Benchmark - Implicit Prejudice

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Author Note

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Many people believe that they are free of prejudicial feelings based on race or gender when they deal with other people. However, it is quite possible that a person exhibits signs of implicit racism even if he or she outwardly appears to be unprejudiced. For this purpose, I decided to take the race and gender-career implicit association test (IAT) hosted by Harvard to examine my own biases.

# Description of Test and Results

I found the idea of determining one’s hidden biases by means of the IAT to be very interesting. The Harvard-hosted site contained a number of IAT tests on different areas, wherein I selected the race and gender-career test to evaluate my own biases. The first test on race aimed to assess my automatic preference for European Americans or Black Americans using a timed activity in which I had to answer a set of questions. I had not undertaken a test like this before, and initially, I was not quite sure whether pressing a few keys could bring out my hidden biases. Nevertheless, I continued with the race test followed by the gender and career test while trying best to follow the instructions on the screen. The results of the race IAT test showed that I was more comfortable around European American people than African American people and tend to prefer the former over the latter with a slight penchant. The gender-career IAT also suggested that I had a moderate association for ‘Female with Family’ and ‘Male with Career’. Essentially, the test was evaluating how fast I responded to the ‘Male’ and ‘Career’ prompts compared to the ‘Female’ and ‘Career’ prompts to determine whether a gender-bias existed.

# Discussion of Results

The IAT assess bias by measuring the strength of association between two or more concepts. The results predicted my implicit bias by calculating how fast I could categorize those concepts (Project Implicit, 2011). As I hit the final submit button and saw the results, I felt both unsettled and surprised. The surprise came from learning that I had a slight, albeit significant, preference for White Americans over Black Americans. The fact that I myself am Hispanic and yet possess a hidden implicit bias against another minority community felt unsettling. Moreover, I always considered myself a self-aware individual and would confront my biases whenever I felt any in my actions or thoughts. The IAT results seem to be quite opposite of my own worldview. Likewise, the results of the gender-career IAT test that I had a moderate bias towards females with family. Once again, the results were surprising because I always liked the idea that men and women should have equal contribution to the house, and that both should have equal career opportunities. Nevertheless, women historically have been associated with family as men have been associated with career and breadwinning; therefore, it is possible that most of us inherited this bias from society.

Even though I accepted the results and saw an opportunity in re-examining my biases, I felt that the element of time-based judgment made the test tricky. In many instances when the keys in the test switched, I mistakenly entered pressed the wrong one. So, whether I associated ‘good' to white and ‘bad' to black solely because of my implicit biases is open for debate. Furthermore, since I was already aware that my biases are going to be tested, it is possible that I answered the questions based on what should be the right answer instead of what I really thought. However, judging by the way the questions were structured and patterned, both IAT tests seemed to have considered that tendency.

# Reflection on Results and Possible Causes

Although initially I was surprised by the results, they started to make sense as I began to contemplate over them. Although America has become far more progressive recently, there still seems to exist a slight cultural tendency of seeing White people as superior to Black people. Although I am Hispanic, I grew up within a White neighborhood and most of my friends were White. The K-12 school I attended also had a very low number of Black students compared to the national average. It is possible that these factors affected my own implicit bias. Nevertheless, I believe my college and secondary education played a role in reducing that bias from a visibly strong level to a slight one. We had a number of class discussions in school about White privilege and White supremacy and being non-White, I was quite aware of that tendency. Similarly, though most of my teachers were women, STEM subjects were generally taught by male teachers.

Moreover, since implicit biases mostly exist on an unconscious level, it is possible for a person to hold a different belief or viewpoint while harboring certain biases internally at the same time. I think the surprise I felt was because internal biases do not always align with our own personal identity or sense of self. Moreover, they do not necessarily come from direct personal experience, but can rather develop through prevailing cultural attitudes and social conditioning (Levinson & Smith, 2012). I am certain that some of the usual implicit associations we have in society are influenced by media portrayals of Black people.

# Validity and Reliability of the Test

The IAT evaluated my internal biases by measuring the strength of association between a category and an attribute, which came in the form of pictures, symbols, and words. My individual stimuli to these attributes were used on basis of the underlying assumption that I would respond more quickly and accurately when a strong internal association exists between those attributes and the corresponding category (Lane, Banaji, Nosek, & Greenwald, 2007). In the race test, the attributes of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ were checked for their strength of association with being White or Black, in terms of accuracy and speed (Project Implicit, 2011). Using the element of speed judgment to assess implicitly-held attitudes has been the basis of over 200 empirical studies (Lane, Banaji, Nosek, & Greenwald, 2007). Nevertheless, several variables related to the test could affect results, such as the order in which the test is taken or the mental alertness of the user while taking the test. Thus, switching the order of the category-attribute pairs and taking the test more than once may influence the repeatability of the results.

Nevertheless, there is still a strong reason to care about the IAT score because our implicit associations can help predict our choices and behavior in social and professional settings. Being aware of these biases can help society overcome discrimination in criminal justice, enhance fairness in promotion and hiring, and address healthcare inequalities.

# References

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