

Proposal for “Implicit-Association Testing: Does it Have a Place at Your Next Job Interview?”

Essay by Richard X. Thripp.

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This was the proposal for my essay, “Implicit-Association Testing: Does it Have a Place at Your Next Job Interview?” (<http://richardxthripp.thripp.com/iat-in-practice-163>). It was required for school, and simply outlines what I planned to write, before I wrote it.

Implicit Association Tests: More than Informative?

In my essay, I will evaluate the accuracy of implicit-association tests designed to measure subconscious racial bias, and decide whether they deserve to be used for critical purposes such as employment screening and juror selection.

Implicit-association testing is an experimental method, with the purpose of revealing biases that are not shown in traditional questionnaires. An example is Project Implicit of Harvard University, the tests of which “has attracted an enormous amount of research interest and debate” (Klauer et al. 353). In one section of the website's race IAT, the phrases “African American or good” and “European American or bad” appear on two sides of a computer screen. Pictures of black faces, white faces, and words such as “glorious” and “horrible” appear one-after-another, with the test-taker instructions being to match up the items to either side. In all instances, correct answers are not as important as “the difference in reaction times . . . [which] is taken as an indicator of the degree of association between concepts” (Steffens 166); a “moderate

automatic preference for White people compared to Black people” is a common result.

Dr. Anthony Greenwald, one of the test's creators, argues against common criticisms of the test, stating that “findings reveal that it is difficult to fake IAT performances” and speaking of “the numerous successful uses of the IAT to measure individual differences” in response to the concern of the test reporting cultural bias as personal bias. Created by researchers from Harvard University, The University of Virginia, and University of Washington, Project Implicit has been lauded in [Slate Magazine](#), and [The Galveston County Daily News](#), in which Howard Brody surmises, “It’s a lesson, I suggest, for all of us in America.”

Shankar Vedantam of [washingtonpost.com](#) writes, “some proponents [say] it would be unethical not to use the test to screen officials who make life-and-death decisions about others.” While calling it unethical is notably extreme, if I was a black man I surely would not want to be assumed guilty when accused of murder, or some other grave crime, due merely to my skin color. “Might employers use such tests to weed out potential racists?,” Vedantam asks. The test could be used so that people who may discriminate as such would not have the chance to do so, as those shown to be unbiased would be favored in positions of power, such as those of judges and jurors.

Jay Dixit, an author for [Slate Magazine](#), raises a significant dilemma: “On the other hand, if a test shows an applicant is biased, but you have no evidence that he has actually discriminated against anyone, would it really be fair not to hire him?” Mahzarin Banaji, one of the test's creators, too fears its mainstream usage, as it will be assumed “that people who have high implicit bias scores will always behave in a biased way—which is not the case, since the tests don't predict behavior with 100 percent accuracy.” While the subject is no doubt ethically murky, I believe that in Dixit's question, it is indeed wrong to withhold a job on the basis of mere discriminatory thoughts, as the person that “fails” an implicit-association test has not done

anything wrong. Interestingly, Dixit notes, “just *taking* [the test] may sometimes be enough to convince people they are prejudiced and should try to change.” I think it would be a good idea to require prospective jurors, job applicants, and anyone in a company's human resources department to take the test, and then write an essay about how they will not let their implicit thoughts translate into discriminatory treatment towards ethnic minorities, as long as this assignment is not a determining factor for their job. Racism can only be stopped through education, not fear, and this is the thesis of my final paper.

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