Remembering the Importance of Whole Type

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We begin this article with a pertinent quote from Isabel Myers on the positive impact of understanding type:

“I have looked at the world from the standpoint of type for more than fifty years and have found the experience constantly rewarding. It can be rewarding for society, too... Whatever the circumstances of your life, whatever your personal ties, work, and responsibilities, the understanding of type can make your perceptions clearer, your judgments sounder, and your life closer to your heart’s desire.” (Myers, Gifts Differing, 1980, pp. 201-202)

“Whole type is what is most important”

There has been a recent movement within the ranks of type practitioners to understand, clarify, and define Jung’s functions (S, N, T and F) in their attitudes (Extraverted and Introverted Sensing, Intuition, Thinking and Feeling). For definitions of the eight Jungian mental processes, see Hartlzer, M., McAlpine, R. & Haas, L. (2005) and Myers, K.D. & Kirby, L.K. (1994). Prior to this movement, practitioners who mostly came to Jung through the MBTI®, had very little understanding of what Myers called the “eight mental processes,” also referred to as the mental functions, the functions-in-attitude, the attitude functions, and the cognitive processes. In previous times, the only written definitions of the mental processes readily available to type practitioners, and more understandable than in Jung’s original work, were the five pages written by Katharine Briggs in Gifts Differing (pp. 77-81).

Recent developments have been of great importance and have contributed to the richness and depth of understanding of type, type dynamics, and type development. However, if we narrowly focus on these newly understood eight mental processes, we run the same danger of portraying type as having separate and disconnected parts as we would if we were to present the type code as separate and detached letters. Rather, type is a dynamic system of the interacting flow of psychic energy from preference to preference and from our conscious to our unconscious mind. As Angelo Spoto has said, “...this [examination of the attitude and function types] is to some degree setting up an artificial split of the material for the purposes of understanding typological theory. Eventually, the intention would be to put the attitudes and functions back together to generate a fuller and more dynamic picture of different psychological types as they manifest in everyday reality” (1989/1995, pp. 28-29). It is Myers’ four-letter type codes that lead us to this understanding.

Katharine’s telling of a meeting that Isabel Myers had with David Keirsey at the CAPT Philadelphia conference in 1979, conveys this point:

David had been invited to give the
keynote speech. The last words of Isa-
bel to David at the end of their cordial
conversation were, ‘David, remem-
ber that whole type is what is most
important.’ I have no quote handy
to explain the meaning of her state-
ment, but Isabel believed whole type
to be a dynamic system of energy and
balance that can guide us like a com-
pass through life. C.G. Jung believed
psychological type was his compass
in life-long development. Isabel cre-
ated the J/P dichotomy to identify the
dominant and the auxiliary. In doing
so, the eight Jungian types became 16
whole types or as Isabel said ‘16 paths
to excellence.’

What is “Whole Type”?  
When people are given the MBTI and
provided with the opportunity for self-se-
lection, “…they are not only casting votes
in regard to the four dichotomies; they
are also providing information needed to
understand their type dynamics leading
to whole type.” Each four-letter type is a
code for the complex set of dynamic rela-
tionships among the functions (S, N,
T and F) and the attitudes (E and I) and
(J and P)” (MBTI Manual, p. 29). The
four-letter code developed by Myers pro-
vides a doorway to understanding and
appreciating individual differences and
the dynamic interplay of the functions
and attitudes. This interplay is what gives
each of the 16 type systems their unique
character, expressed through each type’s
theoretical hierarchy for use and develop-
ment – the dominant, auxiliary, tertiary
and inferior mental processes.

Whole type is also the door to Jung’s model of ongoing growth and de-
velopment which he called individuation. When we asked Angelo Spoto for his de-

definition of “whole type”, he responded:

“The idea of ‘whole type’, as I un-
derstand it, is to provide an image of
wholeness from a typological perspec-
tive. Therefore, “whole type” implies
individuating, i.e. becoming more
whole. From a typological perspec-
tive, that would mean experiencing all the
dimensions of type in a conscious man-
er, regardless of what your superior
function is. We would approach this

enlightened state over the course of
a lifetime. Some people (mostly in the
second half of life) seem to have it
more than others, i.e., you experience
them as more whole human beings,
and not ego-bound or ego-driven.”
(conversation with Spoto, June, 2009).

Whole Type as the
Container for the Eight
Mental Processes

It is important to view Jung’s eight
mental processes within the context of
whole type. As Myers said, “The effect of
the interaction of the preferred processes
is made apparent when the extraverted
form of a particular process – thinking,
feeling, sensing or intuition – is compared
with the introverted form of the same
process” (Gifts Differing, p. 77).

The type code hierarchy provides us
with needed balance; this is where we
can see the flow of psychic energy as we
go in and out of the mental processes.
A focus on the parts at the expense of
whole type can compromise appreciation
of type’s richness and depth.

We need instead to portray two vi-
tal concepts when we speak about type:
(1) the flow of energy of type dynamics
which is unlocked through the code of
the four-letters, and (2) the relatively new
and rich knowledge of the four functions
in both the introverted and extraverted
attitudes. The first concept leads to an
understanding of whole type, while the
second greatly enriches our insight of the
practical effects of the mental processes
as we access them through our code. The
authors have found the need for convey-
ing both concepts in practice and have
developed a way of including this new
knowledge of the eight mental processes,
within what we think of as the ‘Myers
model’, in feedback sessions with indi-
viduals and groups (Paris, 2009).

Myers illustrates the significance of
the dynamic nature of type through the
metaphor of a ship maneuvering through
the sea. She describes the dominant men-
tal process as the Captain of the ship and
the auxiliary mental process as his/her
chief assistant to carry out orders and to
provide a needed balancing perspective.
The tertiary and inferior functions are the crew. At their best, they contribute to the smooth functioning of the ship. If under stress, irritated, or ignored, they are apt to erupt and disturb the collaborating teamwork aboard the ship. We certainly move in and out of all of the eight Jungian mental processes, even though we are only speaking here of the ordering of the first four through the type code hierarchy. There has been work done on the four mental processes not reflected in Myers’ type code hierarchy (see Thomson, L. and Beebe, J.) However, as of this date, there does not seem to be agreement regarding where these mental functions reside in our psyche.

Whole Type as a Guide for Individuation

The process of individuation is a natural process that seems to occur regardless of our level of awareness (see Jung, Spoto, Millner, and others). Armed with the appreciation of the dynamic nature of our own type, we can more consciously undertake the journey toward the complex process of individuation. Both Jung and Myers considered type development, or the conscious development of our mental processes, to be the compass for the journey. It is within this context that Spoto’s statement regarding whole type as “an image of wholeness from a typological perspective” becomes important. If we are conscious of our whole type, we can assess our own path for development, making this difficult journey a bit easier.

Conveying the concept of one’s type as the doorway to life-long development is an important part of whole type and one that is not often a priority for the practitioner. However, when it is included, clients often express excitement: “I didn’t know that type had this kind of depth.”

The first half of life (Accommodation)

It is our task in the first part of life to establish a sense of identity and our place in the world. If we are supported through our environment, our psychic energy is focused on developing use and trust in our dominant and auxiliary mental processes, our most comfortable and natural processes, to accomplish this task. According to the Jungian model, this focus provides the individual with a way of taking in information (perception) and making decisions (judging) and of functioning in both the inner (introverted) and outer (extraverted) worlds. We need to have a good command of our dominant mental process to lead the way, but we also need the corresponding balance of our auxiliary mental process. Lenore Thomson describes this as “an adequate relationship with reality” (p. 82). The development of the first two mental processes gives the personality, or ego, a sufficient degree of consistency, predictability, and effectiveness for facing the world.

Mid-life: a shift of psychic energy (Re-evaluation)

Mid-life is a time for re-evaluation and setting up the foundation for the second half of life. As Jung said, “…we can not live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life’s morning [first stage of life]; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie.” (in Millner, 2004, p. 35). From a type perspective, our psyche pulls us toward the development of our less preferred mental processes, those not represented in our four-letter type code. A focus on functions not previously used helps us to answer the often asked question during this part of life, “Is this all there is?” If we have not developed trust in, and use of, our innate dominant and/or auxiliary mental processes, it is important to claim them during this time of life. If we have developed these mental processes, it becomes more important for us to start to use our less developed functions, the tertiary and inferior functions that we have ignored or that have remained less under our conscious control.

Jung states that we will not be able to develop our secondary functions (auxiliary, tertiary, and inferior) like our dominant function (Jung, 1971/1990, para. 667-671). However, we can develop skills related to the functions and consciously call on them when appropriate (see Hartzler & Hartzler, 2005, for activities to develop the eight functions).
The Second Half of Life
(Re-integration)

Our job in the second half of life, from the perspective of type, is to work toward wholeness with increased consciousness. We now face the world with the new knowledge about ourselves that we gained through mid-life transition. Thus, we will be able to incorporate some of the skills associated with our less preferred functions into our consciousness; we have found that we are more than our four-letter type code. As Spoto described, we are growing toward wholeness and balance. Our energy is re-directed towards development and use of our less preferred mental processes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been four fold:
• to acknowledge the valuable contribution of understanding more thoroughly the definitions of the eight Jungian mental processes
• to define whole type and the importance of understanding its dynamic nature imbedded in each of the 16 four-letter type codes
• to emphasize that Myers’ work opens the door to exploring the individuation process, and
• to caution against over-emphasis on the eight mental processes without feedback within the framework of whole type, which could lead to a misconception that MBTI type is simply an addition of separate pieces.

Isabel Myers’ mission was to give individuals access to the benefits of knowing their psychological type. Her addition of the J/P dichotomy enabled accurate identification of the auxiliary function and expanded Jung’s eight types to 16 dynamic type systems. Her focus included accurate identification of type, the hierarchy of the mental processes within a type, type dynamics, and type development. She also provided us with a doorway into a deeper understanding of Jungian psychology, the psychology of individuation.

It is this dynamic and fluid nature of whole type, and its inherent map for life-long development, that separates the MBTI from other behavior-based personality instruments that are quickly becoming popular. As practitioners, if we do nothing more than explain how we move in and out of the extraverted and introverted mental processes in our type code, and provide people with the corresponding definitions of the dominant and auxiliary mental processes, than we have done a lot to foster the notion that type does not limit us or put us into neat categorical boxes. We will have imparted what the MBTI was meant to do: to lead us to a better understanding of the holistic nature of our psychological type.

References

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