

# Attitude Measurement

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Perhaps the most straightforward way of finding out about someone's attitudes would be to ask them. However, attitudes are related to self-image and social acceptance.

In order to preserve a positive self-image, people's responses may be affected by social desirability. They may not well tell about their true attitudes, but answer in a way that they feel socially acceptable.

Given this problem, various methods of measuring attitudes have been developed. However, all of them have limitations. In particular the different measures focus on different components of attitudes – cognitive, affective and behavioral – and as we know, these components do not necessarily coincide.

Attitude measurement can be divided into two basic categories

- **Direct Measurement** (likert scale and semantic differential)
  - **Indirect Measurement** (projective techniques and the implicit association test)
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## Direct Attitude Measures

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### Semantic Differential

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The semantic differential technique of Osgood et al. (1957) asks a person to rate an issue or topic on a standard set of **bipolar adjectives** (i.e. with opposite meanings), each representing a **seven point scale**.

To prepare a semantic differential scale, you must first think of a number of words with opposite meanings that are applicable to describing the subject of the test.

For example, participants are given a word, for example 'car', and presented with a variety of adjectives to describe it. Respondents tick to indicate how they feel about what is being measured.

In the picture (above), you can find Osgood's map of people's ratings for the word 'polite'. The image shows ten of the scales used by Osgood. The image maps the average responses of two groups of 20 people to the word 'polite'.

The semantic differential technique reveals information on three basic dimensions of attitudes: evaluation, potency (i.e. strength) and activity.

- **Evaluation** is concerned with whether a person thinks positively or negatively about the attitude topic (e.g. dirty – clean, and ugly - beautiful).
- **Potency** is concerned with how powerful the topic is for the person (e.g. cruel – kind, and strong - weak).
- **Activity** is concerned with whether the topic is seen as active or passive (e.g. active – passive).

Using this information we can see if a person's feeling (evaluation) towards an object is consistent with their behavior. For example, a person might like the taste of chocolate (evaluative) but not eat it often (activity).

The evaluation dimension has been most used by social psychologists as a measure of a person's attitude, because this dimension reflects the affective aspect of an attitude.

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## Evaluation of Direct Methods

An attitude scale is designed to provide a valid, or accurate, measure of an individual's social attitude. However, as anyone who has ever "faked" an attitude scale knows there are shortcomings in these self report scales of attitudes.

There are various problems that affect the validity of attitude scales. However, the most common problem is that of social desirability.

Social desirability refers to the tendency for people to give "socially desirable" responses to the questionnaire items. People are often motivated to give replies that make them appear "well adjusted", unprejudiced, open minded and democratic. Self report scales that measure attitudes towards race, religion, sex etc. are heavily affected by social desirability bias.

Respondents who harbor a negative attitude towards a particular group may not wish to admit to the experimenter (or to themselves) that they have these feelings. Consequently, responses on attitude scales are not always 100% valid.

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## Projective Techniques

To avoid the problem of social desirability, various indirect measures of attitudes have been used. Either people are unaware of what is being measured (which has ethical problems) or they are unable consciously to affect what is being measured.

Indirect methods typically involve the use of a projective test. A **projective test** involves presenting a person with an ambiguous (i.e. unclear) or incomplete stimulus (e.g. picture or words). The stimulus requires interpretation from the person. Therefore, the person's attitude is inferred from their interpretation of the ambiguous or incomplete stimulus.

The assumption about these measures of attitudes is that the person will "project" his or her views, opinions or attitudes into the ambiguous situation, thus revealing the attitudes

the person holds. However, indirect methods only provide general information and do not offer a precise measurement of attitude strength since it is qualitative rather than quantitative. This method of attitude measurement is not objective or scientific which is a big criticism.

### Examples of projective techniques include:

- Rorschach Inkblot Test
- Thematic Apperception Test (or TAT)
- Draw a Person Task

## Thematic Apperception Test

Here a person is presented with an ambiguous picture which they have to interpret.

The thematic apperception test (TAT) taps into a person's unconscious mind to reveal the repressed aspects of their personality.

Although the picture, illustration, drawing or cartoon that is used must be interesting enough to encourage discussion, it should be vague enough not to immediately give away what the project is about.

TAT can be used in a variety of ways, from eliciting qualities associated with different products to perceptions about the kind of people that might use certain products or services.

The person must look at the picture(s) and tell a story. For example:

- o What has led up to the event shown
- o What is happening at the moment
- o What the characters are thinking and feeling, and
- o What the outcome of the story was



## Draw a Person Test

Figure drawings are **projective diagnostic techniques** in which an individual is instructed to draw a person, an object, or a situation so that cognitive, interpersonal, or psychological functioning can be assessed. The test can be used to **evaluate children** and adolescents

for a variety of purposes (e.g. self-image, family relationships, cognitive ability and personality).

A projective test is one in which a test taker responds to or provides ambiguous, abstract, or unstructured stimuli, often in the form of pictures or drawings.

While other projective tests, such as the **Rorschach Technique** and **Thematic Apperception Test**, ask the test taker to interpret existing pictures, figure drawing tests require the test taker to create the pictures themselves. In most cases, figure drawing tests are given to children. This is because it is a simple, manageable task that children can relate to and enjoy.

Some figure drawing tests are primarily measures of cognitive abilities or cognitive development. In these tests, there is a consideration of how well a child draws and the content of a child's drawing. In some tests, the child's self-image is considered through the use of the drawings.

In other figure drawing tests, interpersonal relationships are assessed by having the child draw a family or some other situation in which more than one person is present. Some tests are used for the evaluation of child abuse. Other tests involve personality interpretation through drawings of objects, such as a tree or a house, as well as people.

Finally, some figure drawing tests are used as part of the diagnostic procedure for specific types of psychological or neuropsychological impairment, such as central nervous system dysfunction or mental retardation.

Despite the flexibility in administration and interpretation of figure drawings, these tests require skilled and trained administrators familiar with both the theory behind the tests and the structure of the tests themselves. Interpretations should be made with caution and the limitations of projective tests should be considered.

It is generally a good idea to use projective tests as part of an overall test battery. There is little professional support for the use of figure drawing, so the examples that follow should be interpreted with caution.

The **House-Tree-Person (HTP)** test, created by Buck in 1948, provides a measure of a self-perception and attitudes by requiring the test taker to draw a house, a tree, and a person.

- The picture of the house is supposed to conjure the child's feelings toward his or her family.
- The picture of the tree is supposed to elicit feelings of strength or weakness. The picture of the person, as with other figure drawing tests, elicits information regarding the child's self-concept.

The HTP, though mostly given to children and adolescents, is appropriate for anyone over the age of three.

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## Evaluation of Indirect Methods

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The major criticism of indirect methods is their lack of objectivity. Such methods are unscientific and do not objectively measure attitudes in the same way as a Likert scale.

There is also the ethical problem of deception as often the person does not know that their attitude is actually being studied when using indirect methods.

The advantages of such indirect techniques of attitude measurement are that they are less likely to produce socially desirable responses, the person is unlikely to guess what is being measured and behavior should be natural and reliable.

## References

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