

# Society and Individual Differences

## CONSTRUCTING A BRIDGE

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Many models or frameworks are used to interpret human society. They can arise out of class, cultural, economic, gender, even literary perspectives. Usually, they offer generalised views of human responses to events and situations. The dilemma of how to understand people who don't easily fit these generalisations is significant for society in general and public policy regarding health, education and equity issues in particular. This paper is based on original research that has examined individual psychological differences described by C.G.Jung's theory of psychological types as a means of interpreting human and societal behaviour, providing a rationale and framework for its social utility.

*"If a theory is something people do anyway,  
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 human nature*

W.G. Runciman (1998)

### Introduction

The ideas of C.G. Jung have rarely found a place in social thought, certainly not in its mainstream, unlike his sometime mentor Sigmund Freud. Although this pioneer psychologist and psychotherapist had made necessary comment on society in his research and writing, his concern was more with the individual, rather than the generalised or average person, a construct he criticised strongly and regularly as not really representing anyone at all (1958).

In the public domain, with the exception of some business and organisation texts, few publications can be located that have sought to apply Jungian related ideas to an understanding of society. Progoff ([1953] 1981), Odajnyk (1976), Borenzweig (1984) and Gray (1996) seem to stand out, whilst Doyle's attempt to explain the ways different cultures see money and property used both temperament-oriented personality ideas, as well as that of Jung (1999). Samuels has also attempted to make a bridge between Jungian and other psychoanalytic ideas in a political sense, without really getting out of the clinical setting and on to the street (1991).

One of the main reasons for the lack of influence of Jung's thought in the social sphere is that the interests of Jungians have been more abstract than practical, whether it be by examining dreams, fairy tales, the arts and so on. These interests are usually clinical issues relating to the psyche or the unconscious (as defined), and so internally rather than externally focused.

However, one aspect of Jung's thought that has entered the public arena in some way has been his theory of psychological types, as expressed in the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®), a psychological instrument which aims to make the typology practical and useful in people's lives.

The use of the MBTI itself in social research is problematic, as it is a commercially sold item with business-oriented constraints imposed by its publisher, CPP Inc. Notwithstanding that, research associated with this instrument and its translations can provide useful data on different types of people and their lives.

It's worth noting, too, that whilst the MBTI is based on Jung's typology, the theory itself is independent of the questionnaire. In psychology and sociology, as well as in the so-called hard sciences, we have to be aware that you can measure constructs which don't necessarily exist (e.g. Deutsch 1997; Danziger 1994, 1997).

## Presuppositions of C.G.Jung's Psychological Types

When examining an idea or construct, it's important to know what is presumed in its presentation. It's impossible to adequately understand an idea otherwise. Rational choice theory, for instance, and constructs like Baby Boomers, Generation X and so on presume certain things about people and culture to arrive at their formulations.

The former suggests that people have one particular way by which they make decisions, and the latter presumes uniformity of culture, experience and social status by particular age groupings.

My research indicates the following as presuppositions for the notion of psychological types:

- There is such a thing as an individual personality, or self
- At least part of this self is innate in terms of predisposition
- This self has evolved in humans over time
- There are conscious and unconscious components of the self
- Type preferences are to do with generation and expenditure of psychic or personal energy
- Type preferences are a bridge between the conscious and unconscious
- Preferences are comprised of sets of opposites
- Conscious use of these preferences require personal will and is also purposeful
- Pathologies arise when the predisposed preferences are either not utilised or suppressed

These can be expressed further in a more social and descriptive sense:

- All human beings, as part of being human and irrespective of their culture, are born with a predisposition to looking at and experiencing the world in a particular way; This predisposition can be classified broadly as cognitive or mental patterns/preferences as follows:
  1. An energy-orientated attitude to the world  
(Extraversion or Introversion)
  2. A way of taking in information from the standpoint of facts, or impressions  
(Sensing or Intuition)
  3. A way of sorting this data and making rational, non-emotional decisions, either objectively and non-personally, or subjectively and personally  
(Thinking or Feeling)
  4. A consequential public face to the world, either ordered or open-ended.  
(Judging or Perceiving)
- These preferences involve choice in that human beings can choose to act outside their preferences, sometimes under social or cultural pressure, and can develop skills around their non-preferences. However, this is not the choice of Glasser's Control therapy, or rational choice theory and in fact adaptation might be a better term.
- This process also involves becoming conscious, or self-aware. Jung in this way viewed personality as a calling. It is presumed that answering the call/becoming more conscious increases the value of one's contribution to society and also that individual welfare is enhanced. Consciousness is a key factor in the development of individuals, and societies. Being unconscious, however, is not seen as negative, from the theoretical standpoint, at least.
- These inborn preferences are developed through interaction with the environment (e.g. family, place of residence, belief systems, culture), a combination of nature and nurture. Exercising these preferences may and does look different in different cultures. All preferences are valuable to human societies, in their various forms.
- Exercising any and all of these preferences comes within the span of normality in terms of human behaviour. An environment unfavourable to certain preferences can also inhibit their development. It is presumed that this experience results in some psychological stress for the individual.

- These preferences are also developed dynamically over the lifespan in broadly recognisable stages that also includes personal acknowledgment of the value and use of non-preferences. In some ways, this is the Jungian definition of maturity, different, of course, to old age.
- All preferences are used by both males and females, notwithstanding that:
  1. more males than females are likely to prefer objective, non-personal decision making
  2. more females than males are likely to prefer subjective, personal decision making.

The research methodology undertaken by Isabel Briggs Myers in the 1940s sought, amongst other things, to see whether gender was a factor in any of the preference opposites. Her findings of gender differences in Thinking judgement and Feeling judgement have been replicated across cultures, via translations of the MBTI.

Psychological type is also essentially about what Jung called perception and judgement. By this he meant what sort of information a person was naturally interested in, or took notice of, and the decisions a person then made regarding the information. An emotional decision is outside this framework, it coming directly from the unconscious in Jung's view.

Research with the MBTI across cultures indicates the types are unevenly distributed (i.e. there aren't equal numbers of each type). Variations in the percentages of each type in different cultures also occur, so there doesn't seem to be a detailed pattern, but a broad one.

## **Psychological Type Preferences**

How can these preferences help us understand more about people? Here are brief descriptions of the constructs that explain something of what they entail:

### ***1. 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. One might say that *extroversion* is coterminous with common notions of personality through reality shows, celebrities and the like. In Jung's schema, you can be a shy extravert.

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

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, at least at the leadership level at the present time.

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 in society. 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). Forcing them to express emotions in the extraverted way, particularly in therapies or school settings, may be counterproductive.

### ***2. Sensing–Intuition***

These opposites represent completely different ways of looking at the world, of what is of interest for an individual. 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, as in debates on intelligence gathering, but intuitives are more interested in what they mean, and there are various approaches to that.

Intuition is also about the "big picture" and associated patterns, not details and facts. IQ tests, controversial in themselves, seem to be biased towards an intuitive perspective.

There are roughly three times as many sensing people as intuitives. What this can mean is that the more common sensing behaviour is generalised and defined as normal. Consequences for differences in families, schools and other groups are self-evident. The situation is reversed in academia and psychology, particularly counselling, where intuitives predominate, and there can be difficulties here when a Sensing person is in need of this kind of help.

### **3. 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. Paradoxically, American culture, particularly in business, is a thinking oriented culture. 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”.

### **4. 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. Creative writing as taught seems to be more J (multiple drafts) than P (more than one draft means a different piece of work).

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.

## **Psychological Preferences and Society**

How can a psychological type approach be used in examining and understanding society?

Firstly, it provides a regular framework for understanding natural differences between people within the same culture. By doing so, it challenges methods that generalise about people e.g. social and economic policy, and suggests one reason at least why some processes and decisions aren't as successful.

The framework can also be used to understand differences between cultures. For instance, whilst differences between Middle-Eastern cultures and the United States culture may be self evident to many (in the moment, feeling based versus ordered, objective, extraverted etc.), the presumptions of inviting Iraq presumed similarity.

The differences between European Australian culture and Aboriginal Australian culture are also a case in point, where the latter would seem more feeling based than the former. This doesn't mean that people in that culture overwhelmingly favour the cultural preference, simply that that's the cultural expression.

John Giannini (2004) has recently investigated this issue in looking at US culture at the present time, and contrasting that with both his personal psychological type preferences and the preferences he would identify as being descriptive of the Italian culture he was part of as a child, and which was challenged by emigrating to America.

A psychological type perspective is also a non-judgemental way of talking about some serious issues. Ward (2002) is one who has pointed out what changes have occurred in society simply through the adoption of general psychological language. For psychological type, natural preferences are presumed good by definition, and so natural behaviour is not pathologised, or identified as a "syndrome". It also provides a framework for understanding when, through stress or lack of development, a person does not act positively (e.g. Quenk 2002)

The type approach is also consistent with what is now known about early childhood behaviour and development (e.g. Kagan 2002). If this is the case, then a pluralistic society depends on understanding this difference, particularly in preference to a medically-oriented model that proposes drug and other treatments, for what might be normal behaviour that would be better treated as such.

If we're going to understand society, we need to know more about the individuals who inhabit it, particularly if the differences between individuals are significant enough to impact directly on education, learning, health, social policy and economic management.

**Note:** This paper is a combination and adaptation of several of my previously presented and published conference papers and articles. Key papers are listed in the references. They can be found on my website [www.petergeyer.com.au](http://www.petergeyer.com.au) together with other relevant papers.

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