

A (Brief) Look at Attitude Measurement
Friday, March 25, 2005

Attitudes are “...the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology.”

G. Allport (1935, p. 798)

- I. The First Attitude Scale (Thurstone, 1928; Thurstone & Chave, 1929).
 - A. “Armchair” generation of a large array of evaluative statements about some topic.
 - B. Administer statements to a sample of “judges” to determine the favorability of each statement (usually sorted into 11 favorability categories).
 - C. Compute mean scores for each statement.
 - D. Choose representative statements and administer to another sample.
 - E. Sample Items from the First Attitude Scale
 1. I believe church membership is almost essential to living life at its best. (1.5)
 2. When I go to church, I enjoy a fine ritual service with good music. (4.0)
 3. I do not receive any benefit from attending church services, but I think it helps some people. (5.7)

4. I think that the teaching of the church is altogether too superficial to have much social significance. (8.3)
5. I think the country would be better off if the churches closed and the ministers set to some useful work. (10.4)
6. I think the church is a parasite on society. (11.0)

II. Assessing Evaluations of Attitude Objects

A. Likert-Type Scales: Social Attitudes

SD					SA
-2	-1	0	1	2	Crime is the major social problem confronting us today.
-2	-1	0	1	2	I support capital punishment.
-2	-1	0	1	2	Prison can rehabilitate offenders.
-2	-1	0	1	2	So-called "illicit" drugs should be legalized.
-2	-1	0	1	2	Social problems are due to the decline of traditional family values.

B. The Semantic Differential (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957)

1. *Connotations* versus *Denotations*

MOTHER

Denotation (definition): a woman who has borne a child.

Connotation: other associations or significance we associate with the attitude object "mother" (nurturing, cold, other positive or negative associations).

2. Three Underlying Dimensions

Evaluative (positivity/negativity): 14 items in all

Good	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Bad
Ugly	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Beautiful
Clean	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Dirty
Sad	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Happy
Kind	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Cruel
Awful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Nice
Foul	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Fragrant
Sweet	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Sour...

Potency (strength/weakness): 3 items

Strong	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Weak
Small	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Large
Heavy	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Light

Activity (activity/passivity): 3 items

Active	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Passive
Slow	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Fast
Hot	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Cold

3. Can Use with Any Attitude Object (instant coffee, abortion, PSY 3201, George W. Bush, tuition increases, and so on).

GEORGE W. BUSH

Competent	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Incompetent
Bad	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Good
Dishonest	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Honest
Ineffective	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Effective
Likeable	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unlikeable

III. Psychophysiological Approaches to Attitude Measurement

A. Sometimes people don't know their true attitudes, or don't want to tell us.

B. Can Measure Involuntary Physiological Responses

1. GSR (galvanic skin response) or heart rate.
2. Pupillary Dilation
3. Facial Musculature (corrugator or zygomatic muscles)

C. Drawbacks

1. May indicate extremity, but not direction (GSR).
2. May indicate direction, but not extremity (pupillary dilation)
3. Can be unreliable (facial musculature).

IV. Measuring the Behavioral Component: Unobtrusive Observations

A. Leventhal (1970): anti-smoking films and chest x-rays

B. Page (1997): subtle manifestations of prejudice

C. Drawbacks

1. Power of the situation can override the influence of attitudes on behavior.
2. Behaviors must be closely tied to attitudes.

E. Examples

1. How might you measure attitudes toward safe sex after a large-scale media campaign?
2. How might you measure people's attitudes toward their jobs?

V. Attitude Assessment Exercise: Attitude Object is PSY 3201

- A. What would a Likert-type scale look like?
- B. What would a semantic differential-type scale look like?
- C. What behavioral measures might you use to assess attitudes?