directed at us here in Canada...

Rosie: Wow...

Rehman: ...than in the States, I mean, there's always, I mean, don't get me wrong. It's not like I haven't had racist experiences in the States, but it's almost like the average person in some cities more than others was more kind. There's times, like, I knew a woman who says "I've never had somebody opened a door for me in Winnipeg. But in DC, white men have opened doors for me all the time."

Rosie: I see. So almost like it's an indifference or coldness, like maybe the people hide both the negative and the positive. So there, there may not be - There is overt discrimination in Canada, but there's also not overt kindness and warmth towards you.

Rehman: Well, I just think we hold a lot more racist beliefs than we tend to recognize.

And they're there. We don't talk about them and I think they're coming up now.



Racism in Canadian politics [00:21:10]

I think we hide them in our politics. We talk about right wing, you know, Conservative. And I'm not saying that all people who are Conservative have racist points of view, but certainly there's a lot of people who have racist points of view who have taken up leadership in the Conservative Party.

And unfortunately, it actually, I think it prevents People of Colour or people who come from religious or ethnic or cultural minorities who have conservative views, fiscally or otherwise, from having that point of view or voting that, because it's associated with people would also vote against them.

I'll give you an example. So I had a woman come to my door who's currently been voted into office here in Winnipeg, in the province. And came to my door a few years ago, with her canvassing for a vote and gave me her little pamphlet from the Conservative Party. And this doesn't mean I have anything specifically against any one particular person, but - and asked me if I would be voting for them and had given me the pamphlet.

And I said, "Actually, no." And they said, "Why?" And I said, "Well, there's leadership in your party that has made active steps to work against people like me and people in my community." And her response was, "Oh. Can I have my card back then?"

Rosie: [gasps] No!

Rehman: I kid you not!

Rosie: Like the only response was, "Don't waste my card, give it back to me"? Like not any, not even like, "Tell me more"?

Rehman: That's right.

Rosie: Wow.

Rehman: Yeah.

Rosie: That is - OK - I don't know why - I mean, this is funny. We're having a discussion, I invited you on this podcast to talk about inclusion and racism within Canada, and I'm still coming across as shocked about this stuff! Like why is it surprising me? I have no idea, but it's - it's horrifying! It really is horrifying!

Rehman: Well, I think there's a couple of things. I think number one, we tend to ignore what we see and we the experiences are so normalized that they're just a part of our experience and we pass it off. And there's a lot of people who experience racism and discrimination and just don't pay attention to it. Because there's nothing they can do and it just becomes a part of their experience. Like, "Well, what are you going to do. It is what it is." And you just become so blunted to it, myself included.

And that's where, when my kid started to say stuff and I was like, yeah, he's right. Of course he's going to feel this way. And I've just gotten busy in my work that I've chosen not to do this work. Maybe it's time I use my work to work on this issue. But we normalize this.



And then, Rosie, I mean, with all due respect, there's also this concept of, you know, you're Chinese, but you could possibly pass as part White.

The privilege of appearing White [00:23:45]

Rosie: Really?

Rehman: Yeah. I, I, you know, like, I mean -

Rosie: [laughs] I guess all that sun block was working for me eh?

Rehman: Yeah. But I mean, skin colour can certainly do that. I mean, there's people who say things to me, like - I remember a woman on a plane speaking very ill of Black people to me, and then flirting with me. And I'm like, excuse me, I'm a Person of Colour. Right? So like in her mind, Black people were the target and somehow I was OK.

Or people will make comments about, you know, my eyes are a bit lighter than the average Person of Colour. And so they will say, "Oh, you must have some White in you." And so somehow being partially White or appearing partially White, or having a feature that is perceived to be White buys you some privilege. And again, it doesn't get you fully into the circle, but somehow, it gets you there?

And so I think the quote unquote, "the less White" you look, the quote unquote "less White" you act, the more, I think, of a target you become. So I've had experiences, but I have privilege as a man, as I'm not a Muslim woman, I don't wear the headscarf or the hijab.

So I don't have that, but ask a Muslim woman who wears the hijab. And you know, I say this to women all the time, a non-Muslim woman. I said, "If you really want to experience what racism is like in Canada, just wear the hijab for a day, forget a day, just wear it for an hour and go to the mall. And you will experience what it's like, to see what racism is like in Canada."

Rosie: You know, I'm sorry, I made a joke about it earlier and I'm sorry about that.

Rehman: No, no, you don't need to. I mean, that's all we can do sometimes is we have to be able to have a sense of humor about it. I mean that's how we survive it! You don't have to be sorry.

Rosie: Thanks. Well, to be honest, I guess I didn't even know how to respond because you - in a way you touched on a point that goes a couple of ways. First of all, I want to acknowledge Chinese racism, which is rampant. And by that I mean, racism from Chinese people against others. You could probably find racism in every culture, no matter where you go. I think that's just the human condition.

Colourism and fantasizing about being White [00:25:42]

But there's for sure, like I've observed skin colour gradation scale of racism that, the lighter your skin is, or - sorry. Lighter skin people tend to be racist towards darker skin people.

Rehman: Colourism.



Rosie: Yes. Yes, sure. Colourism. And even within Chinese culture, just as I've heard from South Asian friends, like from India and from Sri Lanka. That similar things, like they prefer lighter skin. Like to me, it's this almost sad legacy of colonialism. Where for some reason, we all want to be more like White people, even though we're not White people.

Rehman: Yes.

Rosie: But if only our skin could be lighter, we think that's more beautiful for some reason. And there's products and chemicals that make you that way, which is really sad!

Rehman: Well and surgeries, right? Like in Asia, I mean there's surgeries to remove the fold in the eyelid for Asian people. Or to lengthen the nose, right, you get the implants. I mean, there's skin bleaching creams, there's light colored contacts and blonde is everybody's favorite colour, right. So, um -

Rosie: Yep. Honestly I fantasized about being White when I was a kid and I had blonde hair.

Rehman: Yeah.

Rosie: That was my dream to be, you know, the beautiful White person. I don't know why!

Rehman: That is a common fantasy for most People of Colour.

Rosie: Wow.

Rehman: My kid, in playing or creating an avatar or whatever will want to choose blue eyes. I'm like, "Why would you - you're great as you are!"

"No, no, I want blue eyes!"

Why blue? Why? Why not brown? Why is blue the standard? Beautiful blue eyes. What about beautiful dark eyes?

Rosie: Yeah.

Rehman: You know?

Rosie: Aw, yeah. Yeah. I support you in making your kid proud of what he looks like.

Rehman: Yeah.

The biggest mistake is to not try [00:27:22]

Rosie: So, so OK. So how can we help? So first of all, acknowledging that as a Chinese person, I think that there's also racism between races out there. I'm kind of, I touched on this before. Like I know I've had racist thoughts, like if not actually said anything out loud. I've had racist thoughts against Black people against Brown people. About the way people talk or dress or act. Like, it's out there, I know that it's out there and it's not right.



So how can myself and others who are, who recognize that there are these wrong things that go on - how can we be more supportive? How can we be more allies? How can we be more sensitive? How - OK, here's a really crazy question. I put myself out there for anyone else who wants to be an ally.

Is it more respectful or less respectful if I try to say your name and I get it wrong? Would you rather I try and get it wrong, or...?

Rehman: Try it. Say it.

Rosie: OK.

Rehman: Have the discussion. You know, speak your intent. I think tone is everything. People don't recognize it. It's not the mistake. It's the tone. I understand that the name is not a common name to people. It's not well-practiced.

And of course, most people are really understanding. I'm not offended by that. And a lot of people are not, you know, offended by those kinds of things. But I think it's ultimately about the tone. It's the ability to feel. Like it's, it's also the ability for the ally to be able to recognize if they're making a mistake.

Rosie: Right.

Rehman: It's the assumption that they are always right, or the perception that they're always right, that leads people into getting into trouble. Now, a lot of people who are from a majority culture, a lot of White people would be so afraid of making a mistake that they won't say anything.

Rosie: Mm hm.

Rehman: And when they don't say anything, the presumption is that they are making an assumption. It is always best to recognize that, you know what? I don't know what to say. I'd like to learn. What that does is, it brings you down to the same level as other people, when you stay quiet or silent about it, it makes you look like you're sitting above people. And that may not be your intent.

So I would say, the biggest thing I'd say is learn, and make learning a big part of your life if you want to be an ally. And ask questions, and state it as such. And if you make a mistake, which you will, as all of us do - I make a lot of those mistakes on a regular basis, even though this is my work. And just state it. It's that sense of humility about it, versus a sense of, you know, snobbery that somehow, you think you're better than somebody, or you feel like you're too good to admit that you made a mistake.

And then the second piece I would say is about finding ways to make sure people feel included. And not leave the responsibility on those people who are marginalized, because they're not going to tell you that it's needed, because doing it would make them feel like they stick out.

We have to first build the road before people start to walk it. And the people who build the road are the people with the materials to build that road, they have the privilege to build that road. And so if you carry any privilege, whether it's white privilege or male privilege or cultural privilege, use it to benefit those who don't have it.



Rosie: Yeah. I was thinking about that earlier, too, around how to be inclusive.

And I wonder if part of that is to, to ask the questions and not make any assumptions. Like, really just basic kindness and courtesy.

So, OK, so for example, you don't drink as a Muslim, but I also know of Muslims who do drink. So just because, if I find out you're Muslim, I shouldn't assume that you don't drink just because you're a Muslim.

It would be better, I think, for me to ask like, "Oh, do you drink Rehman?" And, "Can I offer you something?" And you can tell me, "No, I don't drink. You know, I'm a Muslim and I choose not to drink." Then OK, now I know, right? And hopefully I remember it too [laughs]. But I shouldn't assume one way or the other that just because you're a Muslim, you do or don't do something, I think.

Rehman: But I think even acknowledging that I - that you can say, look, I know, this is what I understand - is this true for you? Because sometimes people will go - like sometimes Muslims, or anybody, will go along with things because they want to, but sometimes they do it because there's a need to fit in.

Rosie: Right.

Rehman: There's a lot of kids out there who don't want to drink, but do it because if they don't, they won't appear as Western. So to fit in they just go ahead and do it.

So, what I'm trying to say is that what we think are people's free will and free choices, the ability to make their own are not often pure free will. It's often a function of a lot of societal pressure to fit in with what I call the White Standard. And we can never really be too sure about why people are making those decisions. So we need to make sure that we also recognize, or we let people know that we're OK with their decisions regardless of what they are. You know?

Rosie: Yeah. I think that's a really good point too. I'm glad you raised that. And I could see where - cause I've heard this too from allies, that they're afraid to do something, or even to just try to say someone's name. Cause they're like, they feel like they don't know how, or what if they do make a mistake?

And maybe this is also part of a Canadian culture thing. Like, well, better to not do anything. It's almost more polite to not do anything and not say someone's name wrong, or not make the wrong assumption than to try, right? But then that leads to what you noted, which is a lack of conversation and a lack of progress in Canada around this.

Messing up is more likeable [00:33:00]

Rehman: Yeah. And it's not, to me, it's not about polite. It's more about what's relatable. It's more relatable if you can screw up and admit to it. And there's a basic psychological principle that people are generally more likable when they're not 100% perfect, you know?

Rosie: Yeah.



Rehman: You're generally successful, but you are...you still mess up. You're a normal relatable individual, and I think we need to apply that principle to allyship. And our learning is to just acknowledge when we don't know, and we made a mistake, and then you incorporate that next time. I don't think we have to expect ourselves not to know that idea of cross cultural competence is one of a fluid nature, that it's ongoing.

We'll never really know everything about everybody all the time. And so it's more about approaching this thing as always working to learn and know. Because some of us won't have that exposure to people, or different kinds of people, or we'll only have exposure to one kind of person. Our true understanding of people and humanity should always be ongoing, versus a set point where like, well, I've achieved that now.

It seems almost silly if we say it out loud.

Rosie: Yeah, I resonate with that. Cause to me then the true - showing care and kindness and consideration to another human being is showing interest. Like genuinely wanting to know about the person and learning more about them or understanding them better, which never ends. As you said, people are always changing and it's not - then you're trying to learn a culture or read a history. You're just getting to know someone on a basic human level.

Exotifying People of Colour (and their lunches) [00:34:39]

Rehman: Now here's the one caution I would say. In sometimes working on that we can exotify people, where we approach diversity or difference anthropologically. Where we just want to kind of always know, well, "What makes you different? Please, tell me. Tell me about your food." Well, wait a second. What makes you think I...?

I remember once they walked out of my office and I was eating my lunch, talking to the secretary and this psychiatrist walks out and he goes, "[inhales loudly] that smells amazing out here! It smells like Indian food." And then he looked at me, he goes, "What'd you bring for lunch?" And I held up my bagel and I said, "This bagel."

Rosie: [laughs] Was it a curry bagel that you just microwaved?!

Rehman: It was a raspberry bagel. [laughs] You know? And I think sometimes people think that they're being well-meaning and wanting to learn by, you know, barraging people with, "Oh I want to understand you and your point of view."

But cross-cultural competence is first about identifying your own biases and your own misunderstandings. And then leaving the door open to understand about the worldview of other people. And then lastly, for having a working relationship.

But to not make assumptions in that, because sometimes, in our thinking of understanding quote unquote "different people", we assume that they're different and they're not really. You know, we



have to go on this as a case by case basis, but also be careful we're not making people feel so outside the box. So they're like some, a circus act show.

Rosie: Yeah.

Rehman: You know?

Rosie: Yeah. Well, really people are different just because people are different, right? Like where I shouldn't assume certain things about you because you're Brown. You're another human being. You're obviously going to be different from me, just like I'm going to be different from you.

Rehman: Right.

Rosie: And so I can spend the time, you know, getting to know you as a friend and learn about you as a human being, not you as a Brown Muslim person from Winnipeg or wherever.

Rehman: Right. Exactly. Yeah. So.

Rosie: So Rehman you've given us just so much amazingness of yourself, your stories and your experiences. I think something that I really treasure from this conversation is the fact that we're having a conversation.

I appreciate that about your podcast, Different People. I appreciate that about your willingness to come on this podcast and be my very second guest. We're obviously not going to solve the problem, or be able to say, "Oh, well, this is how we can be a good ally" in just one podcast alone. Even though I've already taken up an hour of your time!

We're going to have all the links in our shownotes so that people can find out how to get in touch with you or, you know, certainly if there's any follow questions, because I can imagine there would be people wondering how they can find out more. So we'll have all the links in our shownotes about how to get in touch with you. But before we close off, are there any parting thoughts or key messages that you want to give us to take away?

Rehman: You know, just that in working on issues of getting to know different people or working on better inclusion, we have to remember that it's because of the politics and the stress of the current, I think, climate of issues of race and discrimination, it can make people very anxious. And we have to understand that the more we avoid things that make us anxious, the worse it gets, but the more we dive in, the more we get used to making mistakes, the easier all of that becomes.

And so what might feel counterintuitive is actually the better thing, is to walk into the anxiety and have those difficult discussions, because that's how we're going to resolve all of these difficulties is through those anxious, but difficult, conversations.



Rosie tries to say Dr. Abdulrehman's name [00:38:25]

Rosie: That is great. Thank you so much for those parting thoughts, Dr. Rehman Abdulrehman. You know, I'm trying to deal with my own anxiety of saying your name correctly by just saying your name! [laughs]

Rehman: It's all good. Yeah, thank you for making the effort.

Rosie: OK, good. Uh, was I close or should I practice?

Rehman: Yeah, fairly close. Thank you.

Rosie: OK. OK, fair enough. And you know, you bring up anxiety, which reminds me that you're a practicing clinical psychologist. And you know, we haven't even had a chance to talk about psychology or mental health, which I wanted to get to. But we've just had such a great conversation about inclusion and diversity, which is your specialty, but not even your main practice.

So I think that very clearly you've made great inroads into inclusion and diversity, that I forget some times you're actually a doctor of psychology as well.

Rehman: Thank you.

How to contact Dr. Abdulrehman [00:39:13]

Rosie: So thank you for the work that you're doing. If people want to find out more about your work, we'll have all the links to your websites. You have a few websites, there's clinicpsychology.com, leadwithdiversity.com, and of course your podcast, differentpeople.ca. They can also find you on LinkedIn and, you know, amongst all the other work that you do as a professor, and teacher, and a speaker, and just so many great things, I really look forward to seeing the amazing work that I know you're going to be doing in this field and your impact on Canada, which I hope will be incredible.

Rehman: Thank you.

Rosie: Cause we, we so need you and everything that you're doing in Canada, especially. So I just want to thank you for all that you do, and thank you for being a guest on Changing Lenses. You definitely changed my lens today.

Rehman: Thank you for having me.

Outro [00:40:06]

[outro music plays]

Thanks for joining us – I hope today's episode helped to change your lens and expand your worldview. If you enjoyed listening, please rate and subscribe to Changing Lenses, available wherever you get your favourite podcasts. For more about how I'm changing my lens, please check out my



website at changinglenses.ca. You'll also find the shownotes and transcripts for each episode, and you can leave comments or questions, or send me a message – I would love to hear from you!

I'm Rosie Yeung, inviting you to join me for the next episode of Changing Lenses. Until then, take care!

[outro music ends]