

Psychological Type and the MBTI® Past, Present and Future?

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A man is not complete when he lives in a world of statistical truth

C.G.Jung

It's now 100 years since C.G. Jung spoke for the first time about extraversion and introversion as terms identifying direction of psychological energy, or libido (as he defined it).

90 years have also passed since the publication of Jung's book *Psychological Types* and its consequential purchase by Katharine Cook Briggs. His book is the stimulus for magazine articles by Katharine Briggs, an influence on her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers' crime novels and plays. Later, particularly in Chapter X, the book was the core source for items for what became the MBTI.

Copyrighting of their work, in the Briggs-Myers Type Indicator (BMTI), later renamed as the MBTI, occurred 70 years ago, in 1943. Isabel Myers and Katharine Briggs commenced this project, in the American summer of 1942 (July). Form C, from around this period, was the standard form, until revisions in the mid-1950s produced Forms E and F.

Today, psychological type, somewhat problematically, is predominantly seen through the lens of the MBTI, rather than that of Jung, the latter being the case for the decades before the emergence of the MBTI around the 1970s and 1980s. The contemporary Jungian component itself seems to be restricted to the work of people like John Beebe, or Naomi Quenk, as though nothing else needs to be said, or investigated.

Part of the reason for this situation is also a general lack of interest in Jung's typology by the vast majority of Jungians, which has occurred for a variety of reasons.

*True personality is always a vocation...
an irrational factor that destines one
to emancipate themselves from the herd
and its well-worn paths.*

C.G. Jung

Psychological Type is also labelled as *personality type*, notwithstanding Jung's idea of personality as a "calling" rather than a given for everyone, as well as a concept which covers the entire psyche, of which the psychological orientation provided by type is only a part. Psychological type is a core component of Jung's idea of consciousness, and not a theory of behaviour.

The phrase "personality type" obscures Jung's broader and deeper ideas about personality, much of which was of little or no personal interest to Isabel Myers. Myers never claimed to be a theorist, but rather a person trying to make practical and useful Jung's typology who selected measurement as her method, whilst not intending to measure anything in the conventional sense.

We never set out to measure anything

Isabel Briggs Myers

Because of the predominant nature of its discovery and delivery, type preferences are generally seen as an outcome of completing a questionnaire – "how did I come out this time?" – rather than something contained within the person, a psychological orientation. So the MBTI is conflated with type for most, who don't see or express it as a separate thing.

Purpose of The Indicator:

*This is a set of questions for finding out what type of person you are.
The questions are not important in themselves,
but the answers point to certain likes and dislikes that are important.*

Isabel Briggs Myers (Form F Instructions 1976)

Isabel Myers' nuanced idea of an "Indicator" has been submerged in a combination of cultural considerations, a narrow view of science, legal advice that has "MBTI" used as an adjective for words like *assessment*, *instrument* and *tool*, thus masking theory and intent (see CPP 1998).

The subtle distinction regarding differences between individuals (traits) and different kinds of individuals (types) is also significant. Part of this state of affairs has to do with how the MBTI is taught, or used in training and other settings, both now and in the past.

Isabel Myers' MBTI

Isabel Briggs Myers and Katherine Briggs have been somewhat pejoratively described as housewives, even by supporters, missing the point of their less than ordinary background and literary achievements. It's not recognised, for instance, that their work on the Indicator achieved what many others had failed to do in the 1920s and 1930s, mostly regarding extraversion and introversion (see Geyer 2012). This included suitable and relevant items for a normal population based on a deep investigation of Jung's ideas and a workable scoring system.

The Gray-Wheelwright Jungian Type Survey, developed at Stanford University at the same time as their work, provided another solution, perhaps from a different appreciation of Jung's ideas.

Some of the distinctive features include:

- the additional construct of a Judging and Perceiving scale to identify the extraverted function, based in part on Katharine Briggs' original research,
- some items with more than two choices (not found in Forms M and Q today,
- The allowing and encouragement of omissions (Myers didn't want false data),
- "Level II" questions from the beginning regarding impediments to type development.

The latter are now expressed in MBTI Step III, and appear to have been for Myers alone to interpret.

Scoring was originally performed with templates, a facility no longer available in some parts of the world. Forms F and G were scored according to Prediction Ratio, with weighted responses – answers allocated 0, 1 or 2 points according to how good the response was for indicating type preference.

The Level II questions were not scored for type, although a number could be allocated that way and were publicly known at one time as "research questions." Computer scoring for all these items was developed at CAPT in the 1970s, and the explanation and use of Level II questions was a major reason for Isabel Myers' collaboration with Mary McCaulley.

After Isabel Myers

The scores mean nothing.

Isabel Myers didn't want you to know your scores.

The point is to validate your type.

Otto Kroeger

Self-scoring and a short-lived short form (AV) were introduced after Myers' death (1980). The latter was the first 50 items of Form G, which were considered to be the most reliable and valid for that form. Apparently a number of people became impatient with completing the full MBTI. The self-scoring forms eliminated the Level II questions and, although utilitarian, created problems with the attention paid to scoring, and the security of the items in that they became easily accessible to those not authorised or trained in MBTI use and interpretation.

In the mid 1980s, factor analysis, a statistical method that doesn't appear favoured by Isabel Myers was used to create Forms J and K, both computer scored, the latter also creating a profile report.

The later Forms M and Q utilised Item Response Theory (IRT), based on computer scoring and providing profile reports, although the former was initially available in both template and self-scoring formats.

The emphasis on computer scoring has made Myers' omissions strategy problematic, particularly as IRT treats the item set as a whole. New items were developed for these forms, with suggestions of item redundancy i.e. a number of items were very similar in language.

Step I, Step II and Step III also became copyrighted names for various MBTI Forms. Essentially a marketing strategy, it (correctly) implies a greater level of complexity to each questionnaire. It may also suggest to some that knowing more about type involves this kind of linear investigation, situated in a corner of the field of personality measurement, rather than seeking out Jung's ideas and others' interpretations using other means – for example reading or listening to Jung himself, or Meier or von Franz..

Technological and cultural development has meant an emphasis on electronic production of profiles of one kind or another and some problematic issues in that it can be tempting for practitioners to believe the profile rather than the person and the person, perhaps some particular types, might believe the profile information rather than their self-knowledge and understanding.

The new MBTI Revision

At the recent APTI Conference in Miami Fl., the Research and Theory Symposium focused, somewhat narrowly (regarding theory and other research issues) and a little defensively (regarding non-MBTI questionnaires), on type measurement. An important series of presentations came from members of a team commissioned by Consulting Psychologists Press (CPP), the publisher of the MBTI, involved in a global research project aimed at replacing the Standard MBTI Form (Form M).

The project seeks to identify items that measure type across countries and languages. The scoring method decided on is called Latent Class Analysis, a category-focused process, and the inventor of the method, Jay Madgison is to conduct that part of the research.

230 items have been derived from Forms M and Q, and the European Step I and II, translated or adapted into 17 languages. The project is implemented online, starting with MBTI Complete. There are 22 countries involved. The US component is based on the 2010 Census and there are categories of gender, ethnicity, age, education, work, marital status and values. This is a different method to that used for Form M research, also based on a US Census (1990), but conducted by telephone. The project appears well-set up and organised as an attempt at comprehensive research in a particular context.

Some questions that arise are:

- There's no apparent return to C.G. Jung's ideas about type (more articles and observations available now than to Myers and Briggs) to refresh understanding of his constructs.
- Isabel Myers' method of selecting items appears discarded.
- The scoring method appears to have been selected before anything else. Although it is a category measuring method, no thought appears to have been given to whether type categories are different from the usual categories found in psychology.
- The efficacy of online-driven research and feedback processes. An article by Gosling et. al. (2004) suggests there are no real problems with this method of research, although issues such as the reliability of the feedback process inherent in MBTI Complete were not part of this study.
- Cultural differences in language and meaning appear problematic. What people are responding to when completing questionnaires is uncertain in non Anglo-American countries, from a Jungian perspective at any rate. G.E.R. Lloyd's work, particularly *Cognitive Variations* (2007) demonstrates the difficulties of presuming consistent meanings across cultures and time, suggesting that neither universalist ideas about human cognition (e.g. Jung, measurement in the context of this paper), nor the opposite in cultural relativism, are adequate explanations for how human beings go about their lives.

Learning – MBTI and Type

Over the past few years, there's been a trend for shorter courses for accreditation/qualifying/certifying in the MBTI, and everything else. Much of this is due to addressing the reality of lack of time for many people to attend and complete courses. Webinars and the like have also come to the fore.

What is now called Certification, arose out of a desire to identify appropriate programs for enabling people to purchase and use the MBTI, according to the judgement of the MBTI publisher. Beginning in 1985, a variety of programs were authorised. These courses, and the qualifying process itself, were a catalyst for "MBTI" becoming shorthand for "Type" as they became the main avenue for learning about Jung's idea, notwithstanding the focus was on a psychological instrument. A standardised course and manual has replaced longer courses with a variety of content.

Currently, you can attend a joint Step I/Step II certification that lasts 4 days, for instance, a situation which identifies a change in focus or purpose for these events from 15-20 years ago. I attended a Step II course in 1998, conducted by Naomi Quenk. It was two days in length. Naomi commented that it should be three, but that no-one would turn up.

Lumping Step I and II together appears a dubious educational strategy, particularly given the extra knowledge required to understand the components of the preferences as reported on a Step II profile, and its associations between type dynamics and development, to say nothing of keeping in mind the function of the MBTI as an Indicator, not a determinant. It was recommended in the past that those wanting to learn about Step II should go out and practice with Step I for some months, at least, before they engaged in further study with Step II.

Education in type and type instruments has, however, always been problematic. A friend of mine, educated in philosophy and an occasional attendee of type meetings, was genuinely surprised when I pointed out that being trained or taught in type essentially involved a 5-day course at one point, now 3 or 4 days, depending on how you interpret things. Learning was, and is, on the job after that. Of course, what is retained from any program or studies is always conjectural.

She was expecting a post-graduate semester unit, or something like that, which seems a reasonable benchmark. Type teaching is essentially a postgraduate activity, essentially at Masters' level, in my view.

The **MBTI Master Practitioner** program, which has its origins in an earlier Certification program managed by CAPT, is a complement to certification. If its origins are any guide it is, in part, an alternative to time-limited certification as opposed to the current approach of life long certification.

This process, as with its predecessor, appears limited to North America; its ability to be rolled out in other countries would be questionable in any case, from a resource basis. As an outsider (Australian) I don't qualify, so I can only rely on anecdote and past history for evaluating the program. It does appear limited to the MBTI itself, rather than any broader scope of other personality type ideas or theoretical examination.

From an educational point of view, the program sets up the question of what constitutes *mastery*, a construct that has its origins in medieval guilds and would imply (to me) a remarkable standard of practice and a depth and breadth of knowledge. Accordingly, it would be a rare and valued level of attainment.

What a person might expect from a master practitioner in the MBTI could also vary substantially: training expertise, or theoretical knowledge for instance.

The Mastery tag in NLP comes to mind as well and perhaps that was the stimulus for the label.

Type Research and Critique

Psychological Type as a theory of personality is dependent on research investigations and reports of many kinds. These range from studies of type distributions in various professions, workplaces and communities, case studies, using type in various projects to the reliability and validity of type questionnaires. All of these investigations require funding and approval of some sort, as well as the more political aspects of being published in respectable journals.

Historically, the MBTI hasn't been associated with major universities and research facilities; it's also not been considered as a research path conducive to a successful academic career.

Research using the MBTI has been problematic over the years for two main reasons:

The first is Isabel Myers' status as a non-psychologist and so unqualified in general. Given that all currently available MBTI Forms have been researched and produced by several well qualified professionals and psychometricians (i.e. PhD holders), this would seem to be redundant, at least at the logical level. However, statements discrediting the MBTI on the basis of its author's claimed professional and social position still occur.

The second is what appears to be a lack of any published psychometric research (for whatever reason) on currently available MBTI Forms. This could be a commercial-in-confidence issue, or simply disinterest on the behalf of mainstream psychometrics. Certainly the psychometric aspects of any MBTI form don't appear to have reached key psychological journals for several years, when the same journals published articles relating to Forms F, G and K in the past. In Australia this is a period of 20 years. It's rare to see research using Forms M and Q and I can't recall seeing published psychometric assessments for these forms.

Psychological type also seems to be a field where many of its critics (and some of its proponents) seem not to attend to issues of fact, whether theoretically based, or the name of a person, or title of a book. There also seems to be little understanding of type as an interpretive, non-measurement idea. Researchers can act as if the MBTI must, by definition, contain aspects of theory such as consciousness (Barbuto 1997) or type dynamics (e.g. Wilde 2012; Reynierse 2009) when nothing is said about these constructs by either the MBTI's author, or in formal publications such as MBTI Manuals (see Geyer 2013)

Outside the quantifiable world of measurement there's really no meaningful research on type dynamics and development i.e. whether there are such constructs and how and why they may be expressed or activated. This may be because such an investigation requires mixed methods research, such as in Dario Nardi's *Neuroscience of Personality* (2009) and a qualitative, perhaps clinical approach. Nardi's research doesn't involve the MBTI, but his own questionnaire.

Other Type Questionnaires

From an historical perspective, the MBTI stands at a fulcrum on measurement development with respect to C.G.Jung's Psychological Types. Examining the 20 or so years before its development commenced uncovers a wide range of discussions about Jung's typology, in particular how to measure it (Geyer 2012). This discussion mostly revolved around Extra/overversion and Introversion. Jung's peers and contemporaries struggled with the functions, other than (for a few) in a therapeutic setting.

Isabel Myers began the MBTI after investigating the *Humm-Wadsworth Temperament Scale*, a questionnaire still in use, having had many revisions over time. Gray and Wheelwright's *Jungian Type Survey* was also researched around the same time as the MBTI, with several articles published in the 1940s but without the apparent knowledge of Isabel Myers.

The MBTI, though, is the direct stimulus for the many type questionnaires that have appeared in the past few decades, particularly on the internet. These instruments have been of variable quality. The Humanmetrics questionnaire is routinely confused with the MBTI, notwithstanding its obvious differences in items and scoring method, to say nothing of a disclaimer on its webpage.

This activity, including that from otherwise respectable sources, demonstrates that it's possible to claim reliability and validity and for respondents to receive an acceptable result without attending to aspects of theory e.g. identifying emotion with Feeling.

In the late 1970s, David Keirse developed his Temperament Sorter in order to get his book published. It has been used successfully since then as an MBTI alternative. There's also been the Hogan and Champagne questionnaire and TMS, an amalgamation of MBTI ideas and Belbin's team roles.

There are a number of type instruments worldwide: one in Europe claims to outsell the MBTI. The claimed business practices of the MBTI publisher and distributors appear to have been part of the reason why alternative type measurements have flourished in recent years, apart from the natural desire of researchers to develop their own questionnaire, for their own purposes and from their own perspective.

As examples, the Majors and the Golden questionnaires have been developed by authors who have worked on the MBTI at a high level and in much depth, developing their own instruments to suit their own aims and interests with different items and scoring methods.

How these and other questionnaires impact on the MBTI as a type identifier for the public at large remains to be seen. Business strategies, their efficacy and appropriateness, will also play a part, although of course this has nothing to do with the quality of any questionnaire or product.

The Art of Science

A feature of measurement of any kind is the possibility that you can measure things that don't exist. By that I mean that constructs like IQ or EI or any type construct are invented – they don't have to exist in the real world. That doesn't mean that these constructs don't have utility or relevance, simply that their identification by questionnaire can be an artifact of the questionnaire itself. Laboratory research has the same kind of problem, as do training environments, the use of psychology students or any other body of undergraduates for research and so on.

C.G. Jung understood this aspect of his categories. Isabel Myers thought types were real, although in what way wasn't specified. Empirically, it could be for her that people of a particular type tended to consistently act in ways different to those of another type. At any rate, she never considered her questionnaire as standalone, making it problematic from a particular scientific point of view. Mandatory feedback sessions that are part of type ethics follow from this perspective, in its own way a mixed methods practice, or combining science and art.

Scientific Developments

Since I am not a behaviourist, I take leave to suppose that you are still very far from the real man when you observe only his behaviour.

I regard behaviour as a mere husk that conceals the living substance within.

C.G.Jung

One of the criticisms of the idea of types, as well as any associated measurement, is that all of it is just an old idea, which has been displaced by what's current and new. Usually, this opinion is presented without any supporting argument, other than that some new idea has just been experienced, or preferred, perhaps not evaluated.

However, this doesn't mean that the idea of type being bypassed shouldn't be examined, albeit at a distance from marketing strategies or ill-constructed notions of "generations", currently in favour, as labels that enable the avoidance of reflection, observation and deeper investigation.

A paradox here is that Jung's formulation is more easily associated with the "new" science (now 100 years old) than the prevailing notion of observable traits and their reduction, which is the acceptable focus of science. The scientist Rupert Sheldrake has suggested over many years that investigation of certain phenomena require appropriate research strategies that differ radically from the so-called "scientific method" (e.g. Sheldrake 2012). These ideas are certainly compatible with the constructs suggested by Jung. The reality is that it's a lot easier and simpler to productively think in traits.

Type approaches are more complex and require a more consistent expression than what is currently the case. Type discourse can be its own enemy with regard to credibility.

Neuroscientific research is both a challenge and opportunity for a typological perspective. It's a challenge because researchers in this field rarely have a working model of personality other than a machine. The use of a thinking and emotion dichotomy is a challenge to Jung's notions of thinking and feeling, which has never entered public discourse as extraversion-introversion, albeit in a variety of forms, has managed. Regarding the latter, current research suggests that extraversion-introversion, however understood, is a cross-species attribute (e.g. Aron 2004). This sets up the possibility of investigating Jung's idea of psychological consciousness, including archetypes.

In the past, models of the brain privileging basic functions have been presented by various type thinkers. These models, as with others, made excessive claims about hemisphericity, as well as the significance of the functions. The literal equivalence of brain activity with personality may be too reductive, particularly as psychological content isn't accessed. The use of mixed methods research with an overt personality model as interpretation may be the most appropriate approach.

Neuroscience is also a challenge to type theory, because it offers the possibility of changing people's "personality" (so described), or finding out to a sufficient (i.e. meaningful) extent about aspects of personality. It may be preferable to science and society for people to be identified by syndromes e.g. Aspergers, instead of what might be, in some cases, a variant of introversion and thinking. This is an old idea of pathologies returning to prominence.

The breadth of "normal" behaviour presumed by type may disappear underneath an avalanche of other, perhaps more discriminatory, labels. A similar prospect is offered by gene research, which can also be overly reductive, whilst providing some insights. The negative aspects of the eugenics movement of the last century may surface again, regarding particular differences.

Cultural Considerations

The disappearance of type may also occur for cultural reasons.

As mentioned earlier, measurement is a strategy of a particular culture. In that sense it has limited meaning, unless western modes of organisation – corporatism, for instance, are being utilised. Cultural differences regarding human nature are also important.

Measurement also carries for many the vestiges of the colonialist and imperialist past, with statistical methods being used to identify and categorise various ethnic groupings, to their detriment. This is significant in international politics, with invented national boundaries, clashes between now defined ethnic groups and so on (see Geyer 2011)

Postmodern ideas, even though popular in contemporary Jungian thought, can deny the existence of the kind of self posited by Jung, proposing a life of mediated relationships, with no fixed point of focus or origin.

Some of the flexibility required by some people and institutions implies the necessity of avoiding the development of a personality in Jungian terms altogether, where naive expression and individual freedom are preferred, or even unconscious obedience to organisational aims, corporate or otherwise. Certain elements of team-building can establish the latter as something necessary.

Are types then a cultural artifact of late modernity and will scientific research and adaptation change what appears to be a natural process, or even eliminate it?

Theory/Practice

One of the curiosities of working with type is emphasis on use rather than theoretical investigation or interpretation. This can mean that fundamental principles are ignored, or not even investigated in favour of behaviour-oriented methods.

It can also mean that the original nature and purpose of a type instrument is misidentified with aspects of type theory that are not part of its measurement strategy e.g. type dynamics, development. It can also mean that more complex models of type are accepted without requisite discussion and debate because their concretised format is deemed suitable for training rooms and similar venues.

Much of this has to do with the way such ideas are interpreted and adapted.

It may also be that the practice of developing and using questionnaires of any kind will disappear as more is known about people, or it may simply fall into disuse.

Observations

In examining the past, present and future of type and the MBTI, I thought it was necessary to investigate the facts and realities of the present and the past and not to mislead by being optimistic without cause. My research and experience tells me that these are challenging times for type, as is the case for many other ideas that have been around for a while.

There's no doubt, for me, that using type as an observational and therapeutic tool will continue to be personally useful in the future. In that respect, counselling and coaching sessions of any kind are likely to be a useful area for type use.

But I wonder how useful others might find it over time, particularly in this period where psychological development and self-awareness of a particular kind seem to be less of interest. As mentioned earlier, personality and behaviour is increasingly seen as situational, flexible, to an extent that seems incompatible with type theory.

The various Associations for Psychological Type were essentially founded because of the MBTI. Therefore, some questions about the MBTI are about the policies and intentions of its publisher and distributors, rather than psychological type as an idea, or as practice for that matter. The business and commercial aspects of type should not be underestimated. Ultimately you don't need a questionnaire of any kind to use type or inform others, but it helps. These important aspects determine what you have available to you, how you can use it and what it will cost.

My recent experiences have been that the situational aspects of life tend to override other personality considerations for many, even if they find type interesting. For others, particularly younger people, it seems to be harder to identify themselves with a type category, regardless of awareness or education. To be fair, I rarely teach type in the usual settings for type practitioners, and so my experience may not be the experience of many others. Ideally and somewhat impractically, I like to teach type for itself, and to help people become themselves, as many do, in what I understand of the Jungian sense at least,

In this respect, I've provided a situational perspective on where type and the MBTI might be now, and presented some prospects for an unknown future.

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