The Transparency of Assessing Aggression Using Conditional Reasoning

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Abstract

The conditional reasoning test of aggression (CRT-A) is an indirect test designed to assess implicit cognitive biases linked to the motive to aggress (e.g., Hostile Attribution Bias). The CRT-A consists of inductive reasoning problems, each containing an inductively valid aggressive answer and an inductively valid non-aggressive answer. The term conditional reasoning is used because the likelihood of endorsing a particular answer is believed to be dependent or conditional on the personality of the reasoner (i.e., high motive to aggress vs. low motive to aggress). The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not respondents could see the purpose of assessment. Participants took both the CRT-A and a self-report and were asked what they believed each test assessed.

Method

Sample

• 59 undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology class participated in exchange for credit. Our study originally called for a sample of 100 participants. However, due to an error in the Media Lab programming for our study, we had to recollect this data semester. Thus, data collection is still ongoing. Below we present preliminary results.

Measures

• CRT-A (James, 1998). A 25 item test designed to indirectly measure the implicit biases and justifications that individuals use to harm others.

• SRP (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). A 48 item test designed to assess psychopathy. We used this as our self-report measure of aggression because aggression and antagonism are at the core of psychopathy (Lynam & Widiger, 2007).

Design

• Our design consisted of a within-subjects factor corresponding to the type of test being completed (self-report vs. conditional reasoning). We also had a four-level between-subjects factor. This factor was created by crossing the order of test administration (CRT-A 1st vs. SRP 1st) with priming (primed vs. not primed).

• Our dependent or conditional on the personality of the reasoner (i.e., high motive to aggress vs. low motive to aggress). The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not respondents could see the purpose of assessment. Participants took both the CRT-A and a self-report and were asked what they believed each test assessed.

Table 1: Transparency of Self-Report and Conditional Reasoning Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>CRT-A</th>
<th>SRP</th>
<th>% Responded: Yes</th>
<th>% Responded: No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition 1</td>
<td>Preceded</td>
<td>CRT-A</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 2</td>
<td>CRT-A</td>
<td>Preceded</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 3</td>
<td>SRP</td>
<td>CRT-A</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 4</td>
<td>CRT-A</td>
<td>SRP</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 1-2 and 2 contain the proportions of individuals who identified the self-report surveys (Table 1) and conditional reasoning tests (Table 2) as assessing 12 different constructs.

Hypothesis Tests

• Hypotheses were tested using a repeated measures ANOVA.

• The dependent variable was the proportion of individuals correctly identifying the tests as measuring aggression.

• Test-type (self-report vs. conditional reasoning) served as the within-person factor and Condition type served as the between-person factor.

• ANOVA results lent support to Hypothesis 1.

Discussion

• Data support our hypothesis that the CRT-A is much less transparent than the self-report. Figure 1 clearly illustrates this main effect.

• However, 30% of our sample still correctly reported aggression as the purpose of the CRT-A. That is, 30% were able to see through the purpose of assessment.

• Thus, future research should seek to better mask the purpose of assessment:
  • Include more sophisticated items.
  • Embed more "real" reasoning items.
  • Include CR items that measure other aspects of personality, i.e., achievement motivation.

• Our interaction hypotheses were not supported. However, Figure 1 suggests that there may be differences in transparency as a function of condition type. Specifically, Condition 2 (priming on CRT-A after taking SRP) revealed a major decline in the transparency of the CRT-A. As we continue to collect data, we will see if this trend holds or disappears.

• Our future research will also examine if simply providing a checklist primed individuals to think about personality as a possible purpose of assessment for both CRT-A and SRP. And, did informing individuals that the would be taking "real world employment tests" prime them to focus on "job satisfaction" as a purpose of assessment. In the future we plan to:
  • Provide a checklist, but only allow one selection.
  • Provide an open ended response instead of a checklist.
  • Omit the description that focuses on "real world employment tests".

• Finally, future research should seek to cross-validate these findings with other conditional reasoning tests (e.g., the conditional reasoning test of achievement motivation and fear of failure).