



## You're the analyst...

### This activity will help you to...

- Recall the main concepts from the psychodynamic approach
- Understand how psychodynamic psychologists see people
- Analyse real-world behaviour in psychodynamic terms
- Create your own psychological explanations

Psychodynamic psychologists use a range of concepts to understand human thinking and behaviour. Their explanations sometimes seem to defy 'common sense' because they look beyond the obvious in explaining why people do the things they do. For a psychodynamic psychologist, a person's **manifest** thoughts and behaviours (those that appear on the surface) are only indicators of a set of hidden (or **latent**) processes taking place in the unconscious. So, to Freudians, things are never what they appear, and everything a person says, does or experiences could have a hidden significance.

Here are some of the concepts a psychodynamic psychologist might use to understand a person's behaviour. Look up the meanings of any that are unfamiliar to you.

**Unconscious, preconscious, conscious, id, ego, superego, oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, Oedipus complex, pleasure principle, repression, denial, defence mechanism, reality principle**

### ...so analyse this

Below are three case descriptions of people's behaviour. You are a psychoanalyst who is trying to explain why the people described think, feel and act as they do. Write a brief report on each case presenting your analysis.

#### 'Shopping addiction'

Increasing numbers of people in the UK have a problem where it comes to spending money – they don't seem to be able to stop. All over the country are people who have accumulated huge debts on credit cards and loans, often by buying things they don't actually need. Men and women tend to buy different things – whereas men tend to splash out on the latest electronic gadgets or enhancements for their cars, women tend to spend on clothes and footwear, sometimes accumulating huge collections of garments or shoes that they never actually wear. However, in both men and women the pattern appears to be the same. The urge to spend strikes the person suddenly, sometimes as a result of some upsetting incident or setback. They generally try to resist the drive to go shopping but it gets stronger over time. Eventually they feel compelled to give in. Frequently they are passing a shoe or gadget shop and this causes them to 'snap', rush in and start making impulsive purchases, generally not thinking much about what they buy, whether they really want it or whether actually have the money for it. The person often uses credit cards, store cards or 'pay later' finance, apparently not considering that the money will have to be repaid at some point. Following the shopping spree there is typically a short period of euphoria but very soon afterwards this wears off, giving way to feelings of anxiety about the money spent or debt accumulated. The person will often feel guilty as well, and may experience feelings of shame, perhaps not readily admitting to their spending or even hiding the goods they have purchased either from themselves or from others.

## **A difficult relationship with the boss**

John is a thirty-two year old man who has found his way onto your analyst's couch because of problems at work. He appears to have had a stable and uneventful childhood, being the oldest of three children. His mother was a teacher in a local school but until he was six his father was a navy officer serving on submarines, which meant he spent long periods away from home. However, following promotion he was assigned to a land-based position and spent more time with his family. John did well at school. Although he appears intelligent and achieved good qualifications he has never made the progress at work that he and his family and teachers expected. Eleven years after graduating from his degree he has never risen above an 'entry level' graduate position and has moved companies, on average, every three years. John believes that he has been unfortunate with his managers who have all 'taken against him'. By John's account his managers tend to perceive him as a threat because he is bright, well qualified and good at what he does. Consequently, he feels they sabotage his work, try to make him look bad and, when he is successful at things, take them away from him or steal the credit from him. He is poor at hiding his resentment and has often had angry outbursts at his various managers. These have, in the past, led to disciplinary action against him which has only heightened his sense of injustice. The exception to this pattern was a spell at his second company where he apparently had a very good relationship with his line manager Linda, for whom he performed very well. Unfortunately, she was promoted and assigned to another office. John subsequently had a big falling out with her replacement, Geoff and left the company soon after. John is convinced that he has just been unlucky with his bosses but has come to see you at the request of his girlfriend, a teacher, who thinks there may be more to it than that.

## **An artistic temperament**

Felicity is hopelessly disorganized and wants you to help. She has never been able to keep control of everything going on in her life. When she was a child her room was always a terrible mess and all through her education she always got through assessments and examinations 'by the skin of her teeth' because she was very haphazard with her planning and preparation and found it very difficult to keep hold of notes, coursework and so on. It is only because she is intelligent and able to think on her feet that she obtained reasonable grades at school. She showed an aptitude for art from a very early age and spent most of her childhood covered in paint and modeling clay. Her parents, both in creative jobs themselves, were happy to encourage her in this although they occasionally regretted the mess associated with Felicity's forays into painting, sculpture and, on some occasions, interior decorating. Felicity won a place at Art School – although she missed out on attending a very prestigious institution because her poor timekeeping made her late for her interview and, in her rush, she forgot her portfolio and had nothing to show the interview panel. At Art School she was very popular and was well liked for her happy-go-lucky outlook and generous nature. She passed her degree – perhaps not as well as she might have done, for predictable reasons. She is now trying to make a living as a freelance artist. She works primarily in oil paint and produces huge canvasses covered in abstract, haphazard smears of colour. Her work is well liked by many who admire art and she has had several exhibitions and sold a few paintings. However, she says she finds it hard to part with her work. She is disappointed, however, about a recent incident in which she had the chance of a commission to produce a series of pieces for a large corporation's new headquarters. In her usual disorganized state she left it very late to leave for the meeting. She missed her train and consequently, her appointment and lost out on the commission.