

Project Implicit

(Send inquiries to agg@u.washington.edu — A. G. Greenwald)

Project Implicit blends basic research and educational outreach in a virtual laboratory at which visitors can examine their own hidden biases. Project Implicit is the product of research by three scientists whose work produced a new approach to understanding of attitudes, biases, and stereotypes. Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji have been conducting research on the hidden aspects of prejudice and stereotypes for the past twenty years. With Brian Nosek, their collaboration led to the opening of a website in 1998 to educate about and raise awareness of the phenomena of ordinary prejudice.

The Project Implicit site (implicit.harvard.edu) has been functioning as a hands-on science museum exhibit, allowing web visitors to experience the manner in which human minds display the effects of stereotypic and prejudicial associations acquired from their socio-cultural environment.

We provide here a brief overview of the site's functioning.

Facts about the Project Implicit web sites

- (a) Visitors have completed more than 3 million demonstration tests since 1998, currently averaging over 10,000 tests completed each week;
- (b) Web sites affiliated with Project Implicit have earned a variety of accolades, most notably a Webby Award in 2002;
- (c) Since its inception in 1998, Project Implicit has expanded from a single site with four demonstration tasks to multiple sites with capability for exploring more than a dozen different varieties of implicit bias as well as attitudes and beliefs toward social groups and politics;
- (d) The Project Implicit family of sites affords a unique opportunity for visitors on the web to try procedures that can reveal one's own hidden biases. These sites have consequently become a popular destination for students and professionals in a wide variety of fields as well as for the public at large.
- (e) Project Implicit's sites have received substantial media attention, with dozens of stories in newspapers (e.g., New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal), magazines (e.g., Newsweek, Time, Psychology Today), television (e.g., Dateline NBC, Discovery Channel, CNN) and radio (both public and commercial, in the United States and overseas).
- (f) The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and Time-Warner, Inc. are partnering to create a 45-minute video that will review the science of ordinary prejudice and the applications of that science in settings in which ordinary prejudice can be shown to play a role: a police department, a classroom, a courtroom, a corporate boardroom, the sports field, a doctor's office.

Findings observed in seven years of operation of the Project Implicit web site

- (a) Implicit biases are pervasive. They appear as statistically “large” effects that are often shown by majorities of samples of Americans. Over 80% of web respondents show implicit negativity toward the elderly compared to the young; 75-80% of self-identified Whites and Asians show an implicit preference for racial White relative to Black.
- (b) People are often unaware of their implicit biases. Ordinary people, including the researchers who direct this project, are found to harbor negative associations in relation to various social groups (i.e., implicit biases) even while honestly (we believe) reporting that they regard themselves as lacking these biases.
- (c) Implicit biases predict behavior. From simple acts of friendliness and inclusion to more consequential acts such as the evaluation of work quality, those who are higher in implicit bias have been shown to display greater discrimination. The published scientific evidence is rapidly accumulating. Over 200 published scientific investigations have made use of one or another version of the IAT.
- (d) People differ in levels of implicit bias. Implicit biases vary from person to person — for example as a function of the person’s group memberships, the dominance of a person’s membership group in society, consciously held attitudes, and the level of bias existing in the immediate environment. This last observation makes clear that implicit attitudes are modified by experience.

Principal Investigators of Project Implicit

(alphabetical order)

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Diversity Training Using Project Implicit

Project Implicit supports four modes of diversity training.

1. Ordinary use of Project Implicit's web site (<https://implicit.harvard.edu>)

Many college course instructors and diversity trainers direct students and workshop participants to IATs available at the Project Implicit web site by providing a link to our site from their site. The Project Implicit site presently provides a dozen IATs, covering domains of race, gender, ethnicity, overweight, age, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Answers to frequently asked questions address basic questions of how to interpret IAT results, scientific status of the IAT, and relation of what the IAT measures to phenomena of prejudice and stereotypes.

2. Organization-tailored Project Implicit web sites

The custom-tailored site is designed as a self-contained training experience. Those participating in an organization's training program are asked to drop in, from the privacy of their own office or home internet-connected browsers, to a specially created page in the organization's web space. Login via organization-provided password serves to limit participation to intended participants from the organization. Anonymity and security in transmission of individual responses is assured by Project Implicit's established data management practices. An IAT of the organization's choice (possibly one created specifically for the organization) is preceded by introductory materials developed by Project Implicit in collaboration with organization staff to enhance the training value of the IAT experience.

The IAT experience(s) provided on a customized site goes beyond the standard Web IAT by including the following components:

- An enlightening and entertaining introduction (including hands-on demonstrations) that convincingly illustrates the important and pervasive role of unconscious or implicit mental processes in ordinary human behavior. This introduction is based on materials developed for the very well-received in-person lectures and workshops that have been given many times by Project Implicit's principal investigators.
- A substantial, organization-tailored concluding segment, consisting of a series of interactive vignettes drawn from situations that arise routinely in the organization's work. This portion is developed by Project Implicit's principal investigators, working in collaboration with the client organization's staff. The vignette situations are selected to be ones in which unrecognized implicit biases can interfere with participants' intentions to be bias-free in their work. The interactive aspect of these vignettes involves choosing from a list of options for responding to the situation described in each vignette, followed by learning how others respond. This is accompanied by explanation of how the vignette's situation has the potential to elicit unintended implicit biases. This explanation presents psychological concepts

in lay language, and connects to the principles that were illustrated in the introductory demonstrations of unconscious mental operation.

- Concluding brief questionnaire that evaluates impact of the IAT experience and its accompanying tutorial materials.

Between the first two above components comes the central experience – taking the IAT. After completing the IAT and before proceeding to the interactive vignettes, the participant receives confidential performance feedback, as on Project Implicit's web site.

The organization's participants will visit this site during an announced participation period. At the end of the participation period, designated organization staff members will be sent a report that includes an aggregate summary of IAT performances by all organization participants, along with summary demographic information (provided by participants) and summary of responses to the concluding evaluation questions. No results are reported in individually identifiable fashion (identities of the respondents are not recorded in any fashion by Project Implicit).

3. On-site workshops

A custom-designed Project Implicit training site can usefully be supplemented with an on-site workshop conducted by a workshop leader trained and certified by Project Implicit. These workshops provide opportunity for more thorough explanation of the science behind the IAT, group-demonstration experiences of additional IATs, and interactive discussion of participants' questions. A concluding portion of the workshop (perhaps with a more select group of participants) provides the opportunity for organization staff to consider how to follow up on the IAT experience to advance the organization's diversity goals.

4. Training of workshop leaders

Project Implicit does not have staff of workshop leaders. Rather, we encourage larger organizations to make use of their own staff members who have diversity training expertise. To make this possible, Project Implicit offers periodic 2.5-day workshops, at which qualified persons (especially those with a relevant social science masters or doctoral degree) can receive the further training that will enable them to conduct workshops in their own organizations.