Implicit Attitudes toward Romantic Partners: Convergent and Discriminant Validity

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Poster presented at the XIIIth General Meeting of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology - San Sebastian, June 26-29 2002

The present study investigates the reliability, covergent, and discriminant validity of an idiographic variant of the Implicit Association Test (IAT, Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) to assess women's implicit attitudes towards their romantic partners. We expected that the Partner-IAT would be reliable and moderately correlated with explicit measures of partner attitudes, relationship satisfaction, and partner attachment.

We also explored whether the Partner-IAT would show discriminant validity by assessing aspects of the relational schema (Baldwin, 1992) that could not be assessed by explicit measures. We expected that the IAT would predict more automatic processes of information retrieval as indexed by a recognition measure of relationship-specific memory, and explicit measures more controlled retrieval processes as indexed by a measure of free recall.

METHOD

Sample

96 women with a romantic partner participated in the study (mean age 26.5, *SD* = 8.8; mean relationship duration 5.6 years, *SD* = 7.1).

Measures

Partner- IAT. The target concepts were *Partner* and *Ideal Partner*; target stimuli were 5 idiographic partner-related items and 5 synonyms of ideal partner. Attribute concepts were good and bad, attribute stimuli were 20 positive and 20 negative words, half of them were used in two subsequent blocks of 40 trials. The sequence of discrimination tasks was 1. Attribute (40 trials), 2. Target (40 trials), 3. Mixed (Partner/good; 40+120 trials), 4. Target reversal (40 trials), 5. Mixed (Partner/bad; 40+120 trials). IAT-scores were calculated as Rt_5- Rt_3, higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward the partner. The internal consistency was good (= .90).

Explicit Measures. Attitudes toward the romantic partner (= .87); relationship satisfaction (RAS; = .91); partner attachment secure-anxious (=.73), dependent-independent (= .75); neuroticism (= .85).

Memory Bias. 56 positive and negative items relating to romantic partner (e.g., "My partner whispered in my ear how happy he is"), 32 relating to other people, and 46 relating to non-social events were generated. Half of them were randomly selected for writing a story about a couple's week-end trip to Lisbon. These items had to be clasified as old in the subsequent recognitzion task, the other half of items served as distracters. Memory indices were created using an SDT approach (Table 1).

***Table 1*. Index of partner-specific memory bias.**

	Old	New
Old	Hit	Missing
New	False Alarm	Correct rejection

1. *z*-standardization of frequencies
2. Partner-related – mean (other social + event related)
3. Memory bias = (Hits $_{\text{Pos. partner}}$ – Hits $_{\text{Neg. partner}}$) + (False alarms $_{\text{Pos. partner}}$ – False alarms $_{\text{Neg. partner}}$)

Procedure

1) Explicit measures 2) listening to story 3) IAT 4) recognition task 5) free recall.

RESULTS

***Table 2*. Correlations between implicit and explicit measures.**

	Attitudes toward Partner	
	Explicit	Implizit (IAT)
Explicit Attitudes		.23*
Relationship Satisfaction	.79***	.27**
Secure-anxious	.68***	.26**
Dependent-independent	.47***	.08
Neuroticism	-.31**	-.15
Recognition bias	.10	.29**
Recall bias	.23*	-.03

** p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001*

As expected, the Partner-IAT showed moderate correlations with explicit attitudes toward the partner, relationship satisfaction and secure partner attachment (Tab. 2). Correlations with dependent attachment and neuroticism were not significant. The correlations and a path analysis (Fig. 1) show also a double dissociation between implicit and explicit attitudes. Only implicit attitudes predict schema-consistent recognition, and only explicit attitudes predict schema-consistent recall.

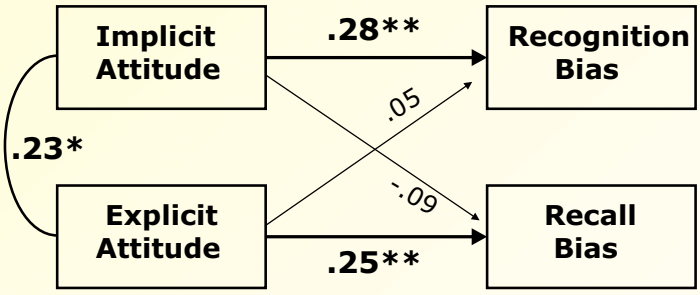

***Figure 1.* Double dissociation between implicit and explicit attitudes and recognition and free recall of schema consistent information**

DISCUSSION

The idiographic Partner-IAT was found to be reliable and the moderate positive correlations with explicit attitudes and relationship measures such as relationship satisfaction and secure partner attachment provide positive evidence for its convergent validity.

The most interesting finding of the present study is a double dissociation between implicit and explicit partner attitudes at one hand and recognition and free recall of Partner-related information on the other. Apparently the implicit partner attitude better predicts better a more automatic, and the explicit attitude better predicts a more deliberative, controlled retrieval of partner-related information in memory.

References:
Baldwin, M.W. (1992). Relational schemas and the processing of social information. *Psychological Bulletin, 112,* 461-484.
Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E. & Schwartz J. L. K. (1998). Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The Implicit Association Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74,* 1464-1480.

Supported by:
Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft DFG