



CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

ON DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

American Association of Law Libraries members tackle issues of diversity, equality, and implicit bias.

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Bryan Stevenson, 2017 American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Annual Meeting keynote speaker and attorney, activist, and author, recently stated in an interview: “You can be very progressive, you can be very educated, and you can still be complicit in the kind of micro-aggression that takes place when you look at people through this lens of racial difference. So, we all have a lot to learn. I don’t think that we should expect to make progress on these issues without bumping into one another, without making mistakes. We just have to have the humility and the patience and the courage to work through that. What I don’t think we should do is just retreat because we don’t know exactly where all the landmines are.” (Learn more about Bryan Stevenson at bit.ly/SO19Stevenson.)

Tackling Diversity

During the fall of 2018, a group of AALL members from across the country got together to have a weeklong online discussion on diversity, inclusion, and equity. The goal was to encourage our professional community to confront these issues

and to deliberately create a space where we could explore them, bump into one another, make mistakes, and learn. This discussion was informative, impactful, and necessary.

The seed for the idea came from the Research Instruction & Patron Services Special Interest Section (RIPS-SIS) board, which asked the RIPS Patron Services Committee to spearhead an online educational event. From there, the leadership of the RIPS Patron Services Committee brainstormed and came up with the discussion themes of diversity, inclusion, and equity. They then reached out to several AALL groups to create a planning committee. This committee consisted of members from each sponsoring organization: Social Responsibilities SIS (SR-SIS), Legal Information Services to the Public SIS (LISP-SIS), Black Caucus of the American Association of Law Libraries (BCAALL), RIPS, and the AALL Diversity & Inclusion Committee.

The conversation was moderated by volunteers from the different groups and the topics changed each day. The topics for the five-day schedule included:

- Monday: Working with the Diversity Office at Your Institution and Resource Sharing.
- Tuesday: Training our Public Services Workers on Diversity & Inclusion.
- Wednesday: When Issues Arise: Dealing With Instances of Discrimination In Our Libraries.
- Thursday: Implicit Bias: In the Stacks and In Our Workplace.
- Friday: Diversity and Inclusion In Law Library Hiring & Retention.

Conversation Progress

As organizers, we were convinced that our discussion would be lively, with folks from academic, government, and law firm libraries chiming in asking questions, offering anecdotes, and suggesting further discussion points. We debated the order of topics and finally settled

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on a five-day schedule that we assumed would spark and maintain interest. And then Day 1 came. The day's question posted at 9:25 a.m. Eastern, and by lunchtime had only elicited a few tepid responses. Were people afraid of the topic? Was no one online that early? Maybe the time zone differences were not accounted for properly? Members of our community routinely attend workshops, webinars, and trainings on these topics and exhibited genuine interest. Day 1's "question" was about resource sharing; we were not asking anyone to reveal their secret biases. After some panicked email exchanges (and gentle nudging), the discussion warmed up.

Reflections from Participants

Day 4 dealt with the topic of Implicit Bias and it definitely elicited the most discussion of the week. No doubt our esteemed moderators and co-authors Shamika D. Dalton and Dr. Michele A. L. Villagran, who recently published an article in *College & Research Libraries News* on the topic, pushed the conversation by posing five questions that encouraged self-reflection and offering their own unique perspectives. A common refrain from contributors throughout the week was that because they do not identify as a minority (i.e., not a member of ethnic or racial minority, disabled, or otherwise identified), they felt there was no place in the discussion for their perspective. This was most distressing. Our goal with this five-day online discussion was to continue the conversations from various trainings and symposia. Every voice contributes to a collective examination and reexamination of diversity. Moreover, as members of AALL, it is imperative that all members feel included. One

commenter remarked feeling guilty for allowing minority colleagues to take the lead (and workload) for all discussion, action, or training on diversity topics, assuming his/her voice was not welcomed in these spaces.

Continuing the Conversation and Why It Matters

The lack of diversity in our profession, the pernicious effect of microaggressions, the corrosive role of implicit bias in both the hiring of library staff and the interactions between library staff and our users, and the continuing sense from people who do not consider themselves to be diverse to be lacking a place at the table to discuss the topics of diversity, inclusion, and equity, were all issues broached during the week. Achieving greater inclusion in our profession will require everyone's involvement. We need to continuously explore topics of diversity and apply lessons learned to our daily interactions, and, as Bryan Stevenson stated, we need to be willing to make mistakes. The intent behind these conversations should not be to elicit feelings of guilt or shame, but rather to help us to see our own biases and be better able to identify when our biases lead us to make unfounded assumptions, and how our lack of awareness leads us to commit microaggressions. As we learn more, we'll begin to see opportunities to teach others and to amplify the voices of marginalized colleagues or users. An important element of this conversation is to try to keep ourselves open to learning, stay non-defensive, and be receptive to constructive feedback. In the end, we all have a responsibility to improve inclusivity, and those of us who do not consider ourselves to be "diverse" can learn to apply instances

when we felt marginalized or “othered” to better understand and empathize on these topics.

Moving Forward

In the future, we hope to have continued conversations similar to the one in October 2018. When members work across AALL subgroups, library types, and job types, good things can happen. While the conversation was not always comfortable, it was always interesting and impactful. As we proceed forward, we should heed the advice of author Ijeoma Oluo: “Get used to being uncomfortable. Be the person that nobody wants to invite to a dinner party. You are going to get pushback. ... But if you continue to do the work, you will have a sense of authenticity in yourself that you have never known. ... You can make a measurable impact on not only the lives of people of color but your own life as well.”

Additional Resources

- “Minimizing and Addressing Implicit Bias in the Workplace: Be Proactive, Part One,”

Shamika D. Dalton & Dr. Michele A. L. Villagran, *C&RL News* (2018). bit.ly/SO19Dalton8


- “Minimizing and Addressing Implicit Bias in the Workplace: Be Proactive, Part Two,” Shamika D. Dalton & Dr. Michele A. L. Villagran, *C&RL News* (2018). bit.ly/SO19Dalton7

- “Diversity, Social Justice, and the Future of Libraries,” Myrna Morales, E. C. Knowles & Chris Bourg, *Libraries and the Academy*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2014). bit.ly/SO19Morales

- “The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing: From Awareness to Action,” Jennifer Vinopal, *In The Library With The Lead Pipe* (January 13, 2016). bit.ly/SO19Quest ■

AALL2go EXTRA

Listen to the 2019 AALL Annual Meeting session “The Search Committee: An Effective Approach to Diversity, Inclusion, and Equality in Library Recruiting,” at bit.ly/AM19Search.

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