Braving Our Blind Spots

Using a Virtual Book Discussion Group to Continue Conversations on Implicit Bias in Libraries

Shannon Jones, Kelsa Bartley, Melissa DeSantis, Ryan Harris, Don Jason, and Dede Rios

Introduction

Increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the workforce in libraries throughout the United States has been a strategic priority for years, yet statistically the homogeneous nature of library staffs remains the same. Statistics from the American Library Association's *2017 ALA Demographic Study* indicates that librarianship is a largely white female profession.[1] This homogeneity is likely a contributing factor to the implicit bias that individuals from marginalized groups feel in librarianship. An implicit bias occurs when we have attitudes toward people, or associate stereotypes with them, without our conscious knowledge.[2] Growing research indicates that implicit biases impact the actions we take and decisions we make in our personal and professional lives. Every day, each of us makes decisions in our professional lives that impact who gets hired, supported, promoted, and admitted, and which programs get funded. Implicit bias impacts

the decisions we make in our personal lives too, from the neighborhoods in which we choose to live and the schools we attend to the friends with whom we associate. Implicit bias is pervasive in all we do. Its effects are long-lasting and detrimental to the recipient. The key to mitigating implicit bias is awareness and action. Uncovering implicit biases is the first step toward appreciating and leveraging the unique differences that each of us brings to every setting or situation.

In this chapter, the group organizers discuss the use of a virtual book club to provide a forum for dialogue on implicit bias. The authors share insights gained from planning and facilitating a virtual discussion group for over fifty medical librarians using Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald's book, *Blindspot: The Hidden Biases of Good People* as a platform for safe and thought-provoking dialogue.[3] The discussion groups provided participants the opportunity to share their unique perspectives in a small-group setting. This intimate environment, though virtual, provided increased participant awareness of ingrained narratives learned throughout their lifetimes and afforded opportunities for each to learn more effective ways to communicate across their differences. This team of facilitators worked together to create a bank of questions for each chapter, Power-Points to share with each group, a shared document for post-session notes, and a communication plan to keep everyone on track. This helped build community and prepare the facilitators, especially for those who lacked experience or confidence in leading online discussion groups. Authors will share insights addressing the benefits and challenges of organizing a virtual book discussion group.

Implicit Bias and Microaggressions Defined

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries define *bias* as a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.[4] While bias might be a concept that is familiar to many librarians, the purpose of the book club was to allow librarians to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of *implicit bias*. The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity defines *implicit bias* as "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. They are "activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control. Can be either positive or negative. Everyone is susceptible."[5] Implicit bias is something ingrained

in us. It is something we cannot control in most instances. It can unknowingly impact how we interact with our peers and also how we provide services to our patrons. Book club participants agreed that gaining greater insight about our own implicit biases, and their impact on our interactions with others, was important for librarians to know. While the uncontrollable nature of implicit bias can make it a difficult and painful conversation for many, the idea to have frank discussions around the topic is important. Gaining a better understanding of the concept has the potential to allow for reflection and growth, and can impact how librarians engage with colleagues, our patrons, and the world at large.

This understanding of how implicit bias can impact daily interactions is an important one, as many people experience microaggressions on a day-to-day basis. Sue and colleagues define them this way:

> Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities.[6]

This definition makes it clear that many instances of hostile words, interactions, and behavior can be unintentional at times. Like implicit bias, microaggressions are often insidious in nature and not done in an overt or knowing matter. The fact that so many create this hostile and unfriendly environment without being aware makes it even more dangerous. It is also imperative to note that microaggressions are not limited only to people of color. Microaggressions can also be directed at people due to their gender, sexual orientation, religion, social class, or other personal characteristics, including immigration status.[7] Librarians can face microaggressions in the workplace. A 2014 study by Jaena Alabi discussed the microaggressions experienced by both minority and nonminority academic librarians in the workplace. Some of the experiences included assumption that another librarian would have a lower education because of their race, being ignored at work because of their race, being told that all racial groups have the same obstacles, and acting surprised at another librarian's professional successes because of their race.[8] An awareness that many librarians are experiencing these microaggressions on a day-to-day basis is vital. In doing so, there

is the hope that actions can be taken to create a more welcoming environment for all. While this is not an easy task, it is crucial to have an understanding of the concepts of implicit bias and microaggressions to be more prepared to respond to these challenges.

The Book: Blindspot: The Hidden Biases of Good People

One method to support increased awareness about implicit bias was to engage colleagues in reading and discussing Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald's *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People.* Published in 2013, *Blindspot* has been described as an accessible and authoritative guide to understanding how our brains' cognitive processes create implicit or hidden biases, how we can become aware of them, and how we can begin to mitigate these biases.[9] The book explains how our brains produce visual, memory, and social "mindbugs" while attempting to process and interpret the myriad stimuli, data, and information we are constantly bombarded with. Banaji and Greenwald define mindbugs as "ingrained habits of thought that lead to errors in how we perceive, remember, reason, and make decisions."[10] These cognitive mindbugs create blind spots or gaps in the way we see and remember things and in our social interactions with each other. Blind spots prevent us from seeing the inherent biases that contribute to the creation of stereotypes, explicit prejudices, and widespread systemic discrimination.

Banaji and Greenwald's research led to the development of the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to assist in revealing and assessing levels of hidden bias. The IAT measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report using other methods.[11] The IAT may be especially interesting if it reveals an unknown implicit attitude, perception, or stereotype to the test taker. The IAT was designed to address the psychological concept of dissociation that often occurs between our rational minds and automatic minds. Dissociation is defined as "the occurrence, in one and the same mind, of mutually inconsistent ideas that remain isolated from one another. "[12] We may be thinking one way in our rational minds, but acting based on biases in our automatic minds, to which we can be completely blind. The premise is that we need to become aware of the cognitive dissonance that continually occurs in our everyday lives so that we can be prepared to mitigate the effects of the biases they cause.

The Race IAT was one of the first IATs developed and features prominently in the book *Blindspot*. The authors spend considerable time discussing how biases and stereotypes continue to contribute to systemic racial discrimination in America. However, the book also mentions other significant IATs, such as the Gender-Career IAT, and how gender stereotypes continue to color our perceptions of women in the workplace. There are now fourteen IATs on the Project Implicit website hosted by Harvard University, including IATs on sexuality, religion, weight, age, disability, ethnicity, and skin tone.[13] To date, millions of people have taken IATs, with all the data collected publicly available for further research.

"Outsmarting the Machine," the book's last chapter, offers ideas and examples for outsmarting the cognitive mindbugs that create hidden biases. The authors conclude that eradicating them may be impossible now but are optimistic that becoming aware of them is the first step to reducing the effects of bias on our society and systems.

Book Discussion Groups as a Learning Tool

Blindspot provided the perfect content for discussing implicit bias, which allowed the organizers to focus their energies on developing a virtual learning environment where participants could learn, discuss, and process the implications of biases on their work as information professionals and in their personal lives. Book discussion groups have also become popular on college campuses and within a variety of communities. Universities such as Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Denver, the University of Miami, and many others sponsor Common Reading programs, where incoming students discuss a common book, often as part of the first-year experience.[14] Penguin Random House maintains a curated list of titles from across all its publishing divisions of books being used in common and community reads programs on its Common Reads website.[15] The website also features an annual list of books used at colleges and universities around the country.[16] Penguin also sponsors its First-Year Experience Conference annually.[17]

Public libraries throughout the US host One City, One Book programs such as Santa Monica Reads; One Book, One San Diego; One Book, Two Villages; One Book, One Philadelphia; Lake Oswego Reads; and Sonoma County Reads

to encourage patrons to read and discuss the same book. Many of these public libraries have received grant funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Big Read program. The NEA Big Read's goal is to showcase a diverse range of contemporary titles that reflect many different voices and perspectives with the aims of inspiring conversation and discovery.[18] Since its start in 2006, the NEA Big Read has supported approximately seventy-five dynamic community reading programs annually. Each community program that receives an NEA Big Read grant is also provided with resources, outreach materials, and training.[19] The National Network of Libraries of Medicine's Reading Club provides a selection of ready-to-use book titles along with free and downloadable materials designed to help libraries support health information needs in their communities.[20]

Historically, most book discussion groups are held in face-to-face settings, though the online environment is becoming more popular. The book discussion group highlighted in this chapter uses a hybrid model featuring four online and one in-person sessions. The in-person session was held at a professional library conference. The hybrid model has proven to be an exciting engagement format as it offered participants the opportunity to interact and build relationships with new colleagues and those from diverse backgrounds.

Discussion Group Organization and Logistics

The Medical Library Association's (MLA) Discussion Group Program provides participants the opportunity to explore a topic of interest with other professionals and earn continuing education (CE) contact hours for professional development.[21] Groups, consisting of three to ten people, may meet in person or hold discussions online.[22] The programs' goals are to promote professional interchange and provide opportunities for professional growth and development. Participants could claim up to seven hours CE credit depending on their attendance level and the completion of the evaluation form. The program required that groups spend eight hours of time in discussion within twelve months of the starting date. Based on these criteria and the book length, the discussion was divided into four 90-minute monthly sessions and one in-person session to be held at the MLA 2019 Annual Meeting (see table 11.1). *Blindspot* consists of eight chapters, so the group discussed two chapters during each of the four online

sessions. The onsite session focused on a discussion of the book's appendixes and other topics the participants proposed. This session was replicated virtually for attendees who were unable to attend the May 2019 conference.

TABLE 11.1

Session Breakdown

Session I January 2019	Chapter 1: Mindbugs Chapter 2: Shades of Truth
Session II February	Chapter 3: Into the Blindspot Chapter 4: Not That There's Anything Wrong with That
Session III March	Chapter 5: Homo Categoricus Chapter 6: The Hidden Costs of Stereotypes
Session IV April	Chapter 7: Us and Them Chapter 8: Outsmarting the Machine
Session V On-site at MLA'19 Annual Conference	Appendix 1: Are Americans Racist? Appendix 2: Race, Disadvantage, and Discrimination Overall discussion feedback Steps for claiming MLA continuing education credit Next Steps

The book discussion group was made possible by a funding award the project leader applied for and received from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine/Southeastern Atlantic Region (NNLM/SEA) on behalf of the African American Medical Librarians Alliance (AAMLA) special interest group (SIG).[23] The initial purpose was to sponsor a ninety-minute session at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Medical Library Association titled "Transforming Libraries through Implicit Bias Training." Two outcomes emerged from this session: the creation of a four-hour CE course ("Implicit Bias for Information Professionals") and the MLA Reads Virtual Book Club. The latter is discussed in this chapter. Award funding was used in 2018 to pay the featured speaker's travel costs to attend the annual meeting and to purchase twenty-five books to distribute to attendees with the hope that recipients would want to join the virtual discussion. The session featured engaging speakers, hands-on activities, and thought-provoking dialogue. During the informal feedback phase, the session facilitators asked the attendees about potential behavioral changes they might make based on this new knowledge. It was at this time that several attendees expressed a desire to keep the conversation going. Ninety minutes

was just not enough time to fully process the implications of implicit bias. The attendees wanted to learn more. They did not want this to be another high-energy conference session that came and went with no real outcomes. At the session's conclusion, at least thirty people indicated an interest in participating in the virtual discussion, and several expressed a willingness to serve as discussion group leaders.

A formal participation invitation was sent to identify prospective participants and additional facilitators immediately following the conference. The organizers used a variety of mechanisms to identify participants, including sending messages to e-mail discussion groups, word of mouth, and marketing at regional conferences and annual meetings. Of those strategies, word of mouth proved to be an effective recruitment strategy as individuals who attended the onsite session encouraged colleagues at their respective institutions to participate. Library professionals from all library types were welcome, though the participants were largely academic and hospital library personnel. Ultimately, ten facilitators were recruited to lead nine groups, and seventy-five librarians signed up to participate. At least one group had co-facilitators. All participant e-mails were added to a Google Group to facilitate easy communication with the participants. The remaining grant funds were used to purchase another fifty books to distribute to the participants. The book was shipped to participants at no cost while a few others opted to acquire their own copy.

Once the books were distributed, the facilitators met virtually to plan the discussion so that it met the MLA Book Club Program requirements. Each facilitator was not only responsible for reading the book but was also assigned to prepare a summary and develop discussion questions for a specific chapter. Facilitators also located supplemental materials to accompany their chapters. These materials included websites, documentaries, and articles that allowed for further exploration of the themes featured in their chapter. All of this work was stored in a Google Drive folder.

The authors used the Google Groups and Drive services extensively throughout the project. The facilitators developed a communication and engagement plan in tandem with the enrollment phase. The plan included the creation of a Google Group to facilitate information exchange with attendees. Support provided included the creation of standard discussion questions, presentation slides, attendance sheets, and other documentation using Google's collaboration and productivity tools.

The organizer's goal was to provide participants options to meet virtually across a variety of days and times and in multiple time zones. All facilitators were asked to identify a consistent date and time to host their discussion group: for example, the first Thursday of the month at 10 a.m. or the second Tuesday of the month at 1 p.m. Facilitators were also asked to indicate which videoconferencing tool (Google Hangouts, Zoom, Webex, etc.) they would use based on personal preference or the tool that was available at their institution. Using this information, the organizers created a group registration form using the Signup Zone scheduling tool.[24] This allowed participants to join the group that worked best for their schedules. Group membership was capped at ten participants per group in addition to the facilitators. During the enrollment phase, participants received a "Meet the Facilitators" handout that included the headshots and bios to use as they were choosing a group.

Once enrollment was complete, a virtual welcome session was held to orient participants to the book club, to set expectations for engaging in respectful discussions, to introduce the facilitators, and to respond to any questions or concerns the participants had.

Facilitator Training

No formal training was offered to facilitators for the first installment of the book club. During the *Blindspot* discussion, facilitators had a series of virtual check-in meetings with organizers and other facilitators. During these meetings, facilitators received informal coaching and were able to ask questions and share concerns. In the evaluation, the facilitators who led the *Blindspot* discussion stated that they would have benefited from training. This suggestion was seen multiple times in the evaluation and heard through anecdotal feedback provided to organizers. Therefore, the organizers of the book club decided to implement training for the next installment of MLA Reads. When the training was implemented, it primarily focused on the mechanics, technology, and interpersonal skills needed to lead virtual book discussions. In hindsight, the training should have focused on guiding difficult conversations and embracing discussion topics that may go beyond facilitators' comfort zones.

There were several planning meetings in the summer and fall of 2018, leading up to the *Blindspot* discussion that launched in January 2019. During these meetings, the organizers and facilitators prepared chapter summaries, wrote chapter

discussion questions, and developed icebreaker activities. These efforts provide consistency in the book discussion curriculum. One goal of the meetings was to help the facilitators become comfortable leading a virtual discussion, since many of them had no prior experience doing so. These meetings also provided the facilitators opportunities to bond with one another and share experiences. It also served as a forum for setting expectations and addressing concerns. Some of the initial concerns included using strategies for sparking and guiding dialogue, addressing scheduling conflicts for facilitators and participants, and managing technical issues.

After the *Blindspot* discussion concluded, book club organizers began developing the training for the next installment of MLA Reads. To do this, they identified best practices for leading book clubs and discussion groups in the literature. The organizers adopted some of these practices and modified strategies for a virtual environment. The organizers pulled additional best practices from their experience leading the *Blindspot* discussion. These best practices were used to create the facilitators' training session. The practices identified were divided into two components: what to do before each session and what to do during the session. Additional best practices include tips for guiding the discussion, the importance of body language, and avoiding technology glitches.

The facilitators were not given any formal training in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Facilitators were not expected to be DEI experts. However, we did expect them to have an eagerness to learn, a growth mindset, and a willingness to share their own experiences. At the inception of the book club, there was no way to anticipate how large it would get or how many facilitators would be needed to guide the participants. Nevertheless, this was a blind spot on the part of the planning committee. All facilitators should have participated in a standard DEI training exercise. This would have given all facilitators a baseline of training. This might have made them more comfortable leading their discussion groups.

Even with no formal DEI training, many facilitators pursued their own training. They read articles, viewed webinars, and listened to podcasts. Several facilitators received implicit bias training prior to signing up to lead discussion groups. They participated in a training session led by Kimberly Reynolds, MD, at the Medical Library Association Annual Meeting in 2018. This training session is where the initial twenty-five copies of *Blindspot* were distributed and where the first wave of facilitators were recruited.

What to Do before the First Virtual Discussion Session

Facilitators were encouraged to complete several tasks prior to leading their virtual session.[25] They were instructed to do the following:

- Finish the book early to allow sufficient time to review the content and prepare for the sessions.
- Be active readers. Facilitators should note specific passages that may spark discussion. Methods include using Post-it Notes, dog-earring pages, as well as underlining and highlighting text. This would allow facilitators to quickly reference specific passages during their group discussions.
- Familiarize themselves with the discussion questions. This allows facilitators to feel more comfortable, relaxed, and confident when reading the questions or guiding conversation back to the questions.
- Engage in consistent and timely communication with group members. Facilitators were encouraged to send e-mail reminders to the group prior to the session. Two to three reminders should be e-mailed at various times leading up to the session. The reminders should include discussion questions, chapter summaries, Zoom or Webex link, and a call-in phone number in the event the videoconferencing technology fails.

What to Do during the First Virtual Discussion Session

During the first session, facilitators were encouraged to determine what motivated members of their group to participate in the book club. Motivation can drive participation. Lack of confidence to speak in a group should not be mistaken for lack of motivation. In addition, knowing the personal motivation for each group member helps a facilitator meet participants' expectations and make the discussions more personalized.[26] Motivation varied from participant to participant. For example, some librarians participated to network with colleagues, while others were looking for a social outlet. Some may enjoy the subject matter and prefer an in-depth conversation, while others may prefer a more lighthearted approach to discussion. Facilitators needed to know this prior to engaging in

discussion with their group members. This helped facilitators respond appropriately to group members and ensure everyone felt their voices had significance.[27] Overall, this kept group morale high and kept group members motivated to continue participating in the book club.

To uncover these motivations, facilitators were encouraged to conduct an icebreaker with their groups.[28] This could be as simple as having everyone on the call do a standard introduction. For example, they may state their name and their institutional affiliation, and disclose an interesting fact about themselves. Some facilitators took it a step further and created "virtual seating charts" with group members' headshots and bios. This allowed people to familiarize themselves with group members and put a face to a name.[29] Overall, this process of virtual introductions helped facilitators learn more about their group members. It made group members and facilitators more comfortable with each other. This comfort translated into a better ability to discuss the concepts and themes featured in the book.

The old adage that says first impressions are the most lasting holds true for virtual discussions too. The first session laid the foundation for the participants' entire MLA Reads experience. Therefore, facilitators were encouraged to promote equity. It was critical that facilitators encourage an environment where participants could express their opinions in constructive ways that kept the discussion open to all. Empowering participants to speak their truth was equally important. Facilitators were expected to cultivate virtual environments where people felt that their voice mattered and was heard while balancing participation and engagement so that one person's voice was not excessive. Facilitators were encouraged to keep their own thoughts and opinions in check as well, since their role was to ensure that the discussion progressed.[30]

What to Do during All Virtual Discussion Meetings

The discussion group sessions were very similar to other online discussions. In fact, facilitators were encouraged to pull from previous experiences leading or participating in virtual discussion groups. The subject matter made the discussion groups unique. Given the sensitive nature of DEI topics, maintaining the psychological safety of participants was paramount. Outside of the welcome session, discussion group sessions were not recorded. A commitment was made to upholding "Vegas rules," where conversations that happened in the group stayed in the group. This was important for making the participants feel

comfortable sharing personal experiences with the group without fear of them being recorded and disclosed outside of the group. Facilitators were encouraged to do introductions for every meeting, as the possibility of new people joining the session was real. Once names were collected, facilitators were encouraged to use them during the call to create a more personal atmosphere. Facilitators were told to allow the discussion to build naturally. They were encouraged to preserve the momentum of the conversation even if they had to ask discussion questions out of order. They were empowered to go where the conversation led them with the caveat that the conversation should highlight concepts featured in the book.[31]

Facilitator contributions to the discussion should be thoughtful, inviting, and mindful. Accomplishing this requires that facilitators ask the questions and then let others respond prior to expressing their own opinions. In addition, facilitators should keep track of who is participating in the discussion and who is not so that they can invite quieter participants into the conversation.[32] Since the questions were shared by e-mail before the discussion meeting time, facilitators could contact a quiet member prior to the discussion day and ask if they could call on them for a specific question during the virtual discussion. This is done by directing questions to quieter members; for example, "Jayne, what are your thoughts on this chapter of the book?" This gives people who are introverts an opportunity to speak up or share their opinions. Facilitators also offered the option for participants to respond in the chat box and then read the comments aloud to the group, as that may be their preferred method of communication. Some may be too shy to speak out verbally while others may be participating in an open office environment with cubicles or in a public space that requires silence. These strategies worked. They created an open and free dialogue. Participants disclosed their blind spots and implicit biases.

Tips for Guiding the Discussion

There is a fine line between dominating the conversation and guiding the conversation in a virtual book discussion. Facilitators were encouraged to guide the conversation using the following strategies:

- Use a structured approach. For example, they might read a question and say, "Who wants to go first?" Then invite participants to respond in a round-robin fashion to the first question. Then let the dialogue flow naturally.

- Remember the specific role the facilitator plays in the group and stay alert. Since the discussion focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics, the conversation had the potential to become emotionally charged and heavy. Facilitators were encouraged to be ready to arbitrate disputes and de-escalate situations. Ultimately, there were very few reported instances of conflict. This may be attributed to facilitators following the best practices and guidelines presented in the training. It may also be attributed to the professional nature of the book club. Participants were discussing this book with colleagues and not personal friends. People will naturally be more circumspect when sharing thoughts and information with professional colleagues.[33]

To make the most of the ninety-minute session, facilitators had to be mindful to rein in tangential conversations and refocus attention to the book. While a little small talk is helpful for building common ground and setting the learning atmosphere, too much small talk could potentially derail a session.[34] Facilitators learned very quickly that the true value of the session was in the dialogue, the connections that were built, and the breakthroughs that some participants were experiencing in their own thinking. During the sessions, the facilitators would make time for participants to discuss the activities and exercises included in the book. One of the first activities in *Blindspot* requires readers to look at two coffee tables that are photographed from different angles. In the photograph, one table appears to be larger than the other table. In reality, the tables are the same size. This exercise and the other activities that followed in the book created an avenue for facilitators to start conversations centered on point of view, perspective, and implicit bias. After completing these exercises and talking about them with their group members, many participants had aha moments. Their blind spots suddenly became apparent to them.

Finally, closing out the session was just as important as the opening. It was critical that facilitators respected participants' schedules by starting and stopping on time. Facilitators used a variety of strategies to bring the conversation to a close. Some shared a favorite quote from the chapter. Others led an informal round-robin, where everyone gave a final thought about the assigned reading. All sessions concluded with a reminder about the date for the next session. If helpful websites, book titles, or other pertinent information was shared in the chat, it was captured and sent to group members via e-mail.

The Importance of Body Language

Some may think that body language would not come into play during a virtual discussion, but that could not be further from the truth. When facilitating a virtual discussion where there is audio and video, facilitators should be sure to keep their eyes on the camera. This allows the facilitator to make eye contact with the participants who are watching on their respective screens and devices. Facilitators should display an open body posture. They should avoid crossing arms and leaning back in the chair. Facilitators should lean into the camera and look engaged with the conversation. Facilitators should avoid fidgeting. Speaking with hand gestures adds emphasis and is acceptable. However, facilitators should avoid twiddling thumbs or tapping pens on the desk. Finally, facilitators should give affirmative gestures such as head nods and smiles.

Best Practices for Avoiding Technology Glitches

Technical difficulties are inevitable when facilitating a book club online. Some facilitators experienced technical difficulties with the virtual conferencing platforms used to facilitate their sessions. For example, the electricity went out at a facilitator's institution during one of her discussion sessions. However, she had previously installed the Zoom app on her phone and was able to pick up the virtual discussion relatively quickly. Another facilitator's institution shut down and rebooted all university computers moments before his group's discussion was slated to begin. Fortunately, he brought his personal laptop to work that day and was able to start his virtual discussion from his backup device.

To minimize these difficulties, facilitators were encouraged to sign into the video conferencing platform ahead of time to ensure it was working that day. Facilitators were told to ensure their group members were familiar with the web conferencing platform prior to the start of the first session. Some facilitators chose to hold a technology practice or training session with their group. This allowed group members to practice using the features such as the chat box and screen sharing prior to their actual session.

Challenges and Pitfalls

Challenges and pitfalls bring opportunities for growth and learning. Despite the amount of preparation that went into planning the discussion, there were pitfalls.

As mentioned in the previous section, some groups experienced technical problems. Some groups had conversations that were too fast- or slow-paced, while some groups experienced a lack of participation. Sadly, some of the preplanned questions fell flat during the discussions. Silence or dead air could be very intimidating to a new facilitator. However, the facilitators were discouraged from panicking but were encouraged to think on their feet. They were told to take the heat off themselves and ask the participants targeted questions to get the conversation moving. For example, a facilitator might ask each member open-ended questions such as, "What did you find the most surprising or interesting about the chapter?" or "What did you learn from this chapter?" Another strategy is for the facilitator to ask each person to choose an excerpt from the month's chapters and read it aloud. Each member can then share their thoughts and highlight the merits and drawbacks of the passage.[35]

New facilitators often found it helpful to shadow an experienced facilitator. Facilitators were invited to attend a session facilitated by a more experienced group leader to inform how they might lead their own session. Participants were made aware of the second facilitator's presence at the beginning of the discussion. Sometimes new facilitators felt overwhelmed with multitasking. Keeping the dialogue flowing while sharing screens, adjusting video and audio, troubleshooting technical problems, and monitoring the chat box was too much. Some facilitators opted to have another facilitator join their call or asked a group member to assist with monitoring the chat box. This allowed for comments in the chat box to be seen and addressed in real time.

Facilitator training was a contributing factor to the success of the virtual book club. The first installment of the book club did not have formal training. It relied on informal meetings and periodic check-ins with facilitators where encouragement and coaching was provided. After the *Blindspot* book discussion concluded, organizers received feedback from facilitators and participants that suggested training for facilitators. It was thought that this training would enhance the book club experience for all participants. Therefore, the training was added. The training focused on the mechanics of leading a virtual book club and did not focus on cultural competency or diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues. It also did not focus on guiding difficult conversations. This was an oversight on the part of the organizers. Nevertheless, this blind spot provided an opportunity for growth and development. MLA Reads organizers will include cultural competency and DEI topics in future facilitator training sessions.

Evaluation

Two separate evaluations were administered to capture feedback from the participants and facilitators. One evaluation was drafted by the facilitators and sent to all participants, while the other was MLA's standard evaluation for professional development. Participants who sought to claim MLA CE credit were required to complete the later. The organizers hoped members would complete both since they asked different questions.

The facilitators created an evaluation that was sent to all participants. Twenty-two participants completed the evaluation, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Ninety-one percent rated their satisfaction with the book club as very to extremely satisfied, and the same percentage said they would participate in a future book club. The remaining respondents said they might participate in a future book club. The open-ended questions returned numerous positive comments such as these:

- What a wonderful way to get a diverse set of professionals to interact and build community.
- The experience was rewarding, helpful, and a good use of my time.
- This makes me want to get more involved.

Respondents were asked about their interest in selected titles for a future book club, and all respondents selected at least one book they were interested in reading.

The evaluation from MLA consisted of a standard set of questions that could not be altered. This evaluation was seen only by participants who wanted to receive a MLA CE certificate. Forty-one respondents completed the evaluation. The results were overwhelmingly positive, with 78 percent indicating the course exceeded their expectations and the remaining 22 percent indicating that the course met most or all of their expectations. The most powerful part of the evaluation was the responses to the open-ended question asking how participants intend to use what they have learned. Some of the responses included these:

- I have already become more conscious of my actions and the words I use.
- I am catching myself when my own biases rear their ugly heads. This is in both work and personal life.
- I will feel more confident when I have to speak up about issues related to unconscious bias now.

Ninety percent of respondents indicated they strongly agreed that the book club format was engaging. Many respondents indicated their interest in continuing to learn about this topic and their interest in participating in another book club.

Both evaluations asked participants to share suggestions to improve the book club. Some feedback was received during the book clubs and incorporated right away. An example was the request to share the discussion questions with all participants prior to the sessions so that participants had the option to spend time thinking about their responses. There were suggestions to post a schedule of all the sessions so that participants could more easily locate a makeup session if they missed their own session. There were suggestions to provide additional training to facilitators, primarily to help facilitators ensure everyone received a chance to speak. And finally, there were suggestions to have more time to discuss the material.

Lessons Learned

Based on participant evaluations and discussions among the facilitators, it was concluded that book discussions are a rewarding way to cover a topic. As this book chapter was being written, a second book discussion on Dolly Chugh's *The Person You Mean to Be*: *How Good People Fight Bias* was underway, with nearly 200 participants. There were a few takeaways learned from this experience and changes that have been implemented for the second book discussion.

Although the Welcome Session was recorded, the individual discussion sessions were not. Recording the Welcome Session was a good decision and worked well. It allowed people who could not attend the Welcome Session to review the information while giving participants the ability to speak freely during the individual book club sessions.

On a technical note related to Google Groups, it was learned that it is better for organizers to send the participants a link to the Google Group and require them to request access rather than having the organizers directly add them to the group. For the *Blindspot* book club, the organizers directly added all participants to the Google Group, but this caused confusion for participants as they might have wanted to use a different e-mail address or they didn't recognize the registration was related to the book club and they deleted the message or did not accept the invitation.

Facilitator training should be offered to all facilitators. Serving as a discussion group facilitator was a new experience for some of the leaders. Creating a baseline training for all of the facilitators would likely help the facilitators feel more confident leading their groups. Additionally, providing training related to discussing sensitive topics would likely also increase the facilitator's confidence.

Schedule at least one standing makeup session a month. Even with the best laid plans, unexpected events come up. Every month, a few participants were unable to make their monthly group meeting. Scheduling a monthly makeup session that anyone could attend relieved stress for those participants. The makeup session should occur at the end of the month and after the last regular session.

Create a site to post all of the information related to the book club that participants will need to know. During the book discussion, organizers sent e-mail messages to all participants, but that might not have been the most effective way to share information. A password-protected LibGuide was created for the discussion of *The Person You Mean to Be* so that participants have one place they can go to retrieve information. An added bonus is that most of these sites will allow organizers to capture statistics on how many times the site was accessed and what parts were accessed most often. This information could be useful in terms of assessment. Some of the items on the LibGuide for book discussion two include a list of all the discussion questions, a calendar showing when all the sessions are meeting during each month, and additional resources related to the book. Adding the LibGuide proved especially helpful. Organizers received feedback during the registration phase for the second iteration of the book club that information professionals who worked in hospitals did not have access to certain online platforms. Therefore, these members would not be able to access content at work if the Google platform was going to be the primary communication medium.

Expect that there will be some attrition of participants. Several of the people that signed up to participate dropped out throughout the process. Sometimes participants let the facilitators know why they were dropping out, but other times they simply stopped attending sessions or responding to e-mail. This caused angst for some of the facilitators, but it should be expected. Life happens, so don't take people's need to discontinue participation personally. People have changes that occur in their personal and professional lives, and sometimes they can't meet all of their commitments. It is nice to reach out at least once to individuals who

have not responded to e-mail inquiries to let them know their participation has been missed and that they are welcome to rejoin when their schedule allows. It was also helpful to remind participants who withdrew from participating in the discussion that they could still claim MLA credit for the time they had participated. Before the book club begins, in order to help facilitators be prepared to handle these situations, make sure all the facilitators know that participants might drop out.

Holding book club sessions virtually allowed us to interact and build community with a diverse group of informational professionals. The sessions were free to attend, and no funding was needed for travel. This allowed participants who do not receive travel funding and participants with family or mobility issues to participate. Offering sessions in various time zones also gave participants the potential option to participate outside of regular work hours.

Outcomes and Next Steps

The initial book club has inspired continued action, including a second cycle for the book club and individual participants using the template established by the first book club to do their own book club discussions on campus. The overall response to the discussion of *Blindspot* has been positive. Feedback from participants at the onsite session and on the evaluation form indicated a desire to see the book discussion group continue, resulting in planning for cycle two of the book club. The feedback form included a question requesting participant feedback on the book selection for the next discussion. Participants' feedback showed an interest in reading Dolly Chugh's, *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias*. This book was seen as a natural extension to continue the conversation on implicit bias and how individuals can respond to it. The meetings were planned to occur over a four-month period to coincide with the four major sections of the book, with an in-person discussion to take place at the 2020 MLA Annual Meeting. The second book discussion featured thirty-two facilitators, nineteen groups, 168 regular participants, and two prescheduled makeup sessions. Similar to the first book discussion, organizers received funding from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Midcontinental Region, to provide the participants with complimentary copies of the book.[36]

One of the inaugural facilitators shared the work that had been done with his library's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee at the University

of North Carolina, Charlotte. The committee liked the idea of facilitating a discussion on issues related to DEI, and the chair of the committee talked to the dean of the library about a possible book club discussion for faculty and staff at the library. When the idea was presented, the dean suggested it expand beyond the library itself and open up to the entire campus community. The first book club discussion took place in January 2020. Because the facilitator had recently read and led discussions on the book *The Person You Mean to Be* by Dr. Chugh, they decided to select that as the first book to discuss. This discussion was not virtual and took place in one 2-hour-long meeting. The book club and discussion were promoted to all faculty, staff, and students. The UNC Charlotte Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee has now created a task group to facilitate these book club discussions on an ongoing basis. The foundation that the virtual book club established made it much easier to facilitate these in-person discussions.

At the University of Virginia, one of the book club facilitators decided to hold in-person book club discussions for faculty and staff. The facilitator used the material created in the LibGuide and discussion questions as the basis of discussion, just the same as the many virtual meeting groups. This was done to make participation easier as the schedule was set to meet the specific schedule needs of those on the campus. The facilitator also thought that because the book discusses sensitive topics, some members might be more willing to share their thoughts and opinions. The in-person sessions have also allowed for some flexibility, allowing for one chapter to be discussed at each meeting for an hour at a time. While using the same book and discussion materials, this in-person session has allowed for creativity in meeting the needs of the members of a specific institution in terms of how often to meet.

A long-term goal for those who have been organizers and facilitators for the book club is to work with the Medical Library Association's annual meeting planners to select a book that the annual meeting attendees could read before coming to the meeting and invite the author to speak at a plenary session. This would be a way to engage a larger group of libraries and to facilitate a larger discussion. The group plans to actively seek out relevant partnerships to continue the vital and important discussions that the book club has helped to facilitate.

Notes

1. Kathy Rosa and Kelsey Henke, *2017 ALA Demographic Study* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2017), https://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/Draft%20 of%20Member%20Demographics%20Survey%2001-11-2017.pdf.
2. Perception Institute, "Implicit Bias," accessed January 17, 2020, https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/.
3. Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, *Blindspot* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2013).
4. Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, "Bias," accessed January 10, 2020, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/bias_1.
5. Cheryl Staats et al., *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review*, 5th ed. (Columbus: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Ohio State University, 2017), 10, http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-training/resources/2017-implicit-bias-review.pdf.
6. Derald Wing Sue et al., "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 4 (May–June 2007): 271, https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271.
7. DeEtta Jones, "Understanding Microaggressions: What They Are and How They Affect the Workplace," DeEtta Jones website, June 5, 2018, https://deettajones.com/understanding-microaggressions-affect-workplace/ (page discontinued).
8. Jaena Alabi, "Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries: Results of a Survey of Minority and Non-minority Librarians," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41, no. 1 (January 2015): 47–53, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2014.10.008.
9. Matthew Hutson, "'Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People' by Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald," *Washington Post*, February 8, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/blindspot-hidden-biases-of-good-people-by-mahzarin-r-banaji-and-anthony-g-greenwald/2013/02/08/4c42d6b8-6a1b-11e2-ada3-d86a4806d5ee_story.html.
10. Banaji and Greenwald, *Blindspot*, 4.
11. Project Implicit. "Overview," Implicit Association Test (IAT), Harvard University, accessed January 9, 2020, https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html.
12. Banaji and Greenwald, *Blindspot*, 4.
13. Project Implicit website, https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/.
14. Virginia Commonwealth University, "Common Book," accessed January 20, 2020, https://commonbook.vcu.edu/; University of Denver, "One Book, One DU," accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.du.edu/onebook/index.html (page discontinued); University of Miami, "One Book, One U," accessed on January 20, 2020, https://culture.miami.edu/programs/one-book/index.html.
15. Penguin Random House, "Common Reads," accessed January 20, 2020, http://commonreads.com/2015/11/01/welcome-new-penguin-random-house-common-reads-website/.
16. Luis Diaz, "What Students Will Be Reading: Campus Common Reading Roundup, 2019–20." Common Reads, Penguin Random House, October 3, 2019, http://commonreads.com/2019/10/03/first-year-reading-2019-campus-roundup/.
17. Penguin Random House, "First-Year Experience Conference," accessed January 20, 2020, http://commonreads.com/2019/11/11/fye2020-registration/.
18. National Endowment for the Arts, "NEA Big Read," October 15, 2019, https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read.
19. National Endowment for the Arts, "NEA Big Read."
20. National Library of Medicine, "NNLM Reading Club," National Institutes of Health, accessed January 20, 2020, https://nnlm.gov/all-of-us/nnlm-reading-club/.

21. Medical Library Association, "Discussion Group Program," accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.mlanet.org/page/discussion-group-program.
22. Medical Library Association, "Discussion Group Program."
23. National Library of Medicine, "National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Southeastern/ Atlantic Region," accessed January 17, 2020, https://nnlm.gov/sea (page discontinued).
24. Signup Zone website, accessed January 17, 2020, https://signup.zone/.
25. Erin Collazo Miller, "How to Lead a Successful Book Club Discussion," ThoughtCo, last updated March 7, 2018, https://www.thoughtco.com/lead-a-book-club-discussion-362067.
26. David L. Baker, "Designing and Orchestrating Online Discussions," *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching* 7, no. 3 (September 2011), 401–11, ProQuest; John H. Curry and Jonene Cook, "Facilitating Online Discussions at a Manic Pace: A New Strategy for an Old Problem," *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* 15, no. 3 (2014): 1–11, ProQuest.
27. Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, *Learning to Teach through Discussion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npg01.
28. LitLovers, "How to Discuss a Book," accessed June 27, 2020, https://www.litlovers.com/ run-a-book-club/lead-a-book-club-discussion.
29. Edwige Simon, "Ten Tips for Effective Online Discussions," *Transforming Higher Ed* (blog), *Educause Review*, November 21, 2018, https://er.educause.edu/ blogs/2018/11/10-tips-for-effective-online-discussions.
30. LitLovers, "How to Discuss a Book."
31. Miller, "How to Lead a Successful Book Club Discussion"; Book Browse, "Leading a Successful Discussion," accessed June 27, 2020, https://www.bookbrowse.com/book-clubs/advice/index.cfm/fuseaction/moderating_meetings; *FreshBooks Blog*, "Six Tips for Running a Book Club at Your Workplace," last updated March 2019, https://www.fresh-books.com/blog/6-tips-for-running-a-book-club-at-your-workplace.
32. Miller, "How to Lead a Successful Book Club Discussion."
33. Book Browse, "Leading a Successful Discussion"; *FreshBooks Blog*, "Six Tips."
34. Miller, "How to Lead a Successful Book Club Discussion."
35. *FreshBooks Blog*, "Six Tips."
36. National Library of Medicine, "National Network of Libraries of Medicine, MidContinental Region," National Institutes of Health, accessed January 17, 2020. https://nnlm.gov/mcr (page discontinued).

Bibliography

Alabi, Jaena. "Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries: Results of a Survey of Minority and Non-minority Librarians." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41, no. 1 (January 2015): 47–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2014.10.008.

American Library Association. "Diversity Counts." Accessed January 17, 2020. https://www.ala. org/aboutala/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/divcounts.

Baker, David L. "Designing and Orchestrating Online Discussions." *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching* 7, no. 3 (September 2011): 401–11. ProQuest.

Banaji, Mahzarin R., and Anthony G. Greenwald. *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2013.

Book Browse. "Leading a Successful Discussion." Accessed June 27, 2020. https://www.book-browse.com/bookclubs/advice/index.cfm/fuseaction/moderating_meetings%20.

Curry, John H., and Jonene Cook. "Facilitating Online Discussions at a Manic Pace: A New Strategy for an Old Problem." *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* 15, no. 3 (2014): 1–11, ProQuest.

Diaz, Luis. "What Students Will Be Reading: Campus Common Reading Roundup, 2019–20." Common Reads, Penguin Random House, October 3, 2019. http://commonreads.com/2019/10/03/first-year-reading-2019-campus-roundup/.

FreshBooks Blog. "Six Tips for Running a Book Club at Your Workplace." Last updated March 2019. https://www.freshbooks.com/blog/6-tips-for-running-a-book-club-at-your-workplace.

Haroutunian-Gordon, Sophie. *Learning to Teach through Discussion: The Art of Turning the Soul*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npg01.

Hutson, Matthew. "'Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People' by Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald." *Washington Post*, February 8, 2013. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/blindspot-hidden-biases-of-good-people-by-mahzarin-r-banaji-and-anthony-g-greenwald/2013/02/08/4c42d6b8-6a1b-11e2-ada3-d86a4806d5ee_story.html.

Jones, DeEtta. "Understanding Microaggressions: What They Are and How They Affect the Workplace." DeEtta Jones website, June 5, 2018. https://deettajones.com/understanding-microaggressions-affect-workplace/ (page discontinued).

LitLovers. "How to Discuss a Book." Accessed June 27, 2020. https://www.litlovers.com/run-a-book-club/lead-a-book-club-discussion.

Medical Library Association. "Discussion Group Program." Accessed January 17, 2020. https://www.mlanet.org/page/discussion-group-program.

Miller, Erin Collazo. "How to Lead a Successful Book Club Discussion." ThoughtCo. Last updated March 7, 2018. https://www.thoughtco.com/lead-a-book-club-discussion-362067.

National Endowment for the Arts. "NEA Big Read." October 15, 2019. https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read.

National Library of Medicine. "National Network of Libraries of Medicine, MidContinental Region." National Institutes of Health. Accessed January 17, 2020. https://nnlm.gov/mcr (page discontinued).

———. "National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Southeastern/Atlantic Region." Accessed January 17, 2020. https://nnlm.gov/sea (page discontinued).

———. "NNLM Reading Club." National Institutes of Health. Accessed January 20, 2020. https://nnlm.gov/all-of-us/nnlm-reading-club/.

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. "Bias." Accessed January 10, 2020. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/bias_1.

Penguin Random House. "Common Reads." Accessed January 20, 2020. http://commonreads.com/2015/11/01/welcome-new-penguin-random-house-common-reads-website/.

———. "First-Year Experience Conference." Accessed January 20, 2020. http://commonreads.com/2019/11/11/fye2020-registration/.

Perception Institute. "Implicit Bias." Accessed January 17, 2020. https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/.

Project Implicit website. https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/.

Project Implicit. "Overview." Implicit Association Test (IAT), Harvard University. Accessed January 9, 2020. https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html.

Rosa, Kathy, and Kelsey Henke. *2017 ALA Demographic Study*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2017. https://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/Draft%20of%20Member%20Demographics%20Survey%2001-11-2017.pdf.

Signup Zone website. Accessed January 17, 2020. https://signup.zone/.

Simon, Edwige. "Ten Tips for Effective Online Discussions." *Transforming Higher Ed* (blog), *Educause Review*, November 21, 2018. https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2018/11/10-tips-for-effective-online-discussions.

Staats, Cheryl, Kelly Capatosto, Lena Tenney, and Sara Mamo. *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review*, 5th ed. Columbus: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Ohio State University, 2017. http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-training/resources/2017-implicit-bias-review.pdf.

Sue, Derald Wing, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin. "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice." *American Psychologist* 62, no. 4 (May–June 2007): 271–86. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271.

University of Denver. "One Book, One DU." Accessed January 20, 2020. https://www.du.edu/onebook/index.html (page discontinued).

University of Miami Libraries. "One Book, One U." Accessed January 20, 2020. https://culture.miami.edu/programs/one-book/index.html.

Virginia Commonwealth University. "Common Book." Accessed January 20, 2020. https://commonbook.vcu.edu/.