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Ways to tackle your implicit biases

September 2017 | Around the Annual Meeting

A panel of lawyers explored the difficult topic of implicit bias within the legal profession, pointing out that understanding bias begins with better appreciation of one's own prejudices.

The program "[Enhancing Justice and Reducing Implicit Bias in the Legal Profession: Strategies that Work](#)," was held at the ABA Annual Meeting in New York and centered on the importance of understanding the individuality of each person and the need to reject stereotypes that punctuate U.S. society.

"We have a long way to go in the way of educating people to deal with our own biases and identifying biases when we see them," said panelist Rhonda Hunter, chief of the juvenile division of the Dallas County (Texas) District Attorney's Office.

That point was emphasized by another panelist, Sarah E. Redfield, a professor of the University of New Hampshire School of Law and editor of an ABA book on implicit bias.

"We grow up with bias; we're not conscious of it," she said. "But it is our responsibility to become aware of it and interrupt it at a certain important point."

Moderator Patty Ferguson-Bohnee, a law professor at Arizona State University Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, led an interactive conversation among panelists and audience members. Audience members, for example, took self-examination tests. They all agreed that the widely available series of implicit bias tests from Harvard is a good tool to identify one's own bias.

Rosevelie Márquez Morales, the East Coast diversity director for the law firm Sidley Austin LLP, recounted a personal story that surprised her about her own biases. When she took the test, Morales, an Hispanic woman, said the results showed she had a bias against young African-American men "wearing low jeans."

When she reflected on that, she realized that in high school she was robbed by three young men with that appearance. Since then, she said she “always crossed the street” rather than having a street encounter with individuals fitting that description.

“Everything that happens in life leaves an impression and you learn from that,” she said, adding: “Take the test, challenge yourself.”

“Enhancing Justice and Reducing Implicit Bias in the Legal Profession: Strategies that Work” was sponsored by the ABA [Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession](#) and the [Judicial Division](#).