

Thematic Apperception Test

(Study Material # 43 for B.A. I, II & III)



The Thematic Apperception Test

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Introduction

- The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) is a projective personality assessment psychological test.
- The TAT was developed in 1935 by American psychologist Henry A. Murray and Christiana D. Morgan at Harvard University.
- The TAT was originally designed as an aid to eliciting fantasy material from patients in Psychoanalysis.
- However, it's uses have evolved over the years.

Murray's Theory of Personality

- How individuals react with their environment ?
- How they are affected by their external forces ?
- How their attitudes, needs and values influence their reaction to world ?

Murray developed a list of 28 needs.....

- ❑ He developed a list of 24 possible forces in person's environment named as press.
- ❑ He gave the concept of thema " a pattern of related needs and press" derived from early infantile experiences.

The Test Procedure

The complete version of the test contains 31 picture cards.

The subject is asked to tell a story for each picture that is presented to them, including the following:

1) What has led up to the event show ?

2) What is happening at the moment ?

3) What the characters are feeling and thinking ?

4) What the outcome of the story was ?

The Picture Cards

Out of the 31 cards, 30 cards are picture cards, all black and white, which contain a variety of scenes designed to present the test taker with certain classical human situations.

One card is left blank where participants are asked to imagine a picture and then tell a story about it.

The original 31 cards were divided into three categories, i) for use with men only, ii) with women only, iii) for use with subjects of either sex.

In practice, an examiner might administer as few as one or two cards or as many as 31.

Scoring System

H.A Murray, 1943 scoring the TAT involves evaluating the following five different aspects of the stories:

- ❖ **The Hero:** Scoring for the hero involves identifying who is central character(s) in the story
- ❖ **Need of the Hero:** For Murray, it was also critical to identify the needs, motives and desire of the hero.
- ❖ **Identifying the presses:** A press refer to any important environmental factor that may influence or interfere with the need of the hero. Example: (parents or boss), (the lock on the door is broken)
- ❖ **Scoring for themes:** Scoring for themes in TAT stories involves noting the nature of the interplay and conflict between the needs and presses, the types of emotion elicited by this conflict, and the way the conflict is resolved.
- ❖ **Scoring for outcome:** Scoring for the outcome of the story involves analyzing how the stories end by noting a happy versus unhappy ending and assessing the extent to which the ending is controlled by the strengths of the hero and forces in the environment.

Scoring System

Several formal scoring systems have been developed for analyzing TAT stories systematically and consistently. Three common methods that are currently used in research are the:

1) Defence Mechanisms Manual

2) Social Cognition and Object Relations (SCOR) scale

3) Personal Problem-Solving System—Revised (PPSS-R)

Interpretation

- ❑ **Nomothetic Interpretation** refers to the practice of establishing norms for answer from subjects in specific age, gender, racial, or educational level groups and then measuring a given subject's responses against those norms.
- ❑ **Idiographic Interpretation** refers to evaluating the unique features of the subject's view of the world and relationships. Most psychologists would classify the TAT is better suited to idiographic than nomothetic interpretations

Interpretation of Cards

In interpreting responses to the TAT, examiners typically focus their attention on one of three areas:

- a) the content of the stories that the subject tells
- b) the feeling or tone of the stories and the participant
- c) the subject's behaviours apart from responses

These behaviours may include verbal remarks (for example, comments about feeling stressed by the situation or not being a good storyteller) as well as nonverbal actions or signs (blushing, stammering, fidgeting in the chair, etc.) The story content usually reveals the subject's attitudes, fantasies, wishes, inner conflicts, and view of the outside world. The story structure typically reflects the subject's feelings, assumptions about the world, and an underlying attitude of optimism or pessimism.

Psychometric Characteristics

❑ Reliability

- ❑ The TAT involve complex, meaningful verbal material. Because of the complexity of this material, exact quantitative analysis is difficult. This issue is further complicated because there are so many different scoring systems.
- ❑ Reliability (and validity) for one system may not mean that adequate reliability will be present for another system.
- ❑ Interscorer reliability across different scoring systems has generally been found to be good, ranging between .37 and .90, with most reports .85 or higher.

❑ Validity

- ❑ Reviews of the TAT's validity have shown wide variability.
- ❑ One reviewer might be impressed by a correlation of .25 while another sees it as highly deficient.
- ❑ Research done on it likewise allows readers to project their biases, needs, and expectations onto the TAT

Applications of TAT

- **Personality Assessment:** Helps to evaluate a person's patterns of thought, attitudes, observational capacity, and emotional responses to ambiguous test materials
- **Expectations:** Reveals the expectations of participants in relationships with peers, parents or other authority figures, subordinates, and possible romantic partners.
- **Recruitment:** The TAT is often used in individual assessments of candidates for employment in fields requiring a high degree of skill in dealing with other people and ability to cope with high levels of psychological stress— such as law enforcement, military leadership positions, etc.
- **Forensic Purposes:** TAT is sometimes used for forensic purposes in evaluating the motivations and general attitudes of persons accused of violent crimes.
- **Consumer Behaviour:** TAT is widely used to study consumer perceptions and motivations.

Advantage of TAT

- Offers access to the covert and deeper structures of an individual's personality.
- Less susceptibility to faking because the purpose of projective techniques is usually disguised.
- Intrinsically interesting and nonthreatening

Disadvantage of TAT

- Difficulty establishing adequate internal consistency and test-retest reliability.
- The effectiveness of the technique is often more dependent on the clinician's individual skill than on the quality.
- Sensitive to situational variables such as mood, stress, sleep deprivation, and differences in instruction.

Conclusion

Despite criticisms for being unscientific, the TAT continues to be used as a tool for research into areas of psychology such as dreams, fantasies, mate selection and what motivates people to choose their occupation.

However, for accurate results, the TAT must be interpreted in the context of the subject's personal history, age, sex, level of education, occupation, racial or ethnic identification, first language, and other characteristics that may be important.

Sometimes it is used in a psychiatric or psychological context to assess personality disorders, thought disorders, in forensic examinations to evaluate crime suspects, or to screen candidates for high-stress occupations

Thank You