

A NORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

C.G.Jung's Psychological Types and the MBTI®

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*It is not only what people are able to do that determines their life's work,
but also what kind of people they are* Anthony E. Kemp (1996)

*If a theory describes something people do anyway,
then it's probably a good theory*

Andrew Samuels (attrib; und.)

Every society is different from every other...

all are at the same time variants of a universal nature W.G. Runciman (1998)

You psychologists always want to say what's wrong with people. I want to tell them what's right with them Isabel Briggs Myers to Mary McCaulley (1970s)

Introduction

When I talk about a “normal psychology” I focus on the different ways different people see life and want to live it, rather than on generalisations made about whole populations of people. These generalisations can often do harm because without proper consideration they can often imply a norm of behaviour inimical to a person's existence.

A normal psychology in this way doesn't imply a perfect individual existence, nor that there aren't any pathologies, but that where this may be the case an individual's approach to life should be considered. The optimum existence for some people, for instance, may not require levels of personal organisation often presented as a norm.

C.G.Jung's theory of psychological types and the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) can be seen as a normal psychology, not only because it was the general intent of the originators of these ideas (particularly Isabel Briggs Myers), but also because it talks about natural differences between people.

It also provides a framework for understanding when and how things become less than normal for individuals and providing suggestions or solutions in that context. The MBTI in particular has provided much information through research about varieties of normal behaviour as well as the broader context of normal lives

Categories in general discourse:

The word *normal* of course, carries a variety of meanings. Sometimes *common* would be a better description for generalised behaviours. This is a simple example of new or reinterpreted terms contributed by psychology to general discourse, sometimes without discussion or general understanding and applied to general populations e.g. *syndrome*, *disorder*.

In the economic/sociological sphere there are categories like *baby boomers*, *generation x*, and so forth. These are extremely limiting terms used without consideration for the different types of people, let alone the middle-class presuppositions inherent in the formulation and description of the terms and the extreme length of time allocated for *baby boomers*, for instance. The *average man* or *average woman* seem to be similarly formulated. These categories presume extraversion, a category first introduced by C.G.Jung

Jung introduced a number of other words into general discourse: e.g. *complex*, *archetype*, and *introversion*, although his version of *thinking* and *feeling* still remain as different to the conventional understanding and he certainly was not in favour of reducing people to averages.

Psychological type categories:

The basic psychological type categories are *perception* and *judgement*, *extraversion*, *introversion*, *sensation*, *intuition*, *thinking* and *feeling*.

Although these categories were later put in questionnaire format, Jung himself was not interested in a classification system, and considered that once you got into statistics, you were outside the realm of psychology altogether. He was perhaps right and wrong on this issue

The Americans Isabel Myers and Katharine Briggs took a different, mathematical, approach to Jung as a means of popularising and using his work by developing the MBTI. There are cultural reasons for this in that the USA is a quantifying society.

However, while constructed to implement Jung's theory, the MBTI actually directs, or indicates you to it. In a specific way, the MBTI is outside the theory of psychological types. Its scores don't have anything to do with skill, development etc., which confuses many, particularly those used to the claims of other personality inventories. Its presumptions about personality are quite different from these other inventories.

But in any case, presumptions about skill and development from MBTI scores presume that the questions asked are perfect questions, understood in the same way by anyone taking it, something not claimed by the MBTI and demonstrably false anyway.

Some general principles of psychological type:

Jung's theory of psychological types presupposes a Self, unique to a person and purposeful. This Self has both conscious and unconscious components. Personality, he actually considered a calling, a self-understanding that to a certain extent transcended a person's type.

Jung thought that people were born with an inborn predisposition to type, perhaps at the quantum level (Meier, 2002) and that the positive combination of both nature and nurture would see that predisposition expressed healthily.

Type preferences themselves are the bridge between the conscious and the unconscious. They are a set of psychological opposites, equally valuable. Developing the preferences means gaining more conscious control over them, being able to use them purposefully. A person will use all

preferences, but trust some more than others throughout life, although the development that occurs normally through life enables greater familiarity with non-preferences

The preferences are more important than general cultural behaviour or norms, but because they are content-free, they are expressed in cultural context. Thus, while type preferences are expressed in behaviours, they are not necessarily specific behaviours or generalisations about types. The individual has to be consulted.

Finally, because type is considered purposive, a type framework is necessarily explanatory rather than predictive. Being totally predictive implies a *tabula rasa* or blank slate view of the mind in any case, and is scientifically false. Whether types are real or not, people aren't blank slates

Verifiability of the idea of type:

The most important thing about verifying C.G.Jung's theory of psychological types is not whether the types are true (something believed by Isabel Myers), but are they plausible? Do they make sense? Do they tell you more about a person than general categories? Are they more helpful?

Data gathered from the use of the MBTI across the world is useful in this regard. It's translated into around 40 languages, and the American version (used here in Australia) works well outside that culture. So what follows are some general statements gathered from that research and my own research and experience, that I consider indicative of the positive and valuable use of type constructs and suggests their plausibility as well.

All psychological instruments, including the MBTI, are self-referential. If they're well constructed and their questions are answered properly, you'll get a result that makes sense. That renders the constructs plausible, not true. You can measure something that doesn't exist (Deutsch 1998). This is particularly true in the behavioural sciences, although it's also an argument in the physical sciences as well, even accounting from what you read in the papers these days.

Verifiability of psychological constructs is therefore outside psychology to a large extent and certainly outside psychometrics: the fields of neurology, biology etc. are particularly useful at the present moment. My studies indicate to me that the type idea is compatible with advances in these areas, particularly with more complex notions or systems ideas.

The value in the MBTI is that certain behaviours are identified or inferred that can be related to type preferences and some examples follow.

Extraversion-introversion:

This is the first category Jung discovered and it's briefly described as where you direct your energy for life. The energy approach was considered fairly implausible by mainstream psychology for many decades, but is supported by Brown (2000) in a general text.

In that way and in aspects of sociability Jung's construct is significantly different to *extroversion* (originally a typographical/translation error, or for Jung, bad Latin) in general discourse.

Similarly, *introversion* is a normal state of affairs for Jung, not neurotic or negative. Not enough attention has been paid to this view.

It seems that there are more extraverts than introverts in Australian society, but the difference is not great. There are different distributions of extraverts and introverts in various workplaces, areas. For instance, extraverts tend to predominate in marketing and entrepreneurial spheres, while introverts predominate in professions such as medicine and law, also politics. Interestingly enough there seems to be a presumption of extraversion being a preferred way of life by the majority, even introverts.

Extraversion and introversion suggest there are different, acceptable ways of being social. Extraverts as a rule tend to express emotions more readily. Introverts tend to be more circumspect about that, as normal behaviour. They may express emotional content in performance or writing (words and music).

Sensing–Intuition:

These opposites represent completely different ways of looking at the world, of what is of interest. This can be the practical as opposed to the possibilities or the vision, or facts versus meanings. For sensing people the facts usually speak for themselves, but intuitives are more interested in what they mean, and there are various approaches to that.

There are three times as many sensing people as intuitives. Consequences for differences in families, schools and other groups are self-evident. The situation is reversed in academia and psychology, particularly counselling.

Thinking–Feeling:

Thinking here is not about being intellectual, nor is feeling about being emotional. People preferring feeling may take notice of emotions, but in Jung's schema emotions have to do with the unconscious. This view is compatible with LeDoux (1998).

These preferences are about conscious decisions (objective and non-personal for thinking; subjective and personal for feeling) when one or other is a developed preference and much less controlled, unconscious decisions when it is not. They are a significant part explanation for different gender language and relevant stereotypes.

Research across cultures indicates that even though there is roughly a 50/50 split with regard to these two preferences, more males than females prefer thinking and more females than males prefer feeling.

The proportions vary: for example it seems there are more Australian females preferring thinking here than in the USA.

In politics, the last US President preferring thinking seems to have been Richard Nixon. In Australia, politicians preferring feeling, of whatever gender, are rare, and in the corporate and similar worlds, women seem to have predominantly the same type preferences as the males.

Counselling language, apart from the cognitive strategies is usually feeling in orientation. This can sometimes be inappropriate and unhelpful for those that prefer thinking even at the basic level of using the terms think/feel.

In counselling and elsewhere, people preferring feeling tend to objectify “the relationship”, while those preferring thinking can tend to subjectify the term, a reversal of what might be expected. They may prefer to talk about “you and me” rather than the term “relationship”.

Judging–Perceiving

This set of preferences relates to the MBTI, although its authors considered that they were implied by Jung in his work. They relate to how one prefers to live their life: scheduled/ordered or spontaneous/flexible. This is also the public *persona*.

Research indicates that there are slightly more people preferring judging than perceiving, and that specific areas of society, such as schools and schooling methods, and the business and legal world are overwhelmingly judging in presupposition and operation.

Judging is also often associated in general discourse with respectability; responsibility, adult behaviour etc. Judging methods (time management; draft documents, regular study etc.) can demotivate Ps, who are more outcome oriented.

The indifference shown to schedules and procedures by many people preferring perceiving can likewise stress the more ordered people preferring judging, whether at home school or work.

Counselling:

Apart from the basic preferences, which can give valuable information, the dynamics of type are extremely relevant to the counselling experience. Type dynamics puts the preferences in an hierarchical order, relevant for development but also levels of consciousness. For instance if an introvert prefers thinking most, then the least preferred preference will be feeling that is extraverted. For an extravert who prefers intuition, the least preferred preference will be sensing and it will be introverted, or internalised. The least preferred Jung called the inferior function.

If people come for counselling, particularly on relationship issues, they are often in their inferior function: arguments and stresses are continual or erupting. The first task from a type perspective would be to get these people to access their most preferred or dominant preference. Asking about emotions in any case may not be effective, particularly as in Jung’s terms they may be overwhelmed by emotion already and it’s not helping them.

Accessing the auxiliary function (if someone is an introvert, it’s the preference they use to communicate with the extraverted world; for an extravert it’s the preference used in the introverted world) is often the best way to communicate about change or new information.

People preferring sensing and judging who come for counselling may sometimes and need translators for what’s going on in a session, depending on the method of the counsellor. A theory of whatever sort, whether it’s a question about their parents or some abstract notion, is not

necessarily useful., unless they see the practicality or have it explained to them. They seem to usually come in (or be sent) because something's not right.

People preferring intuition and thinking come in to counselling mostly to sort things out on their terms. The counsellor therefore needs to be seen to know what they're doing or at least be able to explain why and to be prepared for some sort of discussion about technique.

An ADD diagnosis can sometimes be normal behaviour for some people preferring sensing and perceiving, or extraversion and perceiving who are wanting a more active or physical learning or living style than what they're currently experiencing. This is by no means the only explanation for the diagnosis, but presumptions about normality can often lead to missing out on understanding the person under diagnosis.

Conclusion

My proposition is that Jung's theory of psychological Types and the MBTI extends the range of what might be described as "normal". In support, I've provided some explanations of the idea of psychological types, some outcomes and suggestions for using the type framework, in conjunction with others, of course. Finally, type theory provides a non-judgmental language for talking about some serious issues, and that is a valuable thing in itself

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