

On October 15, I attended the online [2020 Implicit Bias Conference](#), sponsored by the Greater Green Bay YWCA. This conference was originally supposed to be in-person, held in the YWCA gymnasium where people could be properly distanced. Because of the rise in covid cases in Wisconsin, the event was held virtually.

I was hesitant to take a whole day to attend a conference because there are a lot of work projects happening, and I was about to take a week of vacation. I'm really glad that I set aside the time to attend, because I felt like this topic is something that I need to be more aware of and learn more about. With the protests over the summer regarding Black Lives Matter, I had been thinking about implicit bias a lot. What does it really mean? Why do we have it? What is it important for public libraries to be aware of implicit bias?

There were several sessions held throughout the day, as well as some panel discussions. Here are my take-aways from the day:

Defining Implicit Bias

Because the conference was based on implicit bias, we spent a lot of time talking about what it means. Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. It's not outright racism or sexism, and it's not an excuse for those behaviors. We have these attitudes unconsciously. It's also not impossible to shape or change our biases because they are not reflective of our values and ethics. We have the power to choose how to respond to our biases. There are over 188 biases.

Combating bias is a process, and there are strategies that we can implement to work on this. For example, when we are tired or stressed, our fight or flight response kicks in, and it also causes us to have a dip in energy. How do we improve this? We can schedule tasks when we are more awake or have more energy. This presenter talked about how we see more disparities in officer-related shootings when officers work a shift longer than 6 hours. Is this related to stress and fatigue?

This site, from Harvard University, was referenced as a tool for us to use to measure our biases: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

What Do We Do When We Encounter Implicit Bias?

One of the presenters talked about Call-in versus Call-out culture. We all make mistakes when it comes to bias and using language. When we make a mistake, we need to apologize and learn from that mistake. If we see or hear someone making a mistake, a Call-in is talking to someone with kindness and love. Calling out is embarrassing and shaming someone. We should aim to choose "call in."

For example, one of the presenters, Jenni, grew up in Green Bay. Jenni's mom was born in 1950. When Jenni and her mom went to the east side of Green Bay (they lived on the west

side), her mom always locked the car doors. Jenni always wondered why her mom did that, so she did some research. Jenni discovered that in 1950, there were only 17 African-Americans living in Green Bay. In 1960, there were 18. Jenni realized that that was the context in which her mom was basing the decision to lock the doors. Jenni said if she were with her mom now and the same thing happened, she would invite a “call in” with her mom. She might ask, why did you do that or where is this coming from? Jenni would approach this situation with the context that her mom grew up in Green Bay during a time when there were not many African-Americans living here.

What do we say when we encounter implicit bias? Jenni said that she used to worry that she didn’t sound “correct” if she spoke up. Then she said, “Being silent isn’t helping. If I have to be uncomfortable to speak up against injustice, then I have to. Don’t let the need to be perfect drive your silence anymore.”

We can use phrases like: “Seeing that hurt me” or “Hearing you call that person a name really hurt me” or “Did you really mean that?” Another presenter said that inappropriate racial language is like a freight train. It will keep going until someone interrupts or stops it.

Infant Mortality Rates

Several of the presentations talked about infant mortality rates for African Americans.

- African-American babies are born with more disadvantages in Wisconsin more than any other state.
- In 2018, a Green Bay/Brown County statistic showed that: 11% of its white citizens are in poverty, 46% of its African-American population live in poverty, and 23% of the Latino population live in poverty.
- In Wisconsin, African-American babies have a higher risk of dying before the age of 1, and this risk is higher than any state. This is three times higher than white babies.

Implicit bias is a big factor in these stats, because infant deaths are tied to pregnancy complications. These are things that could’ve been preventable. Concerns of these mothers were not validated. How do we fix this? We welcome the paradigm shift. There needs to be a change in how we think and how we view people of color.

Goals:

- Take the bias tests that were referenced from Harvard University.
- Continue to publicize the “Inclusive Services” Updates created by Sherry Machones, the WVLS Inclusive Services Consultant.
- Create at least 3 Digital Bytes in 2021 on Inclusive Services topics.

Overall, this was an excellent conference and one that I am grateful that I took the time to attend.