Public Lecture Series

Thursday, 26 October 2023

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Automatic Associations and Discrimination: A Reassessment

Dan-Olof Rooth, Stockholm University

Discussant: Michael Siegenthaler, ETH Zurich, nccr – on the move

18:15 – 19:45 h
This talk will be held in person at the University of Neuchâtel, 1er Mars 26, room C46, on WEBEX (link),
as well as live-streamed on the nccr – on the move YouTube channel (link).

Abstract

Through the lens of "taste-based" and "statistical" discrimination theories economists have assumed that discrimination can be traced back to people's consciously mediated perceptions of the discriminated target group. However, considerable evidence supports the view that a person's attitudes and stereotypes in fact often operate in an automatic, less conscious, mode. While people's explicit attitudes and stereotypes have for long been captured directly by self-reported reflections in response to attitude questions, the measurement of their automatic/implicit counterparts has a much shorter history. The latter are often achieved at by respondents taking the Implicit Association Test (IAT), a computerized response latency measure designed to tap individual differences in associations between concepts and attributes. The IAT thus indirectly measures an individual's automatic/implicit attitude or stereotype.

Interestingly, implicit attitudes, as measured by the IAT, have been found to be related to discriminatory behaviour in many studies since its invention in 1998. However, recently there has been a debate on how well the IAT-measure can predict discriminatory behaviour (e.g., Oswald et al, 2013). While most of these studies examine IAT's predictive power in a laboratory setting, a handful of studies have analyzed the predictive validity of the IAT in real hiring situations using the correspondence testing methodology (e.g., Agerström & Rooth, 2011). This lecture will first present the correspondence testing (CT) methodology and then turn to the IAT-measure. With these two concepts in place the lecture continues with a review of a few studies testing the predictive power of the IAT-measure in a CT setting. The lecture will close with presenting a few other settings in which the IAT-measure has been proven to be helpful when studying discriminatory behaviour (in sports and in schools, e.g., Carlana, 2019).

Interested participants are invited to take an Implicit Association Test IAT before the lecture.

Short Biography

Dan-Olof Rooth completed his doctorate in Economics at Lund University in Sweden in 1999 with a thesis on "Refugee Immigrants in Sweden". His first academic position was at the Department of Economics at Linneaus University, Sweden, where he in 2009 became professor. Since January 2016 he is a professor at the Institute of social research (SOFI) at Stockholm University. Dan-Olof has various publications in top-ranked academic journals in Economics and Social Psychology such as the American Economic Review, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Review of Economic Studies, Journal of Applied Psychology, and the Review of Economics and Statistics. His current research interests include issues in discrimination more broadly, health economics with a particular focus on disability, and the labour market opportunities of immigrants.

Selected Publications and References

Agerström, J. & Rooth, D. (2011) "The role of automatic obesity stereotypes in real hiring discrimination", Journal of Applied Psychology 96(4): 790-805.

Bertrand, M. & Duflo, E. (2017) "Field experiments on discrimination". Handbook of Economic Field Experiments, 1, 309-393.

Carlana, M. (2019) "Implicit stereotypes: Evidence from teachers' gender bias", The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 134(3): 1163–1224.

Glover, D., Pallais, A. & Pariente, W. (2017 "Discrimination as a self-fulfilling prophecy: Evidence from French grocery stores", The Quarterly Journal of Economics 132(3): 1219-1260.

Oswald, F., Mitchell, G., Blanton, H., Jaccard, J., & Tetlock, P. (2013) "Predicting ethnic and racial discrimination: a meta-analysis of IAT criterion studies", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 105(2): 171-192.