

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

Narcissist? Risk taker? Attention seeker? The desire to label ourselves has never been greater, says the novelist *Lionel Shriver* as she introduces these fun — and addictive — psychological tests



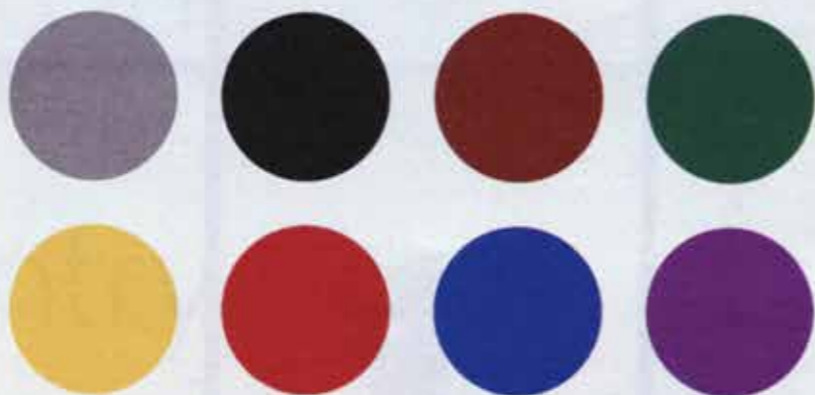
As a kid, I was befuddled by classmates whose reigning ambition was to “fit in” — to blend anonymously with their peers into human wallpaper. I wanted to stand out.

Admittedly, I grew up in the 1960s, an era that celebrated oddity. Yet even during that age of transgressive individualism, most of my contemporaries wanted to keep their heads down. By contrast, I proudly declared that my favourite colour was black and that I far preferred overcast skies to sunny days (my father worried there was something wrong with my eyes). A good four decades before the rest of the world followed suit, I cycled everywhere I went, refusing to learn to drive when I came of age. I was a bit of a nutter, and I wanted to be a nutter.

Thus I've been naturally hostile to conventional psychological testing, insofar as it is designed to weed out the weirdos from the regular people. Of course, throughout my adulthood, the drive to slot everyone into a category, to slap a diagnosis on every variation from the mean, has only accelerated. Indeed, we now live in a time when if you don't have a diagnosis, you don't know who you are, and people wave their designated psychiatric ailments like football trophies. With a wealth of new classifications at our disposal, we can easily peg me now: I am an attention seeker. Damn straight. I have sought attention and often got it, if not always the nice kind. ➔

THE COLOUR TEST

Pick the colour you like the most, then read below



- Grey**
This is the colour of the middle ground: you like to be uncommitted and find quiet acceptance from others.
- Black**
The colour that says “No”. You would like to be confident, self-possessed and recognised, but you are in revolt against your fate.
- Brown**
You are likely to be restless and insecure, and yet you wish to charm and be attractive to others.
- Green**
You like possessions and the good things in life. You're a high achiever, you like impressing others, but you worry about failure.
- Yellow**
You are happy and positive, you like to take dynamic action and achieve results.
- Red**
You are defined by passion and energy, you are impulsive, ambitious and sexy. You live life to the full.
- Blue**
You are calm and loyal but sensitive and easily hurt; you like the good life, and need a stable relationship. Contented, you're likely to gain weight.
- Purple**
Your emotional immaturity means you get stuck in dreams of wishful thinking. You need to avoid excitement: you've had too much already.

MODERN LIFE FRUSTRATIONS

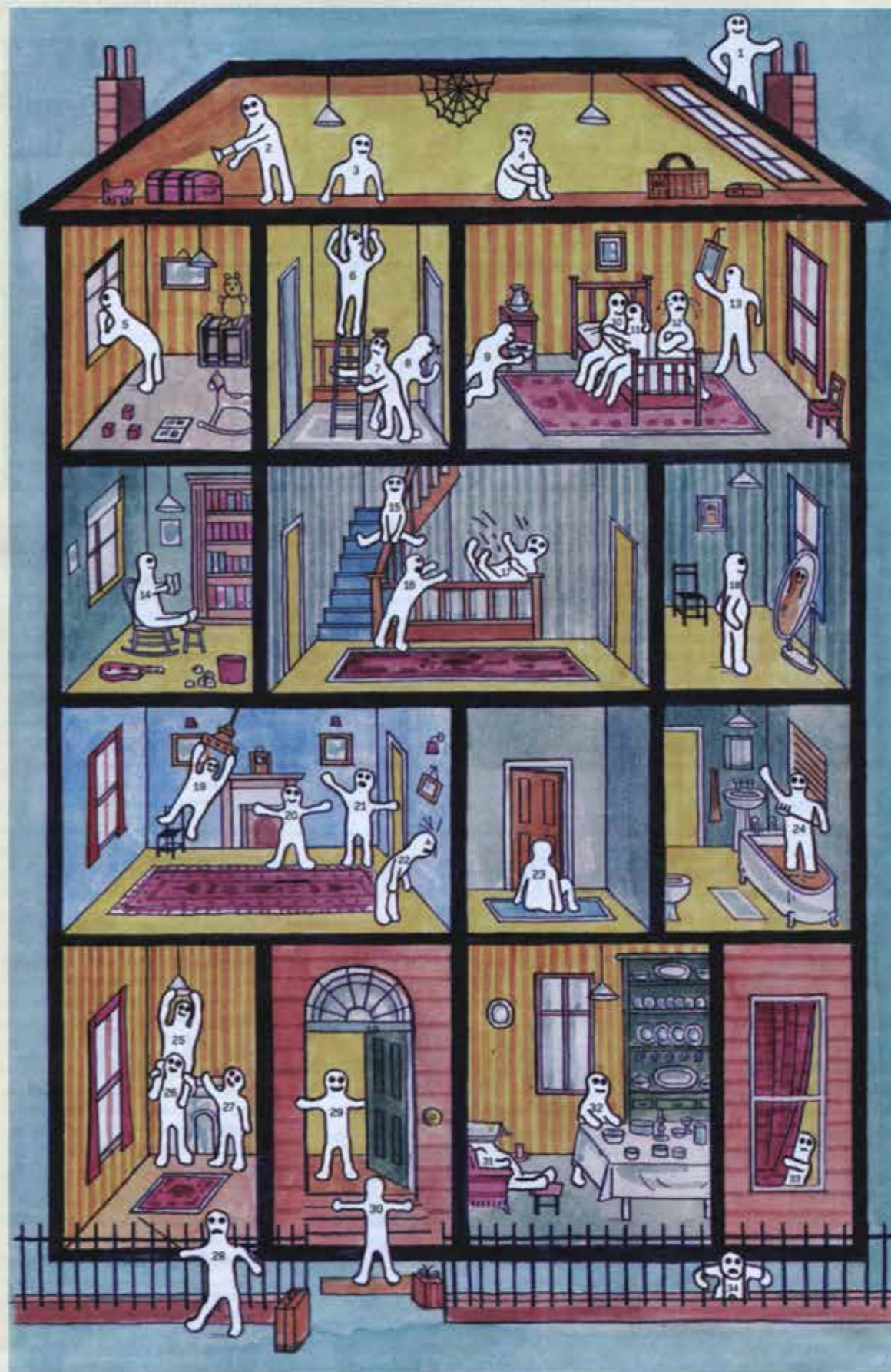
Fill in the blank speech bubbles



The artist Adam Dant's comic sequence (two of which are pictured here) is inspired by a famous projective test developed by the mid-20th-century American psychologist Saul Rosenzweig, the purpose of which is to gauge the extent of a subject's aggression in response to commonplace frustrations. Some, admittedly, would try the patience of a saint.

THE HOUSE OF PERSONALITIES

Which figure are you?



Psychotherapists and counsellors often present their clients with an image asking them to identify, immediately, with one of a number of figures depicting different moods or dispositions. This test may provide some indication of your present level of self-awareness or self-esteem; and even if treated with a degree of wry and self-reflexive irony, it may stimulate thoughtful reflection.

- 1 Curious
- 2 Seeker
- 3 Opportunist
- 4 Dissatisfied
- 5 Procrastinator
- 6 Enabler
- 7 Helper
- 8 Nosy
- 9 Guardian
- 10 Fulfilled
- 11 Loving
- 12 Victim
- 13 Perfectionist
- 14 Contained
- 15 Liberated
- 16 Untrustworthy
- 17 Gullible
- 18 Narcissist
- 19 Happy
- 20 Celebratory
- 21 Cautious
- 22 Angry
- 23 Inert
- 24 Proper
- 25 Creative
- 26 Dependable
- 27 Organiser
- 28 Insecure
- 29 Friendly
- 30 Open
- 31 Unconscious
- 32 Parental
- 33 Anxious
- 34 Fragile

As a novelist, too, I instinctively resist the quantification of character, the reduction of such an elusive concept to a set of measurements, to a score. Theoretically, I suppose, fiction writers might construct protagonists by choosing numerical points on various key continuums: on a scale of 1 to 10, say, our hero scores 2 for "fearfulness", 9 for "openness to new experience", 1 for "risk aversion", 8 for "ego strength"... But good luck with charting out our story's principals in this manner and coming up with Pierre in War and Peace. In other words, the results of much psychiatric testing is crudely descriptive and tells you little you didn't know before.

Nevertheless, these tests are often compelling, if only, especially in the early, more historical instances, compellingly stupid: "Do you feel that there is some sort of barrier between you and other people, so that you can't really understand them?" Isn't that the standard state of affairs between anybody and anybody? Psycho quizzes are also blind to context. An air traffic controller might agree with the statement "I work under a great deal of tension" without having an anxiety disorder. A Nobel laureate might affirm "I am an important person" without being a narcissist. A woman who concedes "Once a week or more I feel suddenly hot all over without apparent cause" may simply be over 50. These days, those who tick the box next to "Are people talking about you and criticising you through no fault of your own?" aren't implicitly paranoid; they participate in social media.

What's especially stupid about much psychological testing is that the psychologists think we're stupid. Were you to tick, when taking a personality test as part of a job application, "I am afraid I am going out of my mind", you would indeed be out of your mind. One is reminded of those naff American visa applications that ask "Are you a member of a terrorist organisation?"

Yet, if you usually know the answers, why are these tests so addictive? Test taking is fun; it's a game. Psychological tests are an opportunity to look in the mirror, and recognising traits in ourselves is validating, regardless of which traits they are. Personally, I'm more apt to look for evidence that I'm an outlier rather than for proof that I'm just like everybody else, an inclination that lately, alas, makes me just like everybody else. As an alternative to an amorphous blob, any form reflected back at us is a relief: I am f**** up, therefore I am ■

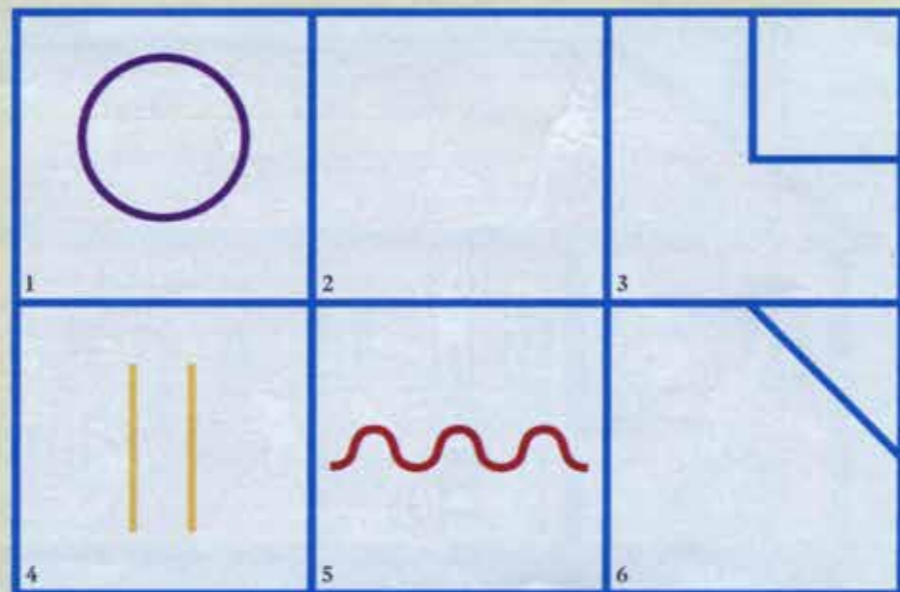
Lionel Shriver is the author of *We Need to Talk About Kevin*

Extracted from *Psychobook*, edited by Julian Rothenstein (Redstone Press £25). For more tests, visit psychobook.co.uk



DRAWING COMPLETION TEST

Draw a picture in each box, using the lines and shapes already there, without reading below until the end



Box 1 This drawing relates to your sense of self. You may have been assertive or tentative (drawn a face, coloured the circle in, and so on) or you may have suggested that there are pressures from outside the circle of yourself. You may happily have seen yourself as a beaming sun, or a flower.

Box 2 Your whole life is revealed in this space. Oh dear! Without prompts or guidelines you have

revealed your innermost self.

Box 3 The square is an architectural unit; your response here relates to your feelings about your house/home or garden. These may have implications with regard to aspects of your identity.

Box 4 The two lines stand for the inescapable dualisms of the universe, especially the duality of sex. You may have just revealed your deepest

feelings about love. (On the other hand, you may not.)

Box 5 This motif has to do with your emotional life. Are you floating on or above the waves, or are you sinking below them? Are you waving or drowning? Or did you see and project something else altogether?

Box 6 This will reveal how you relate to your friends, who are at once part of you and separate from you.

WHAT DO YOU SEE IN THE INKBLOT?



Centre of image: two figures leaning forward — monkeys, courtiers or spiritual devotees of some sort bowed in prayer.

Whole image, including white space: a person praying. A cerebral soul, you have a great capacity for imaginative, rigorous thought. You know all too well the concentration and patience required to do anything good, and can't see why anyone would settle for less if they care about what they're doing. You want to feel like the New Orleans piano player Allen Toussaint, who said of his mentor Professor Longhair: "A rule breaker is a rule maker. He blew my socks off, and I haven't worn any since."

Whole image: a racing car, speed, voluptuousness. **Centre of image: two furry little cubs, babies, devils.** Your highly developed imagination

THE STORY TEST

Where will your mind take you?

This is a type of test that has been popular with many diagnosticians, for purposes similar to those behind the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The test entails inventing a story with alternative possibilities of development. The story here, adapted from a real test, has much in common with John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which, interestingly, came to him in a dream.

This is the most simple type of story test, at each point offering only a limited number of ways to progress.

1. Imagine that you are entering a forest

- Is it light or dark?
- Do you see a path?

2. Begin walking through the forest

- You see a cup. What does it look like?
- What do you do with it?

3. You continue through the forest and come across water

- What does the water look like?
- Is it moving?
- How deep is it?
- You need to cross the water. How do you do this?

4. You then encounter a bear

- What sort of bear is it?
- What is it doing?
- You need to carry on. How do you get around the bear?

5. You reach a clearing. You can see a beach. Can you see any people?

- If so, how far away are they?



is one of the first things people notice about you. "Metaphorical" is your instinctive mode. You excel at constructing other worlds, seeing things from other people's points of view, imagining yourself soaring to great heights or plummeting to your doom.

Whole image: a dentist's/barber's chair

You are sensitive and generous, a combination that ensures you get a lot out of life and take it painfully to heart in equal measure. Given the transparency of your feelings, people often want to look after you, which can occasionally confuse your understanding of intimacy. Formal, conventional environments drain you. You would not thrive in the New England setting the artist Cy Twombly grew up in: "Once, I said to my mother, 'You would be happy if I just kept well-dressed and [had] good manners,' and she said, 'What else is there?'"

Upside down: a woman lying back with her legs open

You can get very distracted. Within moments you can go from being completely in the present to looking down on it from a huge height, analysing it to within an inch of its life. Balance is crucial for you, being able to stay in touch with your physical, sensual side. Life is about sensations as well as thoughts — what it feels like to hold a mouse in your hand, as Iris Murdoch once put it.

Whole image: two dark forces or figures, perhaps female, about to invade and consume a prone figure/torso

You may progress as you digress, to paraphrase Tristram Shandy, or you may just digress. How many unfinished letters or emails, unmade phone calls trail in your wake? As Philip Roth said: "The road to hell is paved with works-in-progress." **Text by Will Hobson**

1. The forest

If you imagined the forest as dark and threatening, this is indicative of your attitude towards the journey you are on at this moment in your life. Alternatively, seeing light would suggest you are an optimist at heart, perhaps even naively so. If you saw a path in the forest, this suggests you are still finding your way in life, things are not yet settled. Those who feel more secure or sure of their development tend not to see a path.

2. The cup

The cup symbolises wealth and your attitude towards it. Did you imagine a trophy, or a cup of coffee? You were given an opportunity to reward yourself and see something of value, did you do this? If you left the cup alone, this means you chose to ignore a reward. Either material wealth has little real value to you, or you didn't think you had worked hard enough for it! Did you pick the cup up and drink from it? This means you found a practical use for it, taking a "here and now" attitude towards the reward. Taking the cup with you on your journey means you saw it as something of value. You are quick to reward yourself and generally seek out new opportunities.

3. Water

The water here represents your attitudes towards sex and desire. The speed at which you saw the water moving indicates your sexual appetite, but not necessarily your need. The faster the water, the greater your appetite. The depth indicates what you expect from sex to feel fulfilled: seeing shallow water suggests you enjoy deep and intense lovemaking, whereas seeing fast-moving water means "little and often" is enough for you. The more easily you crossed the water, the more comfortable or liberal you are likely to be in your approach to sex. So a difficult crossing

suggests an unease or neurosis attached to your sexuality.

4. The bear

The bear represents problems in your life and how you cope with them. Did you jump at the chance to see a problem? If you saw a teddy bear then one would assume your life is relatively stress free. You glide through life with ease. However, most people will see a real bear. If the bear hasn't noticed you, or has but is minding its own business, then this indicates that the problems in your life are manageable. Your stresses are not too big to handle. Given the chance to see a big problem, you chose not to. If, however, you chose to see a dangerous animal, a threat to your safety in some way, you are likely to be under high levels of stress or worry in your real life — perhaps you need a holiday? How you get around the bear is indicative of how you deal with and resolve problems. Most people are able to summon up the courage and placate the bear long enough to move past the threat.

5. The beach

The image of the beach symbolises how you relate to others. The number of people you pictured on the beach relates directly to the amount of human contact you want in your life. A social extrovert is most comfortable in the company of lots of people and will seek out this "audience" wherever he or she travels. Likewise, those that see a deserted beach are usually happy to spend long periods in their own company. Where on the beach you saw the people is also significant. If they were very close, this suggests you crave contact with other people most of the time. If they were sitting in the distance, then you are likely to feel happier to know someone is there for you, but without the proximity — you are content to have your own space.

And finally, tell us...

WHAT WOULD BE THE TITLE OF YOUR AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

Tweet your answer to @TheSTMagazine. We'll retweet the best.

