

[How to Psychoanalyse Your Friends](#)

By [Mister Octopus](#), 28 August 2016

If you know what somebody wants, you understand them. There is no further inquiry required. Armed with knowledge of a person's motives, you can accurately predict their behaviour, their decisions, and their mistakes. You can steer clear of conflicts, frame proposals to your own benefit, and more easily achieve what you want for yourself.

You would think that such a powerful tool would be widely sought after, however I don't see too many people grappling for it. Instead, we spend our time complaining about other people and how frustrating they are.

The reason we can't get along is simple: **we expect other people to be like us.** We are, after all, perfect models of humanity that all others should strive to be more like. But the reality is that other people are not like us. Why should they be?

In psychology, the understanding that other people have their own world as rich as our own is called *Theory of Mind*. Humans until the age of two or three, do not demonstrate Theory of Mind. That is, they

believe everyone else has the same knowledge as them. For example, a child who is given some information in the absence of friend will believe his friend also has this new information.

Overcoming this short-sightedness is difficult. If we are seeking to understand other people, we first need to stop explaining them in terms of our own life experience. But nor can we simply ask people what motivates them, because most often, they do not know. This is because we understand ourselves using a similar process that we apply to other people. We look at our behaviour and make inferences about our nature. **We know about the effects, not their causes.**

After many years of covertly psychoanalysing my friends, I have decided to reveal my process to strip people down to their real selves. It really is a process of stripping down, as you start from the most readily available information and augment it further and further until you discover an individual's basic motives. i.e. what they really want.

If I want to understand a person, I start building a profile consisting of the following elements. I do this when I am alone, because I find you can often see more into people when you aren't assaulted by their faades. For the purposes of this article, I'm going to use myself as an example.



Background:You start to talk and exchange information. This small talk might contain revealing information, but you have no way of knowing if it is signal or noise. For now, it is only useful to identify someone and reinstate conversation. Later, you'll be able to use their history to test your theories about their motives.

My background: born in 1979, stable childhood, studied Engineering, self employed, digital nomad, travelling since 2009.

Appearance:Our appearance is the most salient aspect of our phenotype. It is the product of all our deeper processes. Observing a person's appearance is very useful, although it is important not to draw conclusions too soon. We can deliberately deceive people with our appearance. For example, I allow myself to be stereotyped as a dumb surfer. This gives me an opportunity to evaluate people without raising their defences. On the other hand, it is also an honest side-effect of my need to exercise.

My appearance: long blond hair, fit, bandaged fin cut, friendship bracelets, flip flops, bow legs.

Behaviour:Like our appearance, our behaviour is a good indicator of our basic nature. Unlike appearance, however, behaviour is difficult to modify. It is hard to lie with our body language. There are thousands of behavioural traits you could pick up on, such as: talks loud, interrupts conversations, hides behind her hair, sniffs erratically, quick to anger, histrionic, picks her cuticles. Our behaviour is not random. It results from our intrinsic nature.

My behaviour: disagreeable, impatient, perfectionist, works alone, non-reactive, good listener, walks slowly.

Words:If you hear somebody use an unusual word or phrase more than once, take note. There is a good chance they've said these words to themselves thousands of times over. People develop pet words which reflect their personality. Some revealing ones I've come across are: "high impact", "entitled", "best seller", and "establishment". Vocab and language skills are also the only reasonably reliable indicators of intelligence that I've found (short of an IQ test that is).

My pet words/phrases: boring, kind of, bohemian, hideout, egregious, visceral, beautiful, peace.

Topics:When we talk openly (i.e., not having a manufactured conversation) we are voicing what is on our mind. The sorts of things that occupy our mindspace are direct indicators of our values and motives. For example, someone high in vengeance will spend a lot of time mulling over how they were slighted in the past, or what they plan to do in retaliation. These thoughts will surface in conversation either directly or indirectly, e.g. via criticism.

My topics: psychology, theoretical physics, economics, art, science, investment.

Likes:What we like provides the most direct clue to what motivates us. For example, I like to run. The intrinsic motive is exercise and nothing else. There is no other reason I run. If the only information you had about someone was what they like, you'd have a pretty good shot at guessing at what their motives are.

I like: thinking, studying, surfing, running, psychology, music, languages, writing, sex, art.

Avoids:Equally as important as what someone likes, is what they avoid. Avoidance happens subconsciously, and is less visible than what we seek out. For that very reason, it's a strong indicator of one's true nature.

I avoid: (boring) conversation, conflict, spoon-feeding, interruptions, noise, consumerism, commitment, drunks.

Self View:To build a thorough model of a person, a fascinating exercise is to consider their own model of themselves. A person's self view can reveal their needs, because we have this wonderful trick of deluding ourselves into thinking we are who we want to be. With a model of their model, you'll also be able to see how people post-rationalise their own behaviour.

My self view: I'm not sure about my self view. I think you're reading it.

Motives:Finally, we get to the crux of it. Using the observations you've made, you should easily be able to see which of the following fundamental human needs motivate (or demotivate) your subject. These needs are defined in the [Reiss Motivation Profile](#). I put a "+" to indicate high need, a "o" to indicate medium, and a "-" for low need. Pay attention to which needs you have in common with your subject, and which are in conflict (I add an "=" sign for shared needs and "!" for conflicting needs).

My motives:

- + Independence the desire for self-reliance*
- + Curiosity the desire to explore or learn*
- + Exercise the desire to move one's muscles*
- + Romance the desire for beauty and sex*
- + Order the desire for a predictable environment*
- + Tranquillity the desire to be free of anxiety and pain*
- + Saving the desire to collect*
- o Eating the desire for food*
- o Social Contact the desire for peer companionship*
- o Power the desire for influence*
- o Acceptance the desire to be included*
- Honor the desire to be loyal to one's group*
- Vengeance the desire to get even with others*
- Idealism the desire to improve society*
- Family the desire to raise children*
- Status the desire for social standing*

I've completed a Reiss Motivation Profile test, so this data is quite accurate. Having real data is also useful because we can see how most of the observations I made about myself can be traced to my basic motives:

Background: born in 1979 (*N/A*), stable childhood (*N/A*), studied Engineering (*curiosity*), self employed (*independence*), digital nomad (*independence, curiosity*), travelling since 2009 (*curiosity*).

Appearance: long blond hair (*romance*), fit (*exercise*), bandaged fin cut (*exercise, order*), friendship bracelets (*low status*), flip flops (*low status*), bow legs (*N/A*).

Behaviour: disagreeable (*low honor, low idealism*), impatient (*low honor*), perfectionist (*order*), works alone (*independence*), non-reactive (*low vengeance*), good listener (*curiosity*), walks slowly (*tranquillity*).

Words: boring (*curiosity*), kind of (*N/A*), bohemian (*low status*), hideout (*independence*), egregious (*N/A*), visceral (*romance*), beautiful (*romance*), peace (*tranquillity*).

Topics: psychology (*curiosity*), theoretical physics (*curiosity*), economics (*saving*), art (*romance*), science (*curiosity*), investment (*saving*).

Likes: thinking (*curiosity*), studying (*curiosity*), surfing (*exercise*), running (*exercise*), psychology (*curiosity*), music (*romance*), languages (*curiosity*), writing (*romance*), sex (*romance*), art (*romance*).

Avoids: boring conversations (*curiosity*), conflict (*low vengeance*), spoon-feeding (*independence*), interruptions (*independence, low honor*), noise (*tranquillity*), consumerism (*low status*), commitment (*independence, low honor*), drunks (*tranquillity*).

You can't avoid a certain amount of confirmation bias in this exercise. However, it is far better than simply assuming other people are like us. The more observations you collect, the less likely you are to fall prey to confirmation bias. For example, it'd be hard to argue that I have low curiosity after reading this, no matter how much you wanted that to be true.

I'm going to stop there. We set out to understand people by understanding their motives, and that's what we've done. If you like, you can continue by studying a person's bargaining strategies, effective rewards and punishments, and the problems they have in their life. I'm still working on a comprehensive system for all of that. If you've subscribed, you'll be the first to know when it's done :)

Peace.

About Mister Octopus

