
The Context for Type Development: Using Psychological Type as a Model for Conscious Growth

by Katharine Myers

The English translation of Carl G. Jung's *Psychological Types* (H.G. Baynes, trans.) published in 1923 was subtitled "The Psychology of Individuation." Jung used the term "individuation process" for the first time in this book, referring to what he saw as the natural means by which a person becomes his or her own unique self. We individuate basically through becoming more conscious; that is, dealing with unconscious parts of ourselves by becoming aware of them, owning them, and integrating them into our overall personality. The result of the process is being more fully ourselves and having choice — the ability to draw on all the different parts of ourselves at appropriate times and as we wish. It is similar to the concept of self-actualization.

When we talk about type development, we begin to move into Jung's theories more deeply to look at the unconscious elements of personality and how they may relate to our conscious functioning. We need to learn more than just psychological type preferences and even dynamics. The Jungian community has not, historically, been eager to help us do that. Many Jungians have mixed feelings about psychological type and the MBTI. For decades, Jung's "psychology of consciousness" (his term for his psychological type theory) was ignored by the Jungian community, which was more interested in his work on the personal and collective unconscious, dreams, symbols, etcetera.

Though millions of people have been brought to Jung's work by taking the MBTI, many Jungians have believed that the MBTI community has "cut the limb from the tree" (this was Angelo Spotó's phrase in *Jung's Typology in Perspective*, 1989; in correspondence with me, he said

one of his goals was to "put the limb back on the tree"). By isolating the psychology of consciousness from Jung's overall picture of personality, MBTI practitioners overemphasize consciousness at the expense of the unconscious and the whole person, in this view.

I have some sympathy for this argument. More than a decade ago, I went through a didactic Jungian analysis and I greatly value the knowledge and perspective I gained through this process. For many years, I have been talking with people in the MBTI community about the need to enlarge, enrich, and deepen our use of type by better understanding its place in Jung's larger theory of personality. I also believe however, that one aspect of Myers' genius was that she was able to take psychological type out of the complexity of Jungian theory, recognizing that it was the mechanism for development and most pragmatically useful to her focus on realizing of human potential. In so doing, she created the MBTI and gave people the key to the door to that complexity. Our task is to help individuals move through that door.

Can we consciously work toward individuation?

The question of how individuation occurs and the contribution of psychological type knowledge to the process is one area where I think the type community has important information for the Jungians. Most Jungians believe that individuation can be assisted by Jungian analysis, but that any other approach — such as consciously using psychological type knowledge to assist one's development — would 1) not work and 2) if it did work, it would endanger the functioning of the psyche. This is because the inferior function is the road to the uncon-

scious, the door through which we have access to the important information we need to grow and change. If we *work* to make ourselves more conscious, we are in danger, the Jungians believe, of "closing the door" and losing the messages from our unconscious.

I recall a Jungian conference many years ago when Nancy Millner and I were presenting a workshop on using psychological type to understand and facilitate mid-life transition. A highly respected Jungian guru gave the plenary address just before our workshop, and one of his themes was his concern that the type community was putting too much emphasis on the possibilities of conscious growth. He was eloquent on the dangers.

I was struck by his knowledge and experience, and, after his address, I expressed to Nancy my insecurity about what we intended to do in our workshop. I will forever be grateful that she exclaimed, "Nonsense; if a theory can't be useful, I won't bother with it. We're going to go in there and do our thing!"

Nancy was right. Jung makes it clear that psychological type is the structure through which we become conscious and move toward individuation, and, as Myers and Briggs believed, knowledge of type and the development process actually assists in its unfolding by affirming an individual's way of individuation and removing impeding snags.

According to Jungian Jolande Jacobi, Jung saw two ways in which individuation or development takes place: 1) the natural process, occurring more or less autonomously and without participation of consciousness; and 2) the "artificial process, aided for instance by analysis, developed by definite methods, and consciously experienced" (1967, *The Way of Individuation*, p. 15). One of

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the goals of Briggs and Myers was to make this second route accessible to a wide range of individuals.

Experience with individual clients and in dozens of workshops over the last ten years confirms Myers' and Briggs' hope that conscious use of psychological type can assist people in their growth and development. In the mid-1980s, as qualifying programs began presenting dynamics and development, I was struck by the interest and the wisdom of the participants as we introduced these complex ideas. They asked questions and wanted more. Their response led to the development of mid-life workshops (by Eleanor Corlett, Nancy Millner, and me) where participants explored mid-life transition from a Jungian and typological perspective.

Lay groups at Pendle Hill, a Quaker study center, also responded to my workshops using type for conscious growth. And lately, aging myself, I have begun working with Nan Zimmer and Kathy Carskadon to lead groups in Elderhostel programs through the process of looking at their own developmental path and understanding where they want to go in the future.

What do we learn from these workshop experiences?

Type development has provided me a wonderful guide and helpful critic as I have looked at my own life. The workshops started because I wanted to share the value of type development knowledge with others. My curiosity wanted to find out how the theory actually played out in real lives. Were there sixteen different paths throughout life, each with its own problems and successful strategies? Could such programs be effective? Where was the theory on target? Where did it need to be modified?

Participants affirmed the value of

the workshops for themselves, and the information from participants added to our knowledge of development. In general, people have confirmed the theory in their own lives, with some patterns of difference as a result of the interaction of their innate preferences with life experience. We learned it was much easier for people to identify and work with the strengths and weaknesses of the dominant and auxiliary than to see their less-preferred functions. We learned that, under stress, the negative aspects of the fourth function tended to pull the third function in. We found that people could move into looking at introverted and extraverted forms of each function. Isabel's belief (see "Isabel Briggs Myers and Type Development," pp. 6-8 in this issue) in the need for flexibility was affirmed for me, as we modified our methods and created new ones.

Using psychological type as the basis for understanding development and consciously directing our growth bridges type theory with the Jungian psyche and the process of individuation. It "puts the limb back on the tree."

It's healthy for those of us in the MBTI community to balance our optimism with a dose of Jungian caution. It's important not to isolate psychological type from Jungian theory and not to rigidly impose order on the psyche or development. It would be counterproductive to close the door to our unconscious, from which we get much of our energy and direction for balance and growth. We need to stay aware of these cautions; but, in my experience, we are all so far from becoming fully conscious (especially myself), that I can't believe conscious use of type for growth can be dangerous. The exception to this is if, at moments

of inflation, we think our efforts have achieved full consciousness.

In working with the psychology of consciousness, we are working with a psychology of choice: to the degree that we become conscious, we have choice in regard to our behaviors and attitudes. Moving toward this freedom challenges and excites us with its promise of growth, change, and fulfillment of self. That is the promise of type development.

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Myers on individuation

The last stage [individuation] comes only to people who live their type fully but continue growing. Through the completeness of their type development, they come face to face with the inevitable deficits of their particular type. Without abandoning the values of the best-developed processes, they can use their self-understanding to recognize and cultivate the values of the previously neglected third and fourth processes. Thus, they ultimately transcend their type. This is admirable, but if it is attempted before the person has achieved full development of the best two processes, it may merely divert the person from that development and have a negative effect.

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Gifts Differing (1980, 1990), p. 176