

# Implicit Cognition and the Social Unconscious

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**ABSTRACT.** Considerable work in social psychology has explained social phenomena in terms of individual mental processes, and researchers more recently have suggested that many of these intrapsychic processes transpired beyond the awareness of individual subjects. Through these extensive research programs the social recedes and the individual constitutes the locus of psychological activity; such studies thus affirm individual-centered ideologies and policies while obscuring social processes and structures. The paradigm of implicit social cognition entails an example of how features of the social world are reconfigured and interpreted as psychological events of individuals. Critical reading of this paradigm both elucidates the technical, rhetorical and theoretical routines through which this relocation is made and shows how that empirical research actually demonstrates the social unconscious. Reappraisal of implicit social cognition research with its demonstrations of dynamic social processes affords supportive evidence for extant feminist studies of the unconscious social gender biases structuring cultural beliefs and practices.

**KEY WORDS:** dynamic social processes, gender biases, implicit social cognition, social unconscious

Over the last quarter of a century, cognitive models have been extended to explain social psychological phenomena. Among the outcomes of this renowned revolution has been the emergence of the conception that many of people's social decisions and actions are guided by cognitive processes of which they often are not aware; what have been considered social events actually transpire within the individual agent as cognitions which are unconscious as well as conscious. Since, as it is argued, these cognitive processes are internal, complex and often unavailable to the 'cognitor', they are susceptible to generating inaccurate perceptions, biases and distortions of external events. With the social in recession, it is no longer readily observable in actions and judgments. The emerging conception of a social psychology with its locus in the individual has consequences for practical affairs, social policy and public history, as well as challenging several dominant social psychological theories and research methodologies.

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The implicit social cognition model is derived from, and very similar to, those of implicit learning (Reber, 1993) and implicit memory. These 'implicit psychologies' are defined by the following tenet: learning, memory and social cognition can take place independently of conscious awareness of the acquisition of, or the content of, the acquired inputs. Much of learning one's first language or the norms of one's culture is done implicitly during childhood development. In differentiating between implicit and explicit memory, Kelley and Lindsay (1996) provide a definition that easily encompasses both learning and social cognition:

One defining difference between implicit and explicit memory [or cognition] has to do with subjective, phenomenal experience: Implicit memory refers to the influence of specific past experiences unaccompanied by subjective awareness of remembering, whereas explicit remembering [or cognition] refers to uses of memory [or thought] that are accompanied by the subjective experience of remembering [or learning]. (p. 54)

New perspectives on implicit social cognition and memory functioning exemplify this important shift in social psychological theory. It throws into question the traditional research on attitudes, self-esteem and stereotypes that held that such judgments were consciously held by individuals and are the product of deliberative social action. Just as the work of McClelland and others investigated the effect of motives that lay on the perimeters of individual awareness, and were assessed by indirect techniques, such as the TAT (Winter, 1996), so the implicit social cognition paradigm seeks to investigate through indirect measures the effects of attitudes, evaluations and stereotypes that are 'unconscious'. Implicit social cognition is hypothesized to entail 'introspectively inaccessible effects of current stimulus or prior experience variations on judgments' (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 6). The causal claim of the theory is that some experience is not remembered 'in the usual sense—that is, it is unavailable to self-report or introspection', but the exposure or experience has an effect on judgment even if the person finds it difficult, or is unable, to remember (recall or recognize) the earlier experience. In other words, implicit social cognition theory describes 'unconscious cognitive involvement in (and especially interference with) deliberate judgments' (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 5).

Current models of cognitive bias and memory distortion are evidence of what critical theorists have described as the demise of the 'social' in social psychology and the ever-increasing dominance of individual-centered psychology (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Sampson, 1977; Stam, 1993). Just as these cognitive models designate internal, individual mental acts as the constituent of social psychology, so they privatize the social. However, theories of implicit social cognition do not, in actuality, signal the demise of the social. Rather, they relocate the social in the unconscious. As we will argue, the implicit social cognition paradigm, along with kindred theories of cognitive unawareness, produces the social

unconscious by welding two traditions together: contemporary research on memory distortion and psychoanalytic investigations of the unconscious. This impressive accomplishment is dependent on the ritualized application of three scientific practices. First, there is the necessary decontextualization of the phenomenal to create the experimental: here the uncertainties of experiential life are replaced by the rigors of control, which include specific and largely routine manipulations, positionings and enactments by the experimenters. In addition, the procedures entail the use of standardized memory tasks, and the employment of various long-established linguistic conventions. Although the ordinariness of these procedures makes them unremarkable, and therefore implicit in most of the research reviewed by Greenwald and Banaji (1995), in the present analysis we make them explicit because we wish to highlight the *social* instead of the individual in the implicit social cognition paradigm. We will make the implicit explicit, thereby showing how the social unconscious is created in the process of investigating implicit memory.

Making the conscious unconscious and the unconscious conscious is often best thought of in spatial terms: moving from a focus on what is in the foreground to what is in the background, or traversing the boundaries of liminality, thereby transforming the liminal to the subliminal, or vice versa. To understand how the social unconscious is produced, then, we must necessarily investigate the scene of construction via deconstruction of one of its defining texts. We propose here to lift the veil of experimental and textual liminality in order to foreground the social and textual manipulations that are essential to the constructions of modernist, positivist memory research. To do this we will use Greenwald and Banaji's (1995) exposition of implicit social cognition. Although their text provides a notably comprehensive, felicitous and contemporary canvas for drawing out the ways in which the social unconscious is made, it is also a touchstone in defining state-of-the-art work in the field.

This reading follows in the tradition of considerable critical work that has been done to identify the conventions of psychological experimentation that tacitly (and sometimes unknowingly on the part of experimenters) engineer, alter, misrepresent, smooth over and elide social actions and cognitions of the experimental subjects. Accounts of the contrivances and behavioral demands of experimental control are nearly as old as experimental social psychology itself (Rosenzweig, 1933; Rosnow, 1981; Silverman, 1970; Suls & Rosnow, 1988). Although psychologists' awareness of their involvement in the complex social world of the experiment is similarly longstanding (Morawski, 1988), substantive changes in investigative techniques have not been forged. These critical accounts recently have been corroborated by science studies research that elucidates the construction of scientific phenomena through empirical and laboratory practices (Golinsky, 1998; Latour, 1987; Woolgar, 1988).

Whereas most of this critical work adheres to a constructivist perspective that brackets social reality and examines what is taken as the real, our analysis takes as a given the phenomenal experiences of subjects and experimenters alike. In positively regarding the phenomenal experiences of individuals, it resists dichotomies of real and constructed, constituting and constituted, but also of individual agency and social reality. Conventional psychological notions (often tacitly retained in constructivist studies) take the individual as autonomous and distinct from the social world and, accordingly, they consider subjectivity to be a feature of individuals. Likewise, the 'social' conventionally is taken to be the out-there: phenomena or materiality that is separate and distinct from the individual. By contrast, we proceed with the view that subjectivity takes form in the social world and through particular historically contingent arrangements of power and normative enactment; subjectivity also is productive of the social. Such reconfiguring of the conceptual boundaries of real and constructed, and of individual and social, constitutes a substantial revision of models undertaken in feminist theory (Butler, 1990; Ferguson, 1993; Flax, 1990; Gardiner, 1995; Jakobsen, 1998; Mann, 1994). In such a reformulation, however, individual action is not solely determined by the social, whether the social is defined as power, materiality or psychological stimuli. Further:

. . . the self need not be prior to the social context or even activity in order to recognize agency. Rather the self is both empowered through social subjectivity—an individual cannot be a self except through the social—and is at the same time subjected or limited by the possibilities of the social. (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 20)

## The Experimental Veil

Implicit social cognition operates when traces of a prior experience have an effect, often detrimental, on a judgment, and the person is unaware of this effect. As elucidated by Greenwald and Banaji (1995), the paradigm of implicit social cognition is inextricably connected with, even dependent upon, the method of observation. It relies on a central and essential investigative practice that is common to all experimental explorations of implicit memory: subjects must be exposed to stimuli without being aware of the stimuli, and recall must be assessed in an indirect manner (Kelley & Lindsay, 1996). For example, Greenwald and Banaji (1995) say that prior exposure to a list of words increases the likelihood that those words will be used to complete incomplete letter strings, even though subjects display a 'poor ability to recall or recognize words from the earlier list' (p. 5). The production of the effect requires precision in the social management of the

experimental situation and has been refined into a paradigm over the course of the last twenty years. The subject's attention must not be focused on the list of words that he or she is acquiring or recalling, a list that will be 'implicitly' not 'explicitly' lodged within the psyche. As Greenwald and Banaji put it, 'in studying implicit cognition indirect measures are theoretically essential' because the subject must neither be informed about what is being assessed nor asked to give a 'self-report concerning it' (p. 5). In order to accomplish this act, a veil of inattentiveness must surround the subjects who are exposed to the experimental manipulations, of which, to be effective, they must be unaware.

The social operations of the experiment, the social situation producing both cause (the word list) and effect (Ss' responses), must not be part of the subjects' awareness. Such legerdemain of modern social engineering is essential for the production of an empirically verifiable unconscious in the subject. Within the growing body of results that Greenwald and Banaji so ably synthesize are described elaborate social rituals of experimental manipulations that are necessary to produce a subject who acts without awareness of her or his novel and immediate surroundings, and yet is disciplined to produce the desired outcomes.

For social psychologists working within this area, the methods and assumptions of the implicit social cognition paradigm serve four important functions:

1. They place the investigators' efforts in a nomological network of common methods and understandings that unifies domains extending from personality/motivation, through social processes, to learning and memory.
2. The paradigm provides social psychologists with an accepted method with which to study a vast array of implicit acculturation phenomena, which might include, for example, the differential acquisition of attitudes toward the expression of aggression by women and men of differing racial/ethnic backgrounds or stereotypes of aging among those of differing social classes.
3. The experimental procedures rationalize the use of some deception, thereby keeping alive a long tradition in social psychology. Yet, the deceptive practices are so minimized that the experiments meet the standards of ethically more rigorous and restrictive review boards of today.
4. For psychologists employing these methods and assumptions, the practices enhance their already powerful status as the experimenter. In relocating phenomena such as attitudes and stereotypes from a realm that is socially shared with subjects and consciously accessible to them, to a position within the subject where the person is unable to articulate what

he/she knows or how he/she knows it, the experimenter becomes the only one who consciously controls the interpersonal domain through deliberative action and who has the technical expertise to access the intrapsychic, non-conscious processes of the subject.

In some senses, the subjects in implicit social cognition experiments are, ironically, in much the same position as the readers of the article, whose focus is foregrounded on these subjects' apparently remarkable behaviors while the scientific maneuvers essential to producing the desired results recede into the background and are nearly forgotten. The seemingly non-intuitive, non-rational actions on the part of the subject, along with the allusion to a non-observable psychic process, the unconscious, captivate the reader. The descriptive language simultaneously underscores the subjects' vulnerability to the effect: subjects have 'poor ability' and 'intrusions' or 'interference' in their cognitive capacities causing them to 'mistake' or 'mislabel' (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, pp. 5–6). The textual veil that is used here to occlude our view of the experimental manipulation is substantial. Linguistic and narrative devices focus not on what is being done socially by the experimenters to the subjects, but assure readers that what is being generated are unconscious productions of the subjects. Early in the account implicit is opposed to self-reportable, which is then termed 'conscious' or 'explicit'; the rhetorical juxtaposition constructs a dichotomy where implicit is unconscious, explicit is self-report. Once this dichotomy is set, there is open discussion of 'unconscious cognition', soon to be supported by other psychoanalytic terms ('projections', 'dissociations') that center the phenomenon in an individual unconscious. Here the authors ally with and call upon a powerful cultural language, a long-established if sometimes denigrated vocabulary, which has been woven into western popular thought.

As the unconscious is created as the implicit in the experimental situation, so too is the conception of the power of implicit cognition read into the history of social psychology as prenascent. Greenwald and Banaji's (1995) attendant literature review of prior research on attitudes and related topics reads almost as a metaphoric narrative of implicit social cognition in past scientific activities. This history of related research rehearses the false starts and overlooked discoveries in which, if (as the history implies) researchers had been more prescient, they could have seen the veracity of implicit cognition, unconscious processes and indirect assessment. Such Whig or presentist history, lauding contemporary work by an exposition of both apparent precursors and obstructions, is not uncommon in psychology (O'Donnell, 1979; Samelson, 1974, 1980; Young, 1966). Yet here the historiographical sleight of hand presents a unique synchrony with the psychological phenomena being reviewed by attributing to others what Greenwald and Banaji think to be explicit.



## The Social Unconscious

Greenwald and Banaji's (1995) exposition is explicit in detailing the ways in which implicit social cognition is created in the laboratory. Where they are necessarily less clear (because we as a profession are not able, as yet, to articulate it fully) is where the phenomena they are producing and studying are situated. Greenwald and Banaji attribute these implicit or unconscious cognitive processes to the minds of their subjects. That is, they foreground the mechanism of memory distortion produced by subjects in three canonical areas of social psychology: attitudes, self-esteem and stereotypes. One way to comprehend more fully the production of these unconscious phenomena is to reverse figure and ground, examining not inferences of individual displays of unconsciousness, but the ground of social unawareness. Instead of looking at the construction of individualized cognitive unconscious, we can look at the ways in which unawareness in social situations can function to create a social unconscious, that is, a shared experience of human beings in which some, if not all, are not fully cognizant of what is going on, but many, upon reflection, can be made aware of what is happening.<sup>1</sup>

Such social unawareness is itself a production, sometimes an inadvertent outcome and sometimes an intended or manipulated occurrence. In implicit social cognition research there are two manipulations that define the paradigm. Both of them require the production of social unawareness and, therefore, can be seen as essential to the construction of the social unconscious. First, the subject must be 'casually exposed' to the experimental input (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 5). Second, the subjects' output must be assessed in such a manner that they are not aware of the assessment. The paradigm, therefore, requires the experimenter to create both indirect stimuli and measurement. The demonstration of implicit social cognition is absolutely dependent upon these two manipulations—the 'indirect measures are theoretically essential' (p. 5). If these socially subliminal manipulations of input and output are not both performed or are not performed successfully, then implicit social cognition becomes explicit; subjects become aware of the situation.

In producing this unconsciousness of the social world that surrounds subjects in an experimental situation, experimenters exercise the power of the social control afforded them as the producers of such events. Whether or not the experimenters are cognizant of the full extent of their expressed power, the subjects are not even aware of the actual reason why they are present in the investigative setting. While they are being subjects and, therefore, fully attentive to the demands of the experiment, they are being manipulated just outside their awareness because what they are attending to is actually a distraction from that which is being studied, which is their inattentiveness.

The two empirical conditions of implicit social cognition that work in conjunction to generate social unawareness are not unique to the experimental setting. These laboratory routines produce human actions that both transpire and are chronicled elsewhere in culture. Whether the paradigm be that of experimental cognition or 'false memory research' or psychoanalysis, this fissure in experience between consciously attending to what turns out, upon reflection, to have been unimportant while implicitly, subliminally or preconsciously attending to what is present, and, in retrospect, vital, in the lived (social) world defines the creation of unconscious phenomena. Descriptively, then, the unconscious is that of which we are unaware in our experience, but which leaves a trace in our being. Although within the psychoanalytic tradition, there is held to be a dynamic unconscious that is actively repressed, all unconscious phenomena, be they clinically uncovered or experimentally designed, still have a significant social component. They are to a great extent produced socially and are almost always exposed socially. However, their location is rarely centered in the *interpsychic* realm, but is almost always relegated to the *intrapsychic*. Where these phenomena are located involves a linguistic mapping that is essential to the psychological construction and experience of our worlds.

### Regions of Being and Textual Boundary Crossings

In the everyday world, the thresholds between the conscious and the unconscious and the personal and the social are continually moved and crossed. These thresholds are not so much barriers or certain boundaries as demarcations of experience and cultural convention into imagined zones of being-in-the-world and awareness of so being. Like the difference between the visible and the invisible, such boundaries are created more by perspective and illumination than by any inherencies of objects (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968). The continual shifting of lines between the four spheres—the conscious, personal, social and unconscious—and their overlaps and separations are present in almost all psychological texts. They also are sustained and validated by cultural traditions and practices outside experimental chambers. Authors and readers negotiate textual models and maps of human being-in-the-world through representations of these spheres; they hypostatize, bifurcate and reify them; yet, upon close analysis of the text, the lines amongst them are highly permeable.

Textual analysis, like analyses of methodological procedures, can be aided by calling to the foreground what is often relegated to the background in psychological discourse: the rhetorical modes of textual representation that we authors and readers borrow, create and sustain in a too often unexamined socially sublimated collusion. The conventions of scientific discourse, along



with its deep dependence upon cultural conventions of seeing and reporting, conceal the elaborate textual manipulations that are required to construct or sustain an argument (Graumann & Gergen, 1996; Lamb, 1991; Latour, 1987; Smith, 1992).

## Rhetorical Subjects

The account of the implicit social cognition paradigm is as dependent upon rhetoric as it is on experimental techniques, and Greenwald and Banaji (1995) use many tacit traditions of our genre in constructing it. To better understand this textual sub-liminality or implicit textuality we can reframe their work by highlighting that which authors and readers complicitly make implicit while they explicitly attend to the exposition of an extensive body of experimental evidence. Such a reading brings to awareness several socially unconscious embedded traditions and assumptions of our discipline. For example, below, we follow Greenwald and Banaji's use of the terms 'subject' and 'subjects' to see how these signifiers appear and disappear in the text and how, through persuasive argumentation (deductive and inductive), the 'subject' signifiers are made to play the role of rhetorical shape-shifters more than that of stable units of analysis corresponding to empirical individuals.

Experimental demonstrations of implicit social cognition generate group phenomena, although the discourse of the scientific reporting situates these events in individual psyches, making it easier to connect the results with highly idiographic disciplines like psychoanalysis. In addition to the two aforementioned ways in which the social unconscious (i.e. the subjects' lack of awareness of input and output) is reliably produced by experimental procedures, there are three ways in which it is constructed in the text. These three textual strategies involve conceptions of the individual subject and rely upon assumptions common to science and the broader culture. Although in an individualistic society like ours, the person seems to be a given—some fundamental emanation of existence—the idea of the person, individual or subject has varied over time, even in scientific psychology, and remains problematic in most psychological texts (Baumeister, 1987; Bayer & Shotter, 1998; Cushman, 1990; Lichtman, 1982; Sampson, 1977; Taylor, 1989). The instability of the subject within psychological discourse is evident throughout Greenwald and Banaji's (1995) review, especially when the subject disappears. This primary step, which is technically necessary given the use of aggregate statistical analyses, is coupled with three strategic moves: (1) the 'subject' is implicitly, not explicitly, included in definitions of the social psychological phenomena; (2) group phenomena are attributed

to individuals; and (3) social events (in this case, prejudices) are given a locus within the psyches of each person.

### *1. The Subject Disappears*

As Greenwald and Banaji (1995) define them, implicit attitudes 'are introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experiences that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects' (p. 8). The place where this introspection occurs is implicitly, not explicitly, stated. As readers who share common assumptions with the authors about where memory and judgment occur, we accordingly read the subject into this definition by locating cognitive activities in the minds (and/or brains) or lived experience of individuals. This reading that locates attitudes in this seminal cultural region transpires in much the same way that incomplete word stems are completed by the subjects with previously seen words—without attention being given to the previous, or backgrounded, or culturally assumed information.

Greenwald and Banaji's (1995) definitions of implicit cognition, implicit self-esteem and implicit stereotypes all are built on this same template. Within their formal definitions the presence of the human subjects is implicit; nowhere do the terms 'subject' or 'person' appear in any of the four definitional statements. We, the readers, fill in the individual subject, because in our discipline and culture—in our tacitly assumed, unconscious social sphere—it is assumed implicitly that what we are talking about are phenomena anchored in discrete, personal experience. But that subliminal, communal assumption can lead, as Greenwald and Banaji would predict, to incorrect inferences about what actually occurs in a given situation.

### *2. Disappearing Subjects*

In the research used to elucidate implicit cognition, 'it is assumed that exposure to a given set of experimental materials produces an approximately uniform effect across subjects in establishing traces that can later influence performance on indirect measures' (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 14). The phenomena of almost all of the reviewed research studies, therefore, are grouped, aggregate or statistical. Although causal attribution of memory processes is made to 'traces' that are tacitly assumed, by authors and readers alike, to exist within individual psyches, according to Greenwald and Banaji, there is no way, at present, to assess individual differences. They carefully acknowledge the absence of a procedure or apparatus to observe objectively the causal attribution being made: 'Measurement of those individual differences is beyond the means of present assessment technology; consequently, a large subset of the empirical implications of the present analysis are currently untestable' (p. 6). Near the conclusion of their paper they reiterate:

'Implicit social-cognitive effects have been demonstrated most clearly in experimental studies in which a group of subjects is uniformly exposed to cues . . . the implicit effect is sought in comparisons between averaged performances of groups exposed to different cues' (p. 19).

If experimental method dictates outcomes or responses, and if these are group phenomena, then, strictly speaking, the cognitive unconscious is a collective or social unconscious manifested in an experimental environment where most of the subjects are unaware of what is going on. However, as is common in psychological research, that causal attribution to the group recedes into the background, as it is assumed that the group is uniform or homogeneous enough to act as a prototypical individual. In short, the group becomes implicit; the individual, explicit.

The apparent almost rhythmic crossing and recrossing of boundaries of individual subject and the group is not unique to the implicit cognition research program. Historical research has documented the slippages of these categories and their relation to emerging traditions of scientific investigation of the psychological. Historical analyses have connected psychology's shift (in the early 20th century) from use of plural methods, including idiographic and qualitative ones, to aggregate techniques that accorded with bureaucratic management styles as well as with psychologists' interest in providing practical knowledge for regulating persons (Danziger, 1990; Hornstein, 1988; Rose, 1989, 1992). Through aggregate techniques, the subject of psychology became generic, yielding generalizable, useful and, not least, quantitative knowledge applicable to an industrial culture; psychology became an 'administrative science' (Danziger, 1990, p. 190). Statistical data about groups of subjects were made compatible with notions of the individual by borrowing cultural categories of persons (gender, age, race): psychologists took these 'essentially adopted culturally established categories and treated them as psychological' (Danziger, 1990, p. 92) thus sustaining a language of the psychological. The nomothetic or aggregate methods enable what Danziger called a 'Robinson Crusoe' myth which 'made it seem eminently reasonable to ignore the settings that had produced the human behavior to be studied and to reattribute it as a property of individuals-in-isolation' (p. 186).

Examining this history more broadly, Seltzer (1992) has described the influences of realist beliefs, machine culture and the market economy on the oxymoronic idea of 'statistical persons'. Intellectuals and artists of the early 20th century were captivated by the:

. . . redrawing of the uncertain and shifting line between the natural and the technological in machine culture and also the ways in which such shifts in the traffic between the natural and the technological make for the vicissitudes of agency and of individual and collective and national identity in that culture. (p. 4)

The realist desires to see, along with the market desires to quantify, resulted not only in a 'double discourse' of the natural and the made but also new understandings of persons. As identified by Seltzer, 'the de-individualizing tendencies of statistics provide models of individualization: models for the generic, typical, or average man, for what I have been describing as the production of individuals as statistical persons' (p. 105).

### *3. The Social Vanishes, the Subject Returns*

The return to the individual subject is not a peculiarity of the implicit social cognition paradigm: the refocus on the singular subject at once corresponds to and is dependent upon psychology's commitment to the individual (Rose, 1989; Sampson, 1977). Writing about gender bias in judgments of fame, Greenwald and Banaji (1995) state that such bias 'occurs without the subject being consciously aware of an influence of recent experience' (p. 17). The 'subject' clearly appears here as the locus of the effect, the effect being that male and female subjects more often attribute fame to previously seen unfamous names if the names are those of men as opposed to women. That both men and women make these attributions 'indicates that the stereotypes [men are more famous than women] they reflect are culturally shared among both men and women' (p. 17). The power of the implicit social cognition paradigm, according to Greenwald and Banaji, is that it demonstrates experimentally that 'stereotypes are often expressed implicitly in the behavior of persons who explicitly disavow the stereotype' (p. 15). Greenwald and Banaji review numerous studies on race and gender stereotyping that demonstrate this effect: the studies concur that although subjects may, on self-report measures, deny being either prejudiced towards women or minorities, they often manifest such prejudice when sexist or racist attitudes are assessed indirectly.

The effect and the problem are returned to the individual mind. The social unconscious, that is, the fact that these prejudices are quantified in group terms and that these aggregated subjects disavow these stereotypes, nearly dissolves; in the place of this actually measured phenomenon is substituted the far less precise term 'culturally shared'. Analytic awareness is, then, shifted to the individualized gendered subjects ('men and women') while the social unconscious is moved to the background, articulated only through a few common cultural terms. Although the implicit social cognition paradigm offers an additional opportunity to understand cultural bias and discrimination, as will be discussed below, the crossings of the individual and social boundaries and the ultimate disposal of the phenomena of the social unconscious in Greenwald and Banaji's text foreshortens our theoretical vision. Between the abstractions of the individual and the cultural, we need a robust conception of the social that captures the explicit and implicit cooperation and collusion whereby groups continually negotiate and con-

stitute themselves as intermediaries between the I/me of the individual and the us/them of cultural identities and institutions.

### **Conclusion: Toward Social-Psychological Knowledge**

The implicit social cognition paradigm at once produces a social unconscious and documents its operations. The paradigm is charged by a paradox: just as implicit social cognition demonstrates how cognitions not in conscious awareness effect conscious decisions, so researchers within the paradigm are influenced by implicit assumptions embedded in the discipline: the unconscious they produce and observe is attributed to individual psyches and not the social processes they—experimenters and subjects—(re)construct. In other words, the paradigm itself depends upon making the explicit implicit. While implicit social cognition research has significant potential to challenge biased and discriminatory social practices, its foregrounding of the individual psyche and dismissal of any social unconscious actually reproduces a widely held bias of our discipline. Although the paradigm and kindred models of implicit social bias provide impressive evidence of ongoing practices in social life, and can be suggestive of interventions into these practices, the theoretical refocus on the individual subject eclipses these models' full meaning and socio-political implications. The paradigm's reliance on psychology's emphatic rehearsal of an autonomous individual subject also prevents acknowledgment of other intellectual work: implicit social cognition research corroborates evidence gathered in other domains, notably feminist studies, that has identified implicit social processes as causes of discrimination and prejudice.

Taking these problems into account, Greenwald and Banaji's (1995) review and the model they propose can propel important developments in theorizing the social unconscious. Their work explicates how duplicity of being—consciously disavowing prejudice while unconsciously expressing it—is enacted by subjects in experimental situations. Their findings offer an experimental foundation on which to begin to build a deeper understanding of social systems that simultaneously disavow sexism and racism while sustaining their continued practice. To understand racism in the post-Civil Rights era and sexism in the post-feminist era, it is necessary to lift the veil of official equality, thereby uncloaking embedded social practices. Considerable feminist and race research has documented how such veneers of equality cover hierarchical systems that in North America and Europe keep Caucasian men in power and Caucasian women, and women and men of color, in subservient positions.

Whereas the implicit social cognition research demonstrates, through its very production, the social unconscious, its ultimate abeyance of the social is corrected in feminist studies of social hierarchies and social relations of

power. A direct instance is found in feminist studies that document the saturation of media with repetitious images that feature men in power and women as sexually submissive (Jhally, 1990, 1995; Kilbourne, 1995, 1999). Another example, entailing scientific epistemology itself, are studies demonstrating how even ostensibly value-free knowledge structures actually are replete with gender biases (Bleier, 1984; Haraway, 1989; Harding, 1986; Keller, 1985; Merchant, 1980). While these and allied studies locate normative practices and categories that structure the social, other feminist research explores how 'the subject of agency is constituted in and through activity, recognizing that social power relations both enable and constrain, but don't simply determine, this constitution' (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 3). Such understandings of subjectivity and agency move beyond the dualism of individual and social to consider how social practices, performances and rules as well as material conditions are constitutive (but not necessarily determining) of individual subjectivity (Butler, 1990; Ferguson, 1993; Gardiner, 1995; Jakobsen, 1998; Mann, 1994). Although these feminist theories differ in important respects, they share two main features that can correct the limitations of implicit cognition research. First, in these theories the social is rendered explicit: it is locatable in normative practices and relations. Second, the individual is neither an autonomous entity nor a mere puppet, ever susceptible to being unknowingly influenced by invisible social forces. Rather, theories that move beyond the dichotomies of individual and social, real and constructed, can comprehend and explicate a self with agentic capacity to resist and reinvent—including the capacity to render the implicit explicit.

The prejudices of race, gender and class are experienced by us all; we share them and rarely articulate them. It is part of a social unconscious that we all participate in and that is expressed whenever the social situation provides the necessary cues and permissions for its expression. A virtue of the implicit social cognition paradigm is that it has managed to reproduce this dynamic in experimental situations. The challenge for that model, and the continuing challenge for psychology, is to see that phenomena that experimental researchers attribute to and locate in the individual subject actually are shared by subjects and experimenters together. We experience life in a social order in which the implicit or the unconscious has immeasurable power as long as it remains unspoken, taboo or hidden by duplicitous cultural practices.

## Note

1. The construct of the social unconscious defined above corresponds to what in psychoanalytic terms would be called a 'descriptive unconscious', or that part of experience that takes place on the perimeters of consciousness, or in the 'preconscious', and can be made conscious by turning awareness to it. This social unconscious is a structural designation both for the interpersonal occurrences



produced experimentally within the 'implicit psychology' paradigm, and for all those incidents in the everyday social realm in which someone or some group is unaware of a phenomenon that is obvious to others. Such events may include, for example, the following: (1) a male teacher initially ignoring the murmuring in his statistics lecture, but, then, becoming slowly aware of increasing unrest and low-level tittering. Finally, he realizes that the joke is on him: his fly is open. (2) Two African American males colluding with Caucasian men in denigrating other blacks, thereby garnering the whites' approval and assuming that their white friends, of course, do not think the same of them, when, in fact, by various looks and gestures, which go unread by the blacks, the whites are assuring each other of their superiority over all blacks. (3) Women who are taught by all forms of heterosexist media that unknown men shouting sexual references at them from passing cars are displaying their admiration, and not denigrating the women, even though women experiencing this aggression often report, after some 'consciousness raising', that they have always 'at some level' been frightened by such attention.

The descriptive social unconscious can with relative ease—an experimental debriefing or glance down at one's pants—be made conscious. Its uncovering often leads to the expulsion of an 'Oh, I see', or to laughter that follows unmasking a prank or joke and accompanies the recognition that one has not been fully aware of what has been going on in the social situation.

Lichtman (1982), building on a critical reading of Freud and Marx, formulates what can best be called, following psychoanalytic conventions, a 'dynamic social unconscious'. He says that the 'unconscious as understood in this essay is inherently social', and that 'fundamental contradictions of individual-social life arise out of the irrationality of social structures' (p. 253). These social structures 'are sustained not merely by the rules of the social system, however estranged and autonomous, but by the tendencies, hidden to the agents themselves, which reproduce the deepest aspects of character necessary to the continued maintenance of the social system' (p. 252).

Lichtman's analysis centers on the fundamental contradictions in capitalist cultures in which common social events are experienced as solely personal phenomena and explained in entirely individualistic terms. Through education and other popular media the social order encourages the growth and use of such personalized, psychologized explanatory systems because they focus individual and social awareness on peripheral, symptomatic issues and away from systemic, structural social problems for which we have no ready language of explanation. Uncovering our individual and collective collusion in our production and reproduction of our own and other's oppression is, of course, a task that meets with resistance voiced both by individuals and their collectivities. To illustrate his point, Lichtman uses examples drawn from unemployed workers, who, to a person, create a scenario of individual blame and culpability for their job loss, while dismissing, out of hand, any attempts to see their plight as the result of impersonal, economic forces over which they had no control. Any critical, systemic questioning of capital is, of course, sadly lacking from the popular media.

Using hermeneutic textual and cultural analysis, Lichtman describes a myriad of ever-shifting shared social defenses that are used collectively and by individuals to guard against the realization that we are influenced and inflected by race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, class and other socio-culturally produced 'differences' that define us to ourselves and others as commodities in a capitalist global economy. For example, following Lichtman's far more detailed analysis and adapting it slightly to the form of the implicit social cognition paradigm, one can see that mass consumer culture creates insatiable consumer needs that are only partially fulfilled by an endless array of ever newer and more improved products (see also Cushman, 1990). In its ubiquity the propaganda of consumer capitalism—advertising and media—colonizes our cognitions. This highly redundant, homogeneous information over time becomes subliminal. It is the ambient muzak of consumer culture. We become numb to the message and lose track of its source. Forgetting the origins of the information, having the messages become implicit, we see our decisions not as socially driven and determined, but as personal choices. We are thereby put into the paradoxical position of choosing, and actually paying for, our socially ordained and commodified statuses.

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