

## Implicit and Explicit Racial Attitudes and Preference for Interracial Dating

HANNAH BYARS, KATIE JORDAN, NICKI BROCK, & MICHELLE VANDELLEN  
University of Georgia

The current study explores the relationship between both implicit and explicit racist attitudes and the preference for interracial dating. It focuses on implicit attitudes and the capacity for their manipulation. We hypothesized that participants' responses to the IAT (*Implicit Association Test* - designed specifically for this study) would be more extreme after overhearing confederates' conversation either in favor of, or against, interracial dating. Our results indicate that the Interracial Dating *Implicit Association Test* (IAT) designed for this study is a legitimate assessment tool. Our results showed that this manipulation in fact had no significant effect, and this suggests that implicit attitudes are resistant to such external influence. Many studies have investigated the general lack of preference for interracial dating, and the inevitable stigma that interracial couples' face; our findings, however, indicate that some individuals prefer interracial couples to same-race couples. This trend provides evidence for a new theoretical starting point, which could shed light on a new way to understand race-related attitudes.

*Keywords:* implicit attitudes, racial attitudes, interracial dating, Implicit Association Test

Cette étude explore la relation entre les attitudes raciales implicites, explicites et les préférences des gens à l'égard de relations interraciales. L'étude se concentre principalement sur les attitudes implicites et leur capacité à être manipulées de façon expérimentale. Notre hypothèse était que les réponses des participants à l'Interracial Dating *Implicit Association Test* (IAT, créé pour cette étude) seraient plus extrêmes suite à l'écoute d'une conversation entre deux acteurs qui se disaient soit pour ou contre les relations interraciales. Les résultats de cette étude suggèrent que l'IAT est une échelle de mesure légitime. Les résultats montrent que la manipulation n'avait pas d'effet significatif sur les attitudes implicites. Ceci suggère alors que les attitudes implicites résistent à ces influences externes. Plusieurs études ont étudié la faible préférence pour les relations interraciales et les préjugés auxquels les couples interraciaux doivent faire face. Toutefois, nos résultats indiquent que certains individus préfèrent les couples interraciaux plutôt que les couples de même race. Cette tendance donne lieu à un nouveau point de vue théorique qui pourrait éclairer une nouvelle façon de comprendre les attitudes reliées à la race.

*Mots-clés :* attitudes implicites, attitudes intergroupes, relation de couple, Implicit Association Test

Racist attitudes have been shown to have decreased over the past few decades (Judd, Park, & Wittenbrink, 1997); despite this drop, however, there is a growing number of socio-psychological studies on racism (Butz & Plant, 2009; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Dasgupta, McGhee, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2000; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren 2009) which indicates that it remains a relevant social issue and a subject of great

interest to social scientists. In spite of the wide scope of research in this field, not much research has been dedicated to the prevalence of interracial dating and whether it has increased as a result of the apparent decline in racism. Furthermore, little research was done on attitudes towards interracial dating. In this article, we evaluate both implicit and explicit racial attitudes towards interracial dating.

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The authors wish to thank Michelle VanDellen, the primary mentor of the project, for her guidance and patience through all stages of the research. Also, the authors would like to thank Holly Aversano and Melissa Brown for their help in initial brainstorming and running of the experiment. Please address correspondence to Hannah Elaine Byars (email: hebyars2@uga.edu).

Several studies have attempted to probe individuals' feelings towards interracial dating (Childs, 2005; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Terri, 2003), but current research focuses mainly on why individuals do not themselves date interracially. Attitudes related to condoning an act are not necessarily the same as those attitudes related to being willing to physically engage

in that act. There is little research addressing this distinction in the context of attitudes towards interracial dating; more specifically, why would individuals be in favor of interracial dating even if they choose not to engage in interracial dating themselves? Typically, research has suggested that interracial dating is uncommon and people are most likely not to date someone of a different race because of societal pressures (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). The only exceptions to this trend have been found to be multiracial individuals, who seem to have a heightened level of comfort in interracial relationships (Bonam & Shih, 2009), and White men, who are more likely than women and persons of other races to engage in interracial relationships (McClintock, 2010). Also, in a study of White women who dated Black men, most women reported feeling a negative stigma in public from being in an interracial relationship (Terri, 2003). This negative stigma has also been found among Black women, who generally opposed interracial relationships (Childs, 2005). In this study, Black women viewed interracial dating as an abandonment of their culture, particularly because racism against Blacks remains prevalent among some Whites (Childs, 2005). More generally among Whites, Blacks, and Asians, interracial dating is viewed as going against family and societal opposition (Childs, 2005; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Terri 2003).

With studies showing that racism is declining, it seems contradictory that a general opposition towards interracial relationships persists. An explanation for such a discrepancy between what people condone and what they are willing to engage in can be found in the different types of racism: explicit racism and implicit racism. Explicit racism is an intentional and controlled process whereas implicit racism is an effortless response brought about by environmental cues less resistant to conscious thought (Judd et al., 1997). Implicit prejudices are not easily influenced by conscious effort, but rather reflect inner attitudes based on previously stored information on the subject (Fazio & Olson, 2006; Larson, 2002). In contrast, explicit attitudes are a direct expression of whatever the subject wants or is willing to portray at the time. The ease with which it is possible to alter or lie about explicit attitudes makes it difficult to identify individuals' true attitudes.

Explicit prejudices are relatively easy for researchers to measure; however, it is easy for participants to skew their responses due to a motivation to control prejudices. Because it is now generally considered

socially undesirable to hold racist views, many people are motivated to hide their prejudices (Butz & Plant, 2009). This motivation to hide socially undesirable attitudes can skew the perception of the true prevalence of racism in our society. In order to counteract the influence of the motivation to control prejudice, several measures have been developed to test for implicit racism, where participants are unaware of the goal of the research (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2002; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998).

Studies have shown that it is relatively easy to alter participants' explicit judgments on a subject (Fazio & Olson, 2006). For example, participants' explicit reactions could be altered by changing minor environmental cues, such as the clothes of the researcher (Lun, Sinclair, Whitchurch, & Glenn, 2007), or the presence of a researcher of a different ethnic group (Lowery, Hardin, & Sinclair, 2001). This minimal amount of input required to alter explicit reactions begs the questions of how much input would be required to influence implicit attitudes, if it is possible at all.

One major influential factor that affects how implicit attitudes are formed is one's surrounding culture. The reasons why someone would date within their race rather than outside of it are evidently very complex, but this decision sometimes stems from culture (Childs, 2005; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Terri, 2003). Implicit attitudes can be based on the values to which one is exposed over time (Fazio & Olson, 2006; Larson, 2002). This suggests that the influence of cultural values are so powerful that they penetrate and shape individuals' implicit attitudes; accordingly, individuals raised in a culture that generally opposes interracial relationships would be likely to adopt this cultural value and avoid engaging in such relationships.

One measure of implicit attitudes, the *Implicit Association Test* (IAT), was developed as a means of testing for implicit attitudes by assessing the strength of associations between concepts. Researchers test for implicit attitudes by measuring reaction times on a computer program, which asks participants to categorize items or ideas (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). A faster reaction time signifies a greater strength of association. For example, if participants are asked to pair Black faces with positive terms and White faces with negative terms, they might do so more quickly than pairing White faces with positive terms and Black faces with negative terms. A quicker reaction time in this case indicates a stronger

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association of Blacks with positive valence than that of Whites with positive valence (Greenwald et al., 2009). The IAT is a widely recognized measure of implicit attitudes, based on studies which indicate its good internal consistency (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001), high test-retest reliability (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007), a relative insensitivity to procedural variances such as trial number (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2005), and the fact that subject familiarity with the IAT does not influence results (Dasgupta et al., 2000). These characteristics make the IAT a valid measure of implicit attitudes and an important tool for determining the racial attitudes of participants.

Critics of the IAT identify a number of problems with its evaluation of attitudes. One such problem is the issue of whether extra-personal associations influence scores in ways that are not representative of subjects' actual views (Olson & Fazio, 2003). Researchers examined the possibility that attitudes towards a specific individual within the group (e.g., a Black person) might form a particularly salient memory, which can prime participants to respond to the IAT in a skewed manner. In such a case, the results can make it seem like the participant was more pro or more against the group, and therefore, the IAT would in fact be giving the impression that the participant's specific memory represents a general attitude towards an entire group (Fazio, 1993; Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986; Sherman, Presson, Chassin, Rose, & Koch, 2002). These primes of salient memories were deemed extra-personal associations, and researchers claim that a more personalized IAT that avoids any extra-personal associations (i.e., both before and within the IAT) would produce more accurate results (Olson & Fazio, 2003).

Other studies have hypothesized that in the process of taking the IAT, a negative image or word would be more salient than a positive one. This would influence participants by making the negative image or word remain in their attention for longer (than would a positive one), and therefore participants would take more time to classify the negative associations (Rothermund & Wentura, 2001, 2004). This would falsely suggest that the participant has a negative perception of the word or image, when in fact, the association process of such a word or image is slowed down by its salience. A problem with this salience hypothesis is that images and words do not fall strictly under negative or positive categories (Ohman, Flykt, & Esteves, 2001). Other studies have also shown that negative pictures and words were sorted faster than neutral ones. For

example, pictures of angry, sad and depressed faces were sorted faster than neutral faces (Ohman et al., 2001).

The present research examines the effect of an explicit statement on a participant's implicit and explicit views on interracial dating. By simply overhearing a statement about interracial dating, we hypothesized that it would be possible to subconsciously alter pre-existing implicit prejudices which would most likely change explicit prejudices in the process. We hypothesized that overhearing a statement about interracial dating would lead participants' implicit and explicit judgments about interracial dating to become more extreme, amplifying previously held views on interracial dating. This effect would be shown in the implicit measure of an IAT, and in explicit measures. Such an effect would have an impact on the study of attitudes, and more specifically, address the question of how much input is required to alter implicit prejudices. Furthermore, the study will shed light on people's thoughts on interracial dating, and the reasons behind preferences or oppositions towards it.

### Method

#### Participants

We recruited thirty-five participants from the University of Georgia's research participant pool. All participants were undergraduate students attending the university. Participants were compensated with one-hour credit toward their required research participation. Among the participants were 25 Whites, one multiracial, two Hispanics, three Asians, and four African-Americans.

#### Apparatus

MediaLab and DirectRT software were used to administer the IAT and questionnaires on Dell computers located in a computer lab setting.

#### Procedure

Participants were invited to sign up for a convenient time slot, each of which accommodated seven other participants. Upon signing up, participants were strongly encouraged to not be late for the study. Once participants arrived for their time slot, a sign hung on the door instructing them to wait for the experimenter to come to get them. While participants were waiting, they were given consent forms to fill out. The

manipulation for the study was performed at this time. The two confederates, who posed as fellow participants, assumed their positions: One exited the research room that the participants were about to enter as if he/she had just completed the study and was now waiting for a friend to complete the study. The other confederate exited a minute later and held a conversation with the first one. Our experiment had two conditions: The first consisted of a conversation between the confederates expressing approval of interracial relationships, while the second condition consisted of a conversation expressing disapproval of interracial relationships (see Appendix A).

After the confederates exited the hallway, the experimenter opened the door and invited the participants in to take part in the study. Each participant was seated at a computer.

Participants were first asked to complete the Interracial Dating *Implicit Association Test* (IAT), which measured positive and negative associations with same-race and interracial couples. Upon completion of the Interracial Dating IAT, participants completed the Rochester Area Racial Attitude Survey and two brief open-ended questions about interracial relationships. Finally, participants were asked to indicate their own race.

Participants notified the experimenter when they finished the study. Each participant was then presented with a debriefing form, informing them of the manipulation, the purpose of the study, and our expected findings.

## Measures

**Interracial Dating Implicit Association Test.** Participants were first asked to complete 20 trials in which they would classify words which had a positive connotation as “positive” (represented by a key on the keyboard), and words with a negative connotation as “negative” (represented by a different key on the keyboard). The next segment asked participants to complete 20 trials identifying images of couples of the same race or of different races. Images presented two people in each picture, shown from the shoulders up. The couples were smiling towards the camera with their heads very close to one another, indicating that they were in a relationship. Next, the two categories were combined and the participants were instructed to place positive words and same race couples under one column, and negative words and different race couples

under the other column. They completed a 12 trial practice round and then a 40 trial segment. Afterwards, there was a 20 trial intermediate segment in which the participants were again asked to categorize only the images of same race or different race couples. The next segment switched the positive and negative words from the first 40 trial segments, so they were now to group same race groups with negative words and interracial couples with positive words. Again, they completed a 12 trial practice round and then a 40 trial segment. Reaction time was measured to achieve our results. Our dependent variable was the difference in reaction times between the congruent trials (pairing positive words with same-race couples and negative words with interracial couples) and incongruent trials (positive words with interracial couples and negative words with same-race couples).

**Explicit attitudes survey.** After completing the IAT, participants were asked to complete the 44-item Rochester Area Racial Attitude Survey that measures explicit attitudes toward racial groups (Todd, McKinney, Harris, Chadderton, & Small, 1992). In the first part of the explicit attitudes survey, participants rated their level of agreement with a series of statements on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample statements include, “Blacks are naturally more violent than Whites,” and, “Southeast Asians maintain their property as well as Whites do.” The second part of the survey asked participants their preferred racial makeup in a variety of environments. These statements included, “I would rather work with,” and “I would feel most comfortable living in a neighborhood composed of.” The answer choices included “*mostly Whites*”, “*few Whites*”, “*half Whites*”, and “*all Whites*.” Each of the sets of five questions featured a different race including Whites, Jews, Blacks, Southeast Asians, and Hispanic Americans.

For this study, we focused primarily on the questions regarding attitudes towards racial groups. These were found in the first part of the survey. We reversed scored items which were negatively worded, such that high score reflected positive racial attitudes.

We examined the questionnaire for internal consistency. Our analysis indicated that the internal consistency of this scale was not adequate,  $\alpha = .67$ . Specifically, the five items concerning quotas (“I think it is important to have goals or quotas for hiring and promoting Blacks/Whites/Jews/Southeast Asians/Hispanic Americans”) evidenced poor fit with the rest of the items ( $r = -.24$ ). As a result, we decided to treat

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these items separately from the rest of the scale. The new scale based on the remaining items demonstrated good internal consistency,  $\alpha = .79$ . These five questions were called attitudes towards quotas.

### Results

Overall, the IAT data had no outliers ( $SDs < 2.1$ ). The explicit attitudes survey had the five outlier quotas questions ( $SDs > 3.1$  away from the mean), but excluding these questions, there were no outliers ( $SDs < 1.9$  away from the mean).

We examined whether the two conditions predicted the scores on the Interracial Dating IAT. We measured the response times (milliseconds) of participants' congruent trials ( $M = 977.99$ ,  $SD = 251.99$ ), and incongruent trials ( $M = 1172.46$ ,  $SD = 352.10$ ), and the differences between the two ( $M = 194.47$ ,  $SD = 350.01$ ). Only correct trials were used. We found that the two manipulation conditions had no effect on any of the Interracial Dating IAT variables,  $F's \leq 2.1$ ,  $p's \geq .15$ , indicating that the manipulation was not a significant factor in changing implicit attitudes. Results indicate that our hypothesis was not supported, which led us to the conclusion that implicit attitudes are not easily swayed by strangers' expressed opinions. One external conversation was not enough of a factor to influence implicit attitudes. Therefore, the data suggest that implicit attitudes are resilient to the expressed opinions of strangers.

We examined the Interracial Dating IAT variable by analyzing the difference between the congruent and incongruent trials. We found no significant correlations with any of the explicit attitudes measures ( $r's \leq .25$ ,  $p's \geq .14$ ).

We also examined the IAT in terms of the responses to the congruent and incongruent trials separately, and we compared them to the explicit attitudes measures. In our explicit attitudes analysis, we examined the data from the questions regarding Blacks and questions regarding whether there should be quotas for hiring minorities separately. The questions on the explicit attitudes survey specifically regarding Blacks (called attitudes towards Blacks) were analyzed separately ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ). The questions regarding hiring quotas of the five different minority groups were outliers in the data, but together were internally consistent, so they were analyzed separately from the scale ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) and called attitudes towards racial quotas. We calculated the means of all of

the questions excluding the five questions about quotas, which we called general racial attitudes ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ).

We compared the five questions related to hiring quotas for minorities to the Interracial Dating IAT data, and discovered a pro-race attitude in some participants. The congruent trials of the Interracial Dating IAT, had a significant relationships with attitudes towards Blacks ( $r = .41$ ,  $p = .01$ ) and explicit racial attitudes ( $r = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Accordingly, participants who had more negative racial attitudes took more time to sort same-race images as bad and different race images as good, indicating that they had negative implicit attitudes towards interracial dating. We also found significant correlations between attitudes towards quotas ( $r = -.41$ ,  $p < .02$ ) and specifically the quotas concerning Blacks ( $r = -.41$ ,  $p < .02$ ), and response times of the incongruent trials. This indicates that participants who support quotas also categorized different race couples as positive and same race couples as negative more quickly, and therefore they had pro interracial dating attitudes.

### Discussion

In this study, we tested implicit attitudes towards interracial dating and found that they were not easily swayed by strangers' conversation. Further studies should test different modes of influence in order to determine how implicit attitudes can be influenced by external sources. Our findings show that implicit attitudes take a considerable amount of effort to be swayed.

In addition to measuring how easily implicit attitudes could be swayed, we also aimed to gain insight as to participants' actual attitudes towards interracial dating. We found that explicit racial attitudes were positively correlated with implicit racial attitudes. Implicit measures paralleled explicit measures' results in two different instances. Implicit attitudes, measured by the Interracial Dating IAT, showed that participants who had negative implicit attitudes towards interracial dating also had negative explicit attitudes towards Black people (based on the explicit attitudes survey questions specifically relating to Blacks). Also, we found that attitudes towards quotas were negatively correlated with response times on incongruent trials. The faster participants paired different race couples with positive words, the more their explicit attitudes measures indicated that they supported quotas for hiring and promoting minorities. Therefore, some

participants showed a greater support for both quotas and interracial couples. We defined ‘a pro-race stance’ as attitudes towards quotas that go beyond a supportive, and corresponding support for interracial dating. A ‘pro-race stance’ consists of positive attitude towards interracial relationships, and a negative attitude towards same-race relationships. In future research, this concept of a ‘pro-race stance’ could be tested as it relates to non-romantic interpersonal relationships.

The most important limitation in this study is the sample size, which was relatively small due to the limited pool of available participants. A further limitation of is that the study was confined to self-reported attitudes. Self-reported measures run the risk of being altered to suit social-desirability.

In future research, other scales should be used to measure attitudes, including the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986). This scale would provide a further explicit measure and would help to compare interracial relationship attitudes with the level of racism. Other measures should include colorblindness and multiculturalism scales. Colorblindness means that one does not acknowledge race, but this lack of acknowledgement sometimes accompanies strains of implicit racism. Colorblindness differs from multiculturalism in that the colorblind individual claims not to see differences in people of different races while the multiculturalist seeks to integrate these different people while acknowledging their cultural identity. Through this integration, people hope minority members will feel valued and show increased productivity (Plaut et al., 2009). Scoring high on the multiculturalism scale should relate positively with a pro-active approach to interracial relations.

Further research should also include internal and external motivation scales, such as the Motivation to Control Prejudiced Reactions Scale (Dunton & Fazio, 1997). Previous research on motivation to control prejudice has shown that people with low-internal motivation and high-external motivation respond strongly to social pressures (Dunton & Fazio, 1997). This could have had a significant effect on the explicit racism measure.

Another addendum to this study could be to include the AMP (Affect Misattribution Procedure). This is an implicit measure of attitudes, which involves rating Chinese characters after viewing pictures. The ratings of the Chinese characters have been shown to reflect implicit attitudes towards the pictures

(Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005). The AMP would be an important addition because it provides the opportunity to measure attitudes towards interracial dating without having to compare it to attitudes towards same-race dating.

One of the most important additions to the current study would be to create a measure of pro-active stances on racism. This would relate strongly to the incongruent trials in that it would further show that someone who takes less time to match pictures of interracial couples with positive words than same-race couples with positive words would score very high on the measures of pro-active stances on racism. This measure would include questions such as “Blacks/Hispanics/Asians should be given more opportunities,” and, “There should be quotas for the hiring of Blacks/Hispanics/Asians.”

Overall, the study shed light on often-overlooked interracial relationship attitudes, and also provided evidence that the existing IAT for Interracial Relationships could work as a measure of implicit attitudes towards interracial relationships. These results regarding this pro-race attitude should be further studied in the context of the workplace, in the home, in school, and in many other social situations to help explain people’s choices and behaviors with regards to race-related issues. Also, the idea that implicit attitudes cannot be influenced by outside conversation is one that should be further tested to find the point at which implicit attitudes can be manipulated and therefore better understood.

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## Appendix A

### Conversations between Confederates

#### Opposition Conversation

Confederate A: Wow, that survey took so long!  
Confederate B: Yeah, it did, glad it's over.  
Confederate A: Hey, did you get that question about interracial dating?  
Confederate B: Yeah, I did.  
Confederate A: Well what did you say?  
Confederate B: I said that I don't support interracial dating. I think people should stay within their own race.

#### Support Conversation

Confederate A: Wow, that survey took so long!  
Confederate B: Yeah, it did, glad it's over.  
Confederate A: Hey, did you get that question about interracial dating?  
Confederate B: Yeah, I did.  
Confederate A: Well what did you say?  
Confederate B: I don't have a problem with interracial dating at all. Race shouldn't matter.

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Received July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
Revision received December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011  
Accepted February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 ■