Increasing the validity of implicit measures:
New solutions for assessment, conceptualization, and action explanation

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Abstract

Implicit measures were introduced into Psychology to explain phenomena that are characterized by a gap between self-reported attitudes and behavior. In these cases, behavior deviates from self-reported attitudes (e.g., counter-attitudinal behavior, impulsive consumption, procrastination, or addiction). It was assumed that these behaviors are due to the influence of "introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience" (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), and that implicit measures of attitudes should predict these behaviors. Recent meta-analyses have revealed, however, that implicit measures have only limited predictive validity that goes beyond explicit self-reports and thus have failed to meet initial hopes and expectations. I identify possible reasons for this failure: (a) A lack of validity that is due to the influence of extraneous processes, (b) a focus on evaluations instead of motivational qualities, (c) a focus on associations instead of propositional beliefs, and (d) a focus on global instead of context-dependent attitudes and beliefs. Recent developments in the field of implicit measures aiming at addressing these problems have yielded promising results: (a) Statistical process models identifying underlying processes increase the internal validity of implicit measures as indicators of automatic evaluative associations, (b) implicit measures of wanting have the potential to predict behavior better than implicit measures of liking, (c) paradigms of belief evaluation provide measures of automatically activated attitudes for meaningful propositions that have an unambiguous interpretation, and (d) assessment of context-dependent beliefs is better suited to predict specific behaviors. Incorporating these new solutions into research on implicit sources and biases will help to realize the initial hopes and expectations of describing, explaining, and predicting enigmatic and problematic behaviors in many situations.