Purpose. The Thematic Apperception Test, familiarly known as the TAT, is a method of revealing to the trained interpreter some of the dominant drives, emotions, sentiments, complexes and conflicts of a personality. Special value resides in its power to expose the underlying inhibited tendencies which the subject, or patient, is not willing to admit, or cannot admit because he is unconscious of them. Utility. The TAT will be found useful in any comprehensive study of personality, and in the interpretation of behavior disorders, psychosomatic illnesses, neuroses, and psychoses. As now constituted it is not suitable for children under four years of age. The technique is especially recommended as a preface to a series of psychotherapeutic interviews or to a short psychoanalysis. Since the TAT and the Rorschach yield complementary information, the combination of these two tests, as Harrison and others have pointed out, is peculiarly effective.

Rationale. The procedure is merely that of presenting a series of pictures to a subject and encouraging him to tell stories about them, invented on the spur of the moment. The fact that stories collected in this way often reveal significant components of personality is dependent on the prevalence of two psychological tendencies: the tendency of people to interpret an ambiguous human situation in conformity with their past experiences and present wants, and the tendency of those who write stories to do likewise: draw on the fund of their experiences and express their sentiments and needs, whether conscious or unconscious.

If the pictures are presented as a test of imagination, the subject's interest, together with his need for approval, can be so involved in the task that he forgets his sensitive self and the necessity of defending it against the probings of the examiner, and, before he knows it, he has said things about an invented character that apply to himself, things which he would have been reluctant to confess in response to a direct question. As a rule the subject leaves the test happily unaware that he has presented the psychologist with what amounts to an X-Ray picture of his inner self.
Murray's list of needs

A. Needs Motivated by Desire for Power, Property, Prestige, Knowledge, or Creative Achievement
1. n Achievement
2. n Acquisition
3. n Aggression
4. n Construction
5. n Counteraction
6. n Dominance
7. n Exposition
8. n Recognition
9. n Understanding

B. Needs Motivated by Affection, Admiration, Sympathy, Love, and Dependence
1. n Affiliation
2. n Deference
3. n Nurturance
4. n Sex
5. n Succorance

C. Needs Motivated by a Desire for Freedom, Change, Excitement, and Play
1. n Autonomy
2. n Change, Travel, Adventure
3. n Excitance, Dissipation
4. n Playmirth

D. Miscellaneous needs
1. n Abasement
2. n Blame Avoidance
3. n Cognizance
4. n Harm Avoidance
5. n Passivity
6. n Rejection
7. n Retention
8. n Sentience
Murray's list of press

A. Press of Deprivation
1. p Acquisition
2. p Retention

B. Press Descriptive of an Empty, Alien, or Rejecting Environment
1. p Lack
2. p Loss
3. p Rejection
4. p Uncongenial Environment

C. Press of Coercion and Restraint
1. p Dominance
2. p Imposed Task, Duty, Training

D. Press Descriptive of a Hostile, Aggressive Environment
1. p Aggression

E. Press of Danger, Injury, Death
1. p Affliction
2. p Death of Hero
3. p Physical Danger
4. p Physical Injury

F. Press of Friendliness, Sympathy, Respect, Dependence, Love
1. p Affiliation
2. p Deference
3. p Nurturance
4. p Sex
5. p Succorance

G. Miscellaneous Press
1. p Birth of Offspring
2. p Clastrum
3. p Cognizance
4. p Example
5. p Exposition
6. p Luck
Lindzey's Assumptions for TAT Interpretation

Primary assumption: In completing an incomplete or unstructured situation. The individual may reveal his or her own characteristics (strivings, dispositions, conflicts).

Other assumptions

1. The storyteller ordinarily identifies with one person in the drama. The characteristics (wishes, strivings, conflicts) of this imaginary person may reflect those of the storyteller.

2. The storyteller's characteristics may be represented indirectly or symbolically.

3. All stories are not of equal importance.

4. Themes directly related to stimulus material are less likely to be significant than those unrelated to stimulus material.

5. Recurrent themes (those that show up in three or four different stories are particularly likely to mirror the characteristics of the storyteller.

6. The stories may reflect momentary characteristics of the storyteller (those aroused by temporary environmental factors as well as enduring characteristics.

7. Stories may reflect events from the past that the storyteller has only observed or witnessed. However, the selection of these stories suggests that the events may still be a reflection of the storyteller's own characteristics.

8. Group membership or sociocultural factors may also be reflected in the stories.

9. Dispositions and conflicts that are inferred from the storyteller's creations may be unconscious and thus may not always be reflected directly in overt behavior or consciousness.