

Implicit Association Test

Department of Real Estate Form RE 329 outlines which topics must be covered in this two hour Implicit Bias Course. One major item is that students must get "Knowledge of the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

What is the IAT? If you ask 100 people that question, you will receive 100 different answers. That would be the same result if you asked, "Does it help me understand my personal Implicit Bias"? And they would not agree if you asked whether it would be a valuable tool to use in your business.

We encounter different tests every day that at one time were suspect. For example, blood tests, Pet scans, Ultrasound tests, X-Rays, CT, MRI, Mammogram and others are now accepted.

So it is with the IAT. Many scientists swear by the test and think it is the best thing since the bread slicer. Others make statements, "The scores vary each time you take them" and others ask the question "Who developed the standards for the grades of slight, moderate or strong preferences?". However, it is used by many institutions and has been administered all over the world.

It has been said that "The Implicit Association Test is a controversial assessment intended to detect subconscious associations between mental representations of objects in memory. Its best-known application is the assessment of implicit stereotypes held by test subjects, such as associations between particular racial categories and stereotypes about those groups".

The Project Implicit was founded in 1998 by three scientists - Dr. Tony Greenwald (University of Washington), Dr. Mahzarin Banaji (Harvard University) and Dr. Brian Nosek (University of Virginia). The mission of Project Implicit is to educate the public about biases by giving them feedback to raise awareness and encourage self-reflection. It produces high-impact research that forms the basis of our scientific knowledge about bias and disparities. And they developed a test.

The IAT measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., Black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy). The main idea is that making a response is easier when closely related items share the same response key.

When doing an IAT you are asked to quickly sort words into categories that are on the left and right hand side of the computer screen by pressing the “e” key if the word belongs to the category on the left and the “i” key if the word belongs to the category on the right. The IAT has five main parts. Following is their description of the test.

In the first part of the IAT you sort words relating to the concepts (e.g., fat people, thin people) into categories. So if the category “Fat People” was on the left, and a picture of a heavy person appeared on the screen, you would press the “e” key.

In the second part of the IAT you sort words relating to the evaluation (e.g., good, bad). So if the category “good” was on the left, and a pleasant word appeared on the screen, you would press the “e” key.

In the third part of the IAT the categories are combined and you are asked to sort both concept and evaluation words. So the categories on the left hand side would be Fat People/Good and the categories on the right hand side would be Thin People/Bad. It is important to note that the order in which the blocks are presented varies across participants, so some people will do the Fat People/Good, Thin People/Bad part first and other people will do the Fat People/Bad, Thin People/Good part first.

In the fourth part of IAT the placement of the concepts switches. If the category “Fat People” was previously on the left, now it would be on the right. Importantly, the number of trials in this part of the IAT is increased in order to minimize the effects of practice.

In the final part of the IAT the categories are combined in a way that is opposite what they were before. If the category on the left was previously Fat People/Good, it would now be Fat People/Bad.

The IAT score is based on how long it takes a person, on average, to sort the words in the third part of the IAT versus the fifth part of the IAT. We would say that one has an implicit preference for thin people relative to fat people if they are faster to categorize words when Thin People and Good share a response key and Fat People and Bad share a response key, relative to the reverse.

After you take any test, you will be given a score. It will state that you have a slight, moderate or strong preference for one of the two sides of your subjects on the test.

The best way to better understand the tests: Take some yourself. They take about 10 minutes each and there are so many topics. And they keep changing. At least try one.
To choose a test you will go to:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

There is some preliminary information that you must read first. One note states that you must be aged 18 or older. Also, there is a statement about Data Privacy and an Important Disclaimer that simply says no one makes a claim for the validity of these suggested interpretations.

The final statement is the one that I found most interesting. "I am aware of the possibility of encountering interpretations of my IAT test performance with which I may not agree. Knowing this, I wish to proceed". You might get angry.

Here is a current list of the tests available:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>

Weight IAT	<i>Weight</i> ('Fat - Thin' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of people who are obese and people who are thin. It often reveals an automatic preference for thin people relative to fat people.
Disability IAT	<i>Disability</i> ('Physically Disabled – Physically Abled' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize figures representing physically disabled and physically abled people.
Religion IAT	<i>Religion</i> ('Religions' IAT). This IAT requires some familiarity with religious terms from various world religions.
Race IAT	<i>Race</i> ('Black - White' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of European and African origin. It indicates that most Americans have an automatic preference for white over black.
Native IAT	<i>Native American</i> ('Native - White American' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize last names that are more likely to belong to Native Americans versus White Americans.
Transgender IAT	<i>Transgender</i> ('Transgender People - Cisgender People' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish photos of transgender celebrity faces from photos of cisgender celebrity faces.
Age IAT	<i>Age</i> ('Young - Old' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish old from young faces. This test often indicates that Americans have automatic preference for young over old.
Asian IAT	<i>Asian American</i> ('Asian - European American' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Asian-American faces, and images of places that are either American or Foreign in origin.

Presidents IAT	<i>Presidents</i> ('Presidential Popularity' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize photos of Joseph Biden and one or more previous presidents.
Gender-Science IAT	<i>Gender - Science</i> . This IAT often reveals a relative link between liberal arts and females and between science and males.
Gender-Career IAT	<i>Gender - Career</i> . This IAT often reveals a relative link between family and females and between career and males.
Weapons IAT	<i>Weapons</i> ('Weapons - Harmless Objects' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Black faces, and images of weapons or harmless objects.
Sexuality IAT	<i>Sexuality</i> ('Gay - Straight' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish words and symbols representing gay and straight people. It often reveals an automatic preference for straight relative to gay people.
Arab-Muslim IAT	<i>Arab-Muslim</i> ('Arab Muslim - Other People' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to distinguish names that are likely to belong to Arab-Muslims versus people of other nationalities or religions.
Skin-tone IAT	<i>Skin-tone</i> ('Light Skin - Dark Skin' IAT). This IAT requires the ability to recognize light and dark-skinned faces. It often reveals an automatic preference for light-skin relative to dark-skin.

Some questions and comments from the Guru's:

Question: What does it mean if I take the test more than once and get different scores?

Answer: Project Implicit says that this can happen as no test is perfect. They probably will not change dramatically, but some variation is expected much like in a blood test. The results could be influenced by factors related to the test such as category labels, placing of different words, and timing. Also, the test taker could be tired one day or under more stress. How do you explain that some days you play golf like Tiger and shoot a Personal Record, and the next day you hit every sand trap in the county?

Question: Could a different score be a function of handedness or hand-eye coordination?

Answer: There is no evidence that handedness influences IAT scores.

Question: If my IAT shows that I have an implicit preference for one group over another, does that mean that I am prejudiced?

Answer: No, not necessarily.

This is still the Guru's talking. The tests at this site are scientific research, and it is not ethical to require that people participate in scientific research. We appreciate that instructors, employers, and others might want to use the site for school or work assignments, and we encourage you to do so.

However, it is not ethical to pressure or force people to participate against their will. Instructors who grant course credit for participation should offer an alternative assignment. For example, students who don't want to participate may read and summarize a scientific or popular press article about implicit bias. And you should also never ask anyone to share their personal feedback with you.

Research shows the IAT is an effective educational tool for raising awareness about implicit bias, but the IAT cannot and should not be used for diagnostic or selection purposes (e.g., hiring or qualification decisions). For example, using the IAT to choose jurors is not justifiable, but it is appropriate to use the IAT to teach jurors about implicit bias.

The IAT does not meet the standards of measurement reliability for diagnostic use. Just as blood pressure readings might change from one doctor's visit to another depending on how stressed and tired you are, and even how much coffee you may have had, IAT results can change from one time to another depending on where you currently are, your recent thoughts or experiences, and deliberate strategies you might use to influence test results.

People might not like their IAT results. Being confronted with IAT results might cause defensiveness or negative emotions. If you are considering using the IAT in your research, your research plan should take this possibility into account.

It is also important to understand that changes in IAT performance over time might reflect increased experience with the test rather than a genuine change in implicit bias. Pre-post research designs (where you administer an IAT, administer some intervention, and then give another IAT) are discouraged unless you have a "control group" that does not complete the intervention.

The IAT has potential for use beyond the scientific laboratory. However, in the absence of relevant scientific expertise, there is potential for misuse. We do not advise its use outside of the safeguards of a research institution.

FINAL THOUGHT: You now have some information and you are confused. You can use the Google Machine and find reams of more data. Then, you decide whether you will use the IAT in any way or not use it in any way. The decision is yours.