

Blindspot or Bias? Exploring Uncomfortable Self-Knowledge and Equity for Advisors

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Brave Spaces and Safe Spaces

- I am imperfect! I will make mistakes! We are always works-in-progress.
- Plan to take the learning that happens here with you, but leave behind other people's stories and experiences (think modified 'Vegas Rule')
- Think before you share, but know that I cannot guarantee that you will be 'safe'—if possible, try to be brave in sharing your experiences, your learning, and what you still need to work on

Objectives

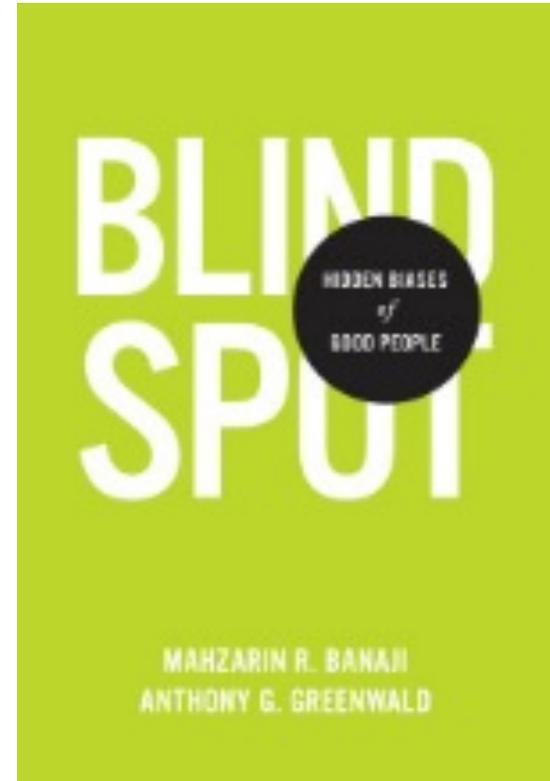
- Learn about “blindspots” and the limitations of “implicit bias”
- Explore our identities and reflect on how they impact our work in advising
- Leave with ideas for how to intentionally consider personal identity and bias

Why does this matter?

- ACPA/NASPA “Social Justice and Inclusion” Competency
- NACADA Core Values
 - “Inclusivity: Academic advisors respect, engage, and value a supportive culture for diverse populations. Advisors strive to create and support environments that consider the needs and perspectives of students, institutions, and colleagues through openness, acceptance, and equity.” (NACADA, 2017b, para. 7)
- NACADA Core Competencies
 - “Core competencies in the Conceptual component (concepts academic advisors must comprehend) include understanding of:...6. How equitable and inclusive environments are created and maintained.” (NACADA, 2017a, p. 2)

What's the deal with *Blindspot*?

- Explores 'hidden bias' through the Implicit Association Test (IAT)
- IAT claims to indicate unconscious preferences for particular groups/identities and associations we make between those groups and other things (value judgements, traits)
- Call for 'outsmarting the machine' in avoiding these biases, and believe that it is unlikely we will eliminate them



Blindspot

- “Understanding how mindbugs [ingrained habits of thought that lead to errors in how we perceive, remember, reason and make decisions] erode the coastline of rational thought, and ultimately the very possibility of a just and productive society, requires understanding the mindbugs that are at the root of the disparity between our inner minds and outward actions” (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016, p. 20)

What is bias?

- Exists in all facets of our lives—desires, preferences, likes and dislikes
 - Examples?
- Are all biases bad?
- When does a bias become part of an oppressive system?
 - Power

What's wrong with *Blindspot*?

- “despite its frequent characterization as a window into the unconscious, ‘the IAT provides little insight into who will discriminate against whom, and provides no more insight than explicit measures of bias.’ (By ‘explicit measures’ they mean simply asking people if they are biased against a particular group.)” (Oswald, Mitchell, Blanton, Jaccard, & Tetlock, 2013, as cited in Bartlett, 2017, para. 7)
- Doing good vs being good
 - Is a perception of “being a good person” more important than addressing our actions, policies, and impact on students and colleagues?

Uncomfortable Self- Knowledge

Beyond Blindspots

Beyond Unconscious Bias

- How unconscious is unconscious bias?
 - “The implicit bias narrative also lets us off the hook. We can’t feel as guilty or be held to account for racism that isn’t conscious. The forgiving notion of unconscious prejudice has become the go-to explanation for all manner of discrimination, but the shaky science behind the IAT suggests this theory isn’t simply easy, but false. And if implicit bias is a weak scapegoat, we must confront the troubling reality that society is still, disturbingly, all too consciously racist and sexist.” Goldhill, 2017, para. 6)
- “Color-blind” racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; 2018)
 - Banaji and Greenwald discuss “aversive racism” but are very wary of using the word “racism” to describe anything but overt hate for people of color

- “One of the central reasons [people with privileged identities feel left out of discussions of equity and justice] is that we tend to conflate the personal with the institutional. As a result, those with agent identities feel helpless to change who they are, rather than realizing that it’s systematic oppression that needs to be challenged” (Davis & Harrison, 2013, p. 39).

Exploring Bias Consciously

- Starting from a point of cultural programming and humility
 - We all have baggage that we may not want
 - We can negatively affect others even when we are being kind and treating them as individuals
 - Oppressive systems do not require our personal investment but do require a lack of disinvestment to continue themselves
- Be willing to engage with discomfort, shame, and loss

Activity: Social Group Membership Profile and Identity Wheel

- Start by just completing the first two columns (social identities and your membership within that identity)
- Which identities came to you first?
 - Race
 - Age
 - Economic class
 - Ability
 - Gender
 - Sexual orientation/identity
 - Religious identity
 - Body size
 - Level of education
 - Life roles (parent, partner, etc.)
 - Neurodiverse status
- For “status”, note whether your group membership is one that is often considered ‘advantaged’ in that social identity or targeted (A or T)
- On your Identity Wheel, create slices of the wheel for each identity based on how aware you are of that identity (how much you think about being X on a daily basis)
 - Use the identities you listed on your Profile
- Reflect on which identities are the largest on your Wheel, what their status is, and what that might mean about you

Who we are affects how we advise.

- Identities
- Perspectives
- Microaggressions
- Culture
- Questions we ask of each other and our students

What is the alternative?

- Critical consciousness and critical pedagogy
 - Becoming aware and then using that awareness to **take action**
 - Asking uncomfortable questions
 - Looking for power and its effects
- Change beyond campus
 - Consider your daily life—how much time do you spend with people who are not like you?
- We are all ‘in it’
 - We are all complicit, but we can all contribute to change

Things Advisors Can Do

- Make reflection on identity part of your day
 - Journaling, silent mindwork, conversations with colleagues
- Ask questions that increase the complexity of the conversation
 - How will this (policy/practice/change) affect different kinds of students differently?
 - Who is in the room for this discussion and what are their identities? Who isn't?
 - How do students who are different from me know that I care about them?
- Begin from a perspective of “critical humility” (Davis & Harrison, 2013, p. 182)

Questions?

You can also reach out via email:

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