

**A Study of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)  
with Japanese Subjects**

by  
**Jennifer L. Gray**

ISBN: 1-58112-042-7

**DISSERTATION.COM**



1999

Copyright © 1999 by Jennifer L. Gray

All Rights Reserved

ISBN: 1-58112-042-7

Dissertation.com

[www.dissertation.com/library/1120427a.htm](http://www.dissertation.com/library/1120427a.htm)

A STUDY OF THE THEMATIC APPERCEPTION TEST (TAT)

WITH JAPANESE SUBJECTS

Dissertation

Presented to the faculty of

Southern California University for Professional Studies

Santa Ana, California

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Jennifer L. Gray

1998



## ABSTRACT

A Study of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

With Japanese Subjects

By

Jennifer L. Gray

Southern California University for Professional Studies

Santa Ana, California

The purpose of the study was to identify common themes on the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) for Japanese subjects. In addition, Japanese TAT themes were compared with American TAT themes (Stein, 1981) for any significant differences. It was hypothesized that significant differences in narrative themes would exist between Japanese and American subjects.

The subjects included sixty male and female college students attending courses in Tokyo, Japan. Subjects were enrolled in college courses during the administration of the test and ranged in age from 18 to 27 years of age. All the participants were fluent in English--allowing them to make responses in that language; therefore, eliminating the errors inherent in translation. Japanese subjects were then compared with Morris I. Stein's original study of eighty American males conducted in 1981.

Ten of the original Murray TAT cards were used: 1, 2, 3BM, 4, 6BM, 7GF, 8BM, 10, 11 and 14. Japanese narratives were then scored using five variables for each of the ten cards: hero gender, the incidence of death, need for achievement, dominant emotional tone and the outcome of the story.

In conclusion, common TAT themes for Japanese subjects were identified for all ten of the cards that were administered. Cards 1, 2, 4, 8BM, 10, 11 and 14 shared many of the same themes for Japanese and American subjects. On the other hand, cards 3BM, 6BM and 7GF varied in theme content for Japanese and American subjects.

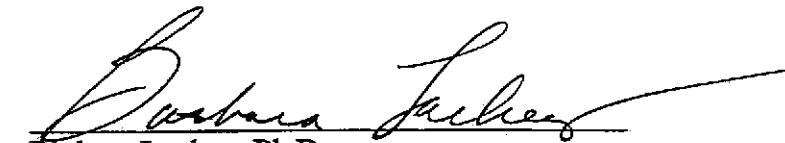
These findings will help determine the validity and reliability of the TAT as an assessment tool for Japanese subjects, and open the door for future studies of Asian populations in the United States as this population is underrepresented in much of the research and literature of today.


A STUDY OF THE THEMATIC APPERCEPTION TEST (TAT)  
WITH JAPANESE SUBJECTS


This dissertation by Jennifer L. Gray, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted and approved by the faculty of the Southern California University for Professional Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

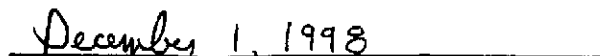
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dissertation Committee:

  
Barbara Lackey, Ph.D.  
Chairperson

  
William Kirk, Ph.D.

  
Gil Linne, Ph.D.

  
Date

**Dedicated to my little Lotus Prince,  
Sheldon Ryan Gray,  
and my loving husband,  
William R. Gray II.  
The two men  
in my life.**



**Such stillness—  
The cries of the cicadas  
sink into the rocks**

Haiku poem from H. P. Varley

## Acknowledgments

“Acknowledgments” is the standard heading used to describe this section of a dissertation or book. However, the heading seems too sterile or vacant to adequately embody the deep appreciation I feel toward those who so generously shared of their energy, time and knowledge on behalf of this project. In any event, I will try to put into words the sentiments I do feel.

The completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of friends and family along the way. For this reason, I would like to thank my family for their love and selfless acceptance of my decision to follow my dream. This project greedily devoured large amounts of my time and energy leaving only leftover crumbs that had to then be shared amongst my spouse and three year-old toddler. Yet, my family did not require me to apologize for this shortcoming, and my worst obstacle was overcoming my own sense of guilt for not having more time and energy. I would like to say thank you to the two men in my life, my husband, Bill, and our son, Sheldon. I love you both!

I also owe a great deal of thanks to my mentor, Dr. Lynch. Her knowledge of the Thematic Apperception Test and willingness to patiently answer my many questions was a great assurance to me during the monotony of scoring and evaluating hundreds of responses. She also served as an inspiring role model and friend, commiserating when I felt discouraged or overwhelmed.

I also received a great deal of help from those who were willing to carry out research in the library while my family and I lived overseas. For this, I would like to thank Jeanne Smith for her selfless hours in pursuit of the journal articles and books that I desperately needed for the literature review. In addition, Valerie MacBean also spent

countless hours at bookstores and libraries in pursuit of culturally relevant material that related to my topic. I could not have done it without these two special people.

An unexpected influence was my relationship with Keiko Kodama. Her insight opened my eyes to the many subtle intricacies of Japanese culture.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the committee members, Dr. Lackey, Dr. Kirk and Dr. Linne. They all toiled over many corrections and rewrites on my behalf. In particular, Dr. Lackey, the Committee Chair, was a calming force during moments of exasperation and frustration.

In conclusion, I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents for their unconditional love and support. As a new parent my life has come full circle, allowing me an intimate understanding of the joy and struggle involved in nurturing the emotional and physical growth of a child. I just want to say thank you Mom and Dad.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	x
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiv
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	xiv
Chapter:	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	17
Statement of the Problem .....	19
History of the TAT .....	21
Highlights of Methodology .....	22
Definition of Terms .....	23
Brief Review of the Literature .....	24
Limitations of the Study .....	28
Research Findings .....	28
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	29
III. METHODS .....	43
Restatement of the Problem .....	43
Research Expectations .....	44
Description of Research Design .....	44
Selection of Subjects .....	44
Procedures .....	45
Description of Instrumentation .....	47

Discussion of Data Processing .....	48
Methodological Assumptions and Limitations....	49
IV. RESULTS .....	53
V. DISCUSSION .....	97
References .....	113

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Informed Consent Form	120
Appendix B	Information Questionnaire	121
Appendix C	Instructions to the Subjects	122
Appendix D	Analysis of TAT Story Content	123

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	TAT Card #1 Dependent Variable Achievement of the Hero	55
Table 2.	TAT Card #2 Dependent Variable Achievement of the Hero	58
Table 3.	TAT Card #2 Dependent Variable Narrative Outcome	59
Table 4.	TAT Card #3BM Dependent Variable Dominant Emotional Tone	62
Table 5.	TAT Card #3BM Dependent Variable Pistol Identification	63
Table 6.	TAT Card #3BM Dependent Variable Death	64
Table 7.	TAT Card #4 Dependent Variable Narrative Outcome	67
Table 8.	TAT Card #4 Dependent Variable Dominant Emotional Tone	68
Table 9.	TAT Card #6BM Dependent Variable Female-Male Relationship	71

Table 10.	TAT Card #6BM Dependent Variable Dominant Emotional Tone	72
Table 11.	TAT Card #6BM Dependent Variable Seeking Advice	73
Table 12.	TAT Card #7GF Dependent Variable Female Relationship	75
Table 13.	TAT Card #7GF Dependent Variable Dominant Emotional Tone	76
Table 14.	TAT Card #7GF Dependent Variable Narrative Outcome	77
Table 15.	TAT Card #8BM Dependent Variable Achievement of the Hero	80
Table 16.	TAT Card #8BM Dependent Variable Death	81
Table 17.	TAT Card #10 Dependent Variable Dominant Emotional Tone	84
Table 18.	TAT Card #10 Dependent Variable Narrative Outcome	85
Table 19.	TAT Card #11 Dependent Variable Achievement of the Hero	88
Table 20.	TAT Card #11 Dependent Variable Narrative Outcome	89
Table 21.	TAT Card #14 Dependent Variable Death	92
Table 22.	TAT Card #14 Dependent Variable Achievement of the Hero	93
Table 23.	TAT Card #14 Dependent Variable Dominant Emotional Tone	94
Table 24.	Correlations Among Death Scales For Japanese Subjects	104
Table 25.	Correlations Among Achievement Scales For Japanese Subjects	105

Table 26	Correlations Among Dominant Emotion Scales for Japanese Subjects	106
Table 27	Correlations Among Narrative Outcome For Japanese Subjects	107
Table 28.	Correlations Among Hero For Japanese Subjects	108



# A STUDY OF THE USE OF THE THE THEMATIC APPERCEPTION TEST (TAT) WITH JAPANESE SUBJECTS

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Culture, the attitudes, beliefs and values of an ethnic group, directly affect the events of counseling and treatment. People in the helping professions need to be aware of the culture that the client identifies with to facilitate counseling. For this reason, it is necessary to spend time and energy learning about the cultural background of the client. Rollo May (1983) explains why culture is an important aspect in defining the whole person:

...How can we know whether we are seeing the patient in his real world, the world in which he 'lives and moves and has his being,' and which is for him unique, concrete, and different from our general theories of culture? In all probability we have never participated in his world and do not know it directly. Yet we must know it and to some extent must be able to exist in it if we are to have any chance of knowing the patient (p. 38).

Culture has many different definitions as a result of the different methods of research conducted by anthropologists and social psychologists in their attempt to study this concept. Culture has been accepted by both fields as a system of meanings (Retief, 1987). Traditionally anthropologists and sociologists have chosen ethnographic research to define culture as the political and economical restraints that the community places on the individual.

If anthropologists explained culture as a metaphor it would be described as something old, new, borrowed and blue. In Japanese culture, "old" refers to the tea ceremony or the ancient art of *ikebana*, flower arrangement. "Old" is what is commonly envisioned when we think of culture. Culture also involves the "new," personal computers and karaoke. "Borrowed" refers to the cultural exchange that occurs when two different groups of people meet and accept customs or products from another culture.

This would include the youth of Japan wearing Levi Jeans and watching MTV from America or people from American society taking martial art classes or eating at a sushi bar. Lastly, the color blue could be depicted as a mental state rather than a color. This would describe the people in cultures who are not satisfied with the rules imposed by their particular society. In any culture there are people who are unhappy with the status quo (McCreery, 1997).

Some believe that we all share the same dynamics of the human experience and are more alike than different, but the subtlety of cultural differences can have a strong impact. “In looking at the psychology of a people there are many considerations, including culture...” (Lowrey, 1983, p. 70). Therefore, client-therapist interaction is one area of many that is greatly affected by cultural heritage.

Cross-cultural sensitivity should be reflected in the helping professions (Henkin, 1985). Counseling will either proceed smoothly or awkwardly depending on whether there is a flow of agreement and harmony or the rocky edges of misunderstanding. Client therapist interactions are complex enough, without adding the dimension of cultural diversity (Corey & Corey, 1993). Yet, cultural differences need not become a stumbling block. Instead, with some cultural perspective and a little creativity differences can enhance the therapeutic process rather than inhibit.

Cross-cultural psychologists have conducted research for the purpose of explaining culture in broader, quantitative terms so those conclusions could be drawn from global comparison of cultures. For this reason, psychological assessment tools were introduced to help explore cultural behavior. Practically, all of these tests were Western in origin creating a cultural bias. Many of these tests were factorially based, consisting of questions that were then grouped into scales, e.g. the personality test. The rigid structure of contemporary psychological scales led to alternatives like the projective test (Retief,

1987). The Thematic Apperception Test (hereafter referred to as the TAT) is one such projective test that allows for individual expression and cross-cultural sensitivity.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the present study is to identify common narrative themes on the TAT for Japanese subjects. Second, Japanese TAT narrative themes and American TAT narrative themes will be compared for any significant differences in content. The comparison will be conducted using a study designed by Morris I. Stein (1981) that identified the most common story themes for 88 American male subjects. Stein's findings will be compared to the responses of 60 male and female, 18-27 year old Japanese students living in Tokyo, Japan.

This study addresses three main questions:

1. What common themes are identified on the TAT for Japanese subjects?
2. What differences in TAT theme content would be found by comparing common themes for Japanese and American subjects?
3. Would common themes on the TAT facilitate counseling with Japanese clients?

Subset questions related to the third question are as follows:

1. What is the dominant emotional tone of each story?
2. How common is the theme of death in the stories?
3. Is there a need for achievement in the stories? Is the character successful or not?
4. With whom do the subjects identify and to whom do they assign the role of hero in the stories?
5. What is the outcome of the stories? How are they concluded?

Some of these questions and themes were taken from Leopold Bellack (1993).

The rationale for using the TAT with Japanese subjects is to assist mental health professionals working with Asian clients. The identification of significant cultural issues for Japanese clients would facilitate counseling and psychotherapy. This in turn would help alleviate premature termination, which has contributed to the problem of underuse of mental health services by Asians (S. Sue, & Zane, 1987; Root, 1985). Stanley Sue, a professor at the University of California and director of the Asian American Studies Program, stated that, "...Asian Americans seriously underutilized mental health services in comparison with their population and the relatively few clients who used services were very severely disturbed—findings that persist even today" (Sue, 1997, p. 352). Through study and research of Asian American populations Sue went on to demonstrate "...that Asian Americans with moderately serious disorders avoided using services more so than in other populations. Asian Americans come from 'face' cultures, so they are especially affected by the shame and stigma attached to using mental health services." (Sue, 1997, p. 352). Collective societies such as Japan teach conformity through the influence of the group. A person within that group who acts against the rules of the group is ostracized "causing a loss of face," a feeling of humiliation that is so great that the face is turned away in shame, hence the name. Utilizing mental health services rather than relying on the devices and support of the family can lead to a loss of face for Asian and some non-Asian groups who have a different perspective on mental illness and pathology. This affects whether they will seek help outside of the family or not. Although, there is stigma associated with seeking mental health services for many Asian individuals, there is also the notion that potential clients might not be aware of the services available to them, and cultural unfamiliarity with clinical centers prevent them from accessing these resources in the community. Some minority centers have tackled this problem by recruiting. This

kind of involvement means working with established community support centers such as churches and community health clinics (Matthews et al., 1997).

Asian Americans “tend to terminate prematurely, and seek psychotherapy only at the point of acute breakdown and crisis.” (Kim, 1985, p. 342). For this reason, by the time many Asian clients make it to therapy they are in crisis and have a greater need for services over a longer period of time. Yet, fifty percent of those clients do not return after the initial session (Anderson, 1983). It is hoped that a tool such as the TAT could help identify the cultural issues that prevent this group of clients from receiving the counseling they need. Insight into the “cultural paradigm” of the client as an individual, not a product of his/her cultural background, would enhance communication and understanding (Ibrahim, 1985). Responses to the TAT would offer insight by forming a framework of knowledge that would allow provision of needed services.

### History of the TAT

The original brainchild for the idea of the TAT is credited to a student of abnormal psychology from Radcliffe named Crane Brinton. Christiana D. Morgan and Henry A. Murray first introduced the projective test in a published article in 1935. The TAT is more closely associated with Murray than with Morgan today, although, Morgan was responsible for the development of the picture drawing and selection (Murray, 1951).

The test was designed to elicit unconscious stimuli through the use of the ambiguous story cards, therefore revealing the projected personality of the subject. Projective tests unlike intelligence tests or objective tests are not looking for right or wrong answers to test questions. Instead, the administrator of a projective test is evaluating the individual’s response to an ambiguous situation with little or no structure. This allows for a full range of responses from the test taker. The lack of structure and ambiguity of this type of test can be very alarming for some subjects or allow the freedom

of individual expression and creativity that others enjoy. The value of the TAT lies in its ability to reveal issues or feelings that the person taking the test might have been unwilling or unable to bring up because the material was locked away in the unconscious.

There is a great need for culturally unbiased test instruments. Unlike objective psychological inventories the TAT relies on the language of the client without influencing or imposing vocabulary. The TAT's potential is due to its use of pictures rather than language as test stimuli. There are over 4,000 different languages spoken all over the world which proves a tremendous stumbling block for cross-cultural psychologists trying to design an effective testing instrument that would need to be translated into the native language of each culture being studied. The TAT has eliminated this deterrent with its use of picture cards not language. Language translation of a test requires lengthy consideration in order to preserve the meaning and intention of words while allowing for the nuances and variations of meaning that exist across cultures. "That of course, is easier said than done; finding the exact equivalent for a single word in another language is often impossible." (McCrae & Costa, 1997, p. 510). For this reason, the TAT would eliminate the need for translation of the test making it an ideal tool for the field of psychology.

### Highlights of Methodology

Japanese subjects were administered the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) using the Leopold Bellak (1993) system. Cards 1, 2, 3BM, 4, 6BM, 7GF, 8BM, 10, 11 and 14 were selected. Projective tests have generally been used for the study of personality and pathology, but for the purpose of this study 10 cards were administered to each subject to identify common narrative themes for Japanese subjects. The main narrative themes identified for Japanese subjects were compared with Stein's study of American narrative themes for the TAT. Studies have indicated that the TAT is a valid instrument for measuring individual differences (Bellak et al., 1993). By using a

standardized set of cards for subjects and using a quantitative scoring method this study acquired reliable data that could be further developed in future studies or compared with existing data.

The Thematic Apperception Test was used to identify significant themes for Japanese subjects. A study by M. Stein (1981) was used to compare common themes for American subjects with those identified in Japanese protocol responses on the TAT. Stein's study is relevant to the author's study, because it summarized the most common themes for American subjects on the TAT. Stein's original study is still commonly quoted and used for the training of TAT administrators as more recent studies have not attempted to duplicate or replace Stein's original TAT study. The study using Japanese subjects consisted of 60 male and female students.

Japanese subjects in the author's study were administered a consent form, information sheet and 10 TAT cards. The cards were administered and scored by the writer to allow for consistency. Every effort was made to develop information about Japanese subjects that did not stereotype or label.

### Definition of Terms

The original Murray Thematic Apperception Test is referred to throughout this paper using the acronym TAT. Revisions to the Thematic Apperception Test are referred to specifically by a differentiating title to avoid confusion.

Freud first used the term *projection* to describe a defense mechanism that avoids unwanted thoughts and feelings. *Projective tests* are used to describe any tool that reflects the unconscious thoughts, wishes and desires of the subject, for example, the Rorschach, Figure Drawing Test and the TAT.

Culture as defined by the author consists of a group of people who share similar values, morals and customs. These concepts are agreed upon and upheld collectively by the group with the intent of teaching them to future generations.

### A Brief Review of the Literature

In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.; DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) the cultural identity of the individual is defined by “Note[ing] the individual’s ethnic or cultural reference groups” (p. 843). Culture is used as a reference for defining individual identity. Professionals in psychology, therefore, need to understand cultural context in order to understand the individual. Psychologists and the APA have a responsibility toward the minority client (Sawyer & Senn, 1973).

“Traditional psychotherapy often requires introspection, high verbal functioning, tolerance for ambiguity and emotional expressiveness on the part of clients” (Stumphauzer & Davis, 1983, p. 253). Traditional Japanese are socialized to refrain from expressing emotions directly and sharing personal details to people outside of the family. According to Atkinson, Maruyama & Matsui (1978) Asians clearly “prefer a logical, rational structured counseling approach over an affective, reflective, ambiguous one” (p. 81). Eastern psychotherapy, which has been studied and written about extensively by Dr. David K. Reynolds (1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995) in his books about constructive living techniques, uses an action-based technique to cope with the problems that clients bring to therapy. This approach is based on the work of two Japanese men: Morita and Naikan. Japanese psychiatrist, Dr. Shoma Morita, offered very contradictory advice from Western psychological theories, preferring an action-based approach that emphasized gratitude in the face of adversity. These references add cultural and psychological insight about



Japanese clients through the study of Asian psychotherapy, and through the administration of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). This writer believes that culture specific counseling methods can be developed specifically for individual Japanese clients using Western psychotherapy. An emphasis on Eastern psychotherapy for Japanese clients is not needed, since the TAT allows therapists to work with specific clients more effectively.

Other culturally related work includes John Welwood's (1983) Eastern and Western combination approach to psychotherapy. Welwood refers to the basic humanness of need and vulnerability, creating neurotic anxiety, which can be overcome through existential thought. The healing affect of the existential tradition to which Welwood refers is based on the Eastern religious beliefs of Buddhism, which give clarity and recognition to the Japanese psyche.

In Addition, Ron Kurtz (1990) defines and explains the Hakomi Method. This psychotherapy is also based on eastern tradition and philosophy. This form of therapy is less conversational and more innovative as it relies on moment to moment interpretations and insightful analogies about Eastern tradition and philosophy as it relates to the counseling setting. Again, with the use of the TAT projective test, counselors would be able to tailor therapy approaches more effectively to the individual needs of the client. People from different cultural backgrounds can benefit from therapy without the counselor learning a whole new therapy.

This paper will focus on Asian culture, specifically Japanese. Japanese subjects are underrepresented in societal population research, and, as a result, they remain faceless in many cross-cultural and comparative studies conducted in the sciences (Kitano, 1973). Many Americans hold stereotypes about the Japanese as exotic and mystical. These stereotypes are not based on anything scientific and their influence can be very damaging