



Indirect measures of attitudes

This activity will help you to...

- Distinguish between direct and indirect measures of attitudes
- Understand how Rorschach inkblots and Thematic Apperception tests may be used to measure attitudes
- Consider the strengths and weaknesses of different ways of measuring attitudes.

Indirect measures

Likert and semantic differential scales are **direct measures** of attitudes. They involve getting respondents to identify their own attitudes. An alternative approach is to try to measure attitudes indirectly by taking some other measurement and inferring the person's attitudes from it.

Physiological measures

For example, with the right equipment we can measure a person's **physiological responses** to the things we present to them or questions we ask them. Such measures might include:

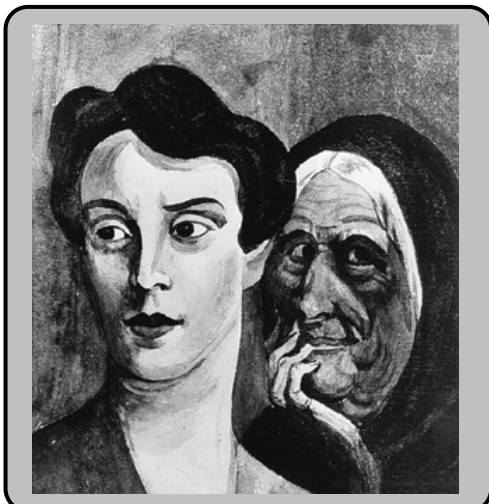
- Heart rate;
- Galvanic skin response (how conductive their skin is to electricity; varies with sweating);
- The dilation or constriction of the pupils of the eye;
- Muscular tension.

Since we know that these things change when a person becomes emotionally aroused (heart rate increases, skin resistance drops) we might be able to infer a person's attitudes from the ways their physiological responses alter when presented with various objects, words or images.

Anger, fear and sexual attraction all involve an increase in emotional arousal. Why might this cause problems when using physiological measures to assess attitudes?

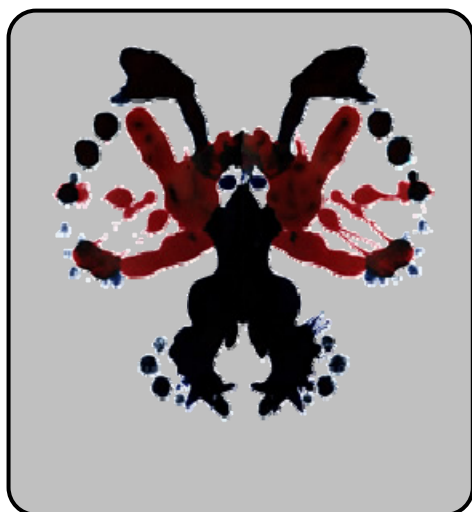
Projective tests

Another way of measuring attitudes indirectly is to use **projective tests**. One example of a projective test is the **Thematic Apperception Test** (TAT; Murray, 1938). In the TAT, respondents are shown pictures and asked to respond to the, perhaps by writing a story about them or describing what is happening in them.



What is happening in this picture?

Another projective test is the **Rorschach inkblots**. Originally developed for use in psychotherapy, the test consists of a series of splodges of ink that are presented to a respondent who then has to describe how the inkblots appear to her or him.



What do you see in this picture?

Both the Rorschach inkblots and the TAT rely on the fact that the respondent is presented with **ambiguous stimuli** (i.e. things that have little or no inherent meaning, or of which many interpretations are possible). Consequently, anything the respondent 'sees' in the inkblot or the picture they must have 'put there' themselves. In other words, the respondent **projects** their own attitudes onto the stimulus (hence the term 'projective test'; compare this with the idea of top-down processing in perception).

Swap your responses to the TAT picture and Rorschach inkblot with someone else. Can you work out any of their attitudes from how they have responded to the stimulus? Explain to them the conclusions you have drawn. Did they agree or disagree?

What kinds of problems might arise from using projective tests to measure people's attitudes?

We have now examined a number of techniques for measuring attitudes:

- Likert and semantic differential scales (direct)
- Physiological measures (indirect)
- Projective tests (indirect)

Which of these measures would you choose under each of the following circumstances? Why?

- You want to measure the attitudes of a large number of people;
- You have reason to believe respondents may try to hide their real attitudes;
- You are carrying out a case study of a single person's attitudes;
- You want to analyse your data statistically;
- You think people may not be fully aware of their attitudes;

Draw up a table listing each type of attitude measure and outlining its advantages and disadvantages as a way of measuring people's attitudes.