

Jungian Theory of Psychological Type Augments the Translating of Social Work Values into Social Work Practice Behaviors

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to link psychological type theory and constructs with a key value of the social work profession, respecting the dignity and worth of the individual. In addition it will demonstrate how an understanding and application of Jungian psychological type theory helps augment and translate this core social work value into practice principles. After discussing definitions and the core social work value of respecting the innate dignity and worth of the individual in historical context, the author will explore several principles that are derived from this core value and examine them through the theoretical lens of psychological type.

Key Words: dignity and worth, Carl Jung, Psychological Type theory, MBTI, social work practice

1. Introduction

People are unpredictable but in somewhat predictable ways. They often demonstrate thematic ways of behaving in both acting and reacting in their environmental contexts, such as in their families, schools, or work. People can all be of

the same religion, the same race, the same generation, and have the same city of birth and even the same eye color. But they differ in striking and predictable ways with respect to the people they love, the way they love them, their emotional range, their sources of stress and typical coping

mechanisms, their way of resolving conflicts, their susceptibility to certain illnesses, their imagination, their self-esteem, their appetites, plus their career interests, work styles, and motivations, among other identifiable differences (Oldham & Morris, 1990, p. 12).

Understanding “typical,” predictable, “thematic ways” of client behavior through an understanding of Jungian type/temperament theory can help social workers translate the core social work value of respecting the dignity and worth of individuals within a caring and just democratic society, and the attitudes and principles that stem from them, into competent practice behaviors with their

clients through the constructive use of predictable differences. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to explore other specific practice issues with clients such as specific problems, needs, and other diversity issues besides the diversity of psychological type, including age and developmental stage, gender, race and ethnicity, culture, spirituality, and geography.

Carl Jung (1923) is given the primary credit by psychological type and temperament theorists for developing the theory of psychological types. He espoused a particular theory of human behavior and emphasized that “besides the many individual differences in human psychology there are also typical differences” (p. 3). It is upon his theory of “common, uncommon needs” that a number of other scholars have built and made elaborations with implications and applications in various contexts.

Jungian psychological type theory with practical applications derived from his theory are embraced by many, but significantly by Isabel Myers (1987), Mary McCaulley (1981), and Judith Provost (1992) and others using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a non-clinical personality test based upon his theory.

A number of social work scholars have referred to psychological type or temperament in their analysis of social work practice (Compton & Galloway, 1986; Keith-Lucas, 1994; McMahon, 1991; Scheafor & Horejsi, 2008). Others (Chess & Thomas, 1986; Jung, 1923; Keirsey & Bates, 1978; Kramer, 1993; McCaulley, 1981; Myers, 1987; Oldham & Morris, 1990; Provost, 1992) have written about psychological type and temperament in psychological and psycho-social interventions. However, no effort toward the integration of type and temperament theory with social work practice values has been attempted.

2. Definitions

According to Tieger and Barron-Tieger (1995) David Keirsey and Marlyn Bates became intrigued with the relationship between psychological type and temperament. Keirsey and Bates (1978) assert that personality type, temperament, psychological type and character are four different words meaning essentially the same thing. Others differ and differentiate the terms to some degree.

Peter Kramer (1993) indicates that one’s neural chemistry [biology] is “inevitably modified by development, environment, life events, and now by discrete medicine” (p.149). Therefore, nature and nurture are always in interaction. To not take both into account is to be bifurcated and less than scientific or professional and less than artistic and creative. Kramer says that the “usage of the terms ‘temperament’ (nature), ‘character’ (nurture), and ‘personality’ (both) was employed by David Reisman in *The Lonely Crowd...* [in 1950] and before that in psychiatry by Eric Fromm (p. 340).”

McMahon (1990) defines endowment as “the natural gifts, talents, and abilities that a person has at birth” and includes in this definition “genetic traits and characteristics along with the innate mental, physical, and cognitive abilities of a person” (p. 64). Also, in contemporary psychiatric research, Oldham & Morris (1990) discuss the biological and genetic influence in temperament and personality style.

This author agrees with Keirsey and Bates, Kramer, Fromm, Oldham and Morris, and McMahon and uses the terms psychological type, temperament, endowment, personality type, and personality style interchangeably and refer to “the biological underpinnings of personality even if the biology has been shaped or altered by [environmental]

circumstance” (Kramer, 1993, p. 149). The term “character” I will differentiate and assume to mean “the combined moral or ethical structure of a person or group.” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1991, p. 259) The term character would then have a significant environmental, cultural and moral determinant.

3. Psychological Type Theory Summary

The best synopses of Jung’s theory of psychological type, as well as practical applications of the theory, came from Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs as they developed the now popular non-clinical personality test called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (M.B.T.I.). The forced choice preference indicator evaluates first, the preferred way that people focus their attention and the ways they are energized, either extraversion or introversion; second, the preferred way people like to take in information when they are paying attention, either sensing, using their five senses to observe the actual, or intuition, using a sixth creative sense to notice patterns, relationships and possibilities; third, the preferred way people like to make decisions, either thinking by using a logical, cause-effect, and objective approach, or feeling by taking a person-centered and value oriented approach; and fourth, the preferred life styles of people as they are oriented to their environments, either judging by living in a planned, organized way, or perception by living in a flexible and spontaneous way.

The problem-solving model includes gathering facts, considering possibilities, weighing the pros and cons and reflecting upon values and commitments. Problem solving and decision making is summarized succinctly by Isabel Myers in Introduction to Type. She says, “To improve your ability to solve problems and make decisions, you need to make full use of

your perception (sensing and intuition) and judgment (thinking and feeling) (p. 30).” Then one will have considered “realities, possibilities, consequences, and human values (p.30).”

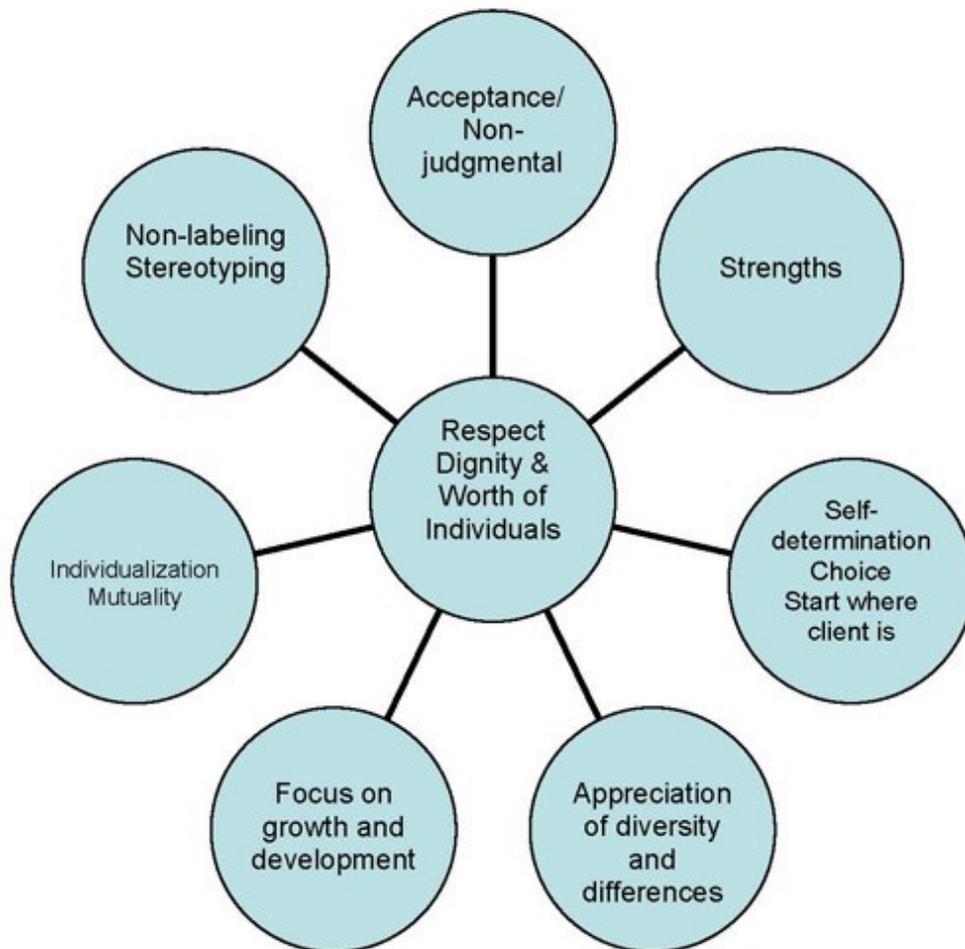
Interventions are best planned after the competent exercise of sensing and intuition in the data collecting phase of social work practice and utilizing thinking and feeling in the assessment and planning stage of practice.

4. Psychological Type Theory and Key Social Work Values and Principles

Psychological type theory helps translate the core social work values in practice. Respect for the dignity and worth of people in a just and caring, democratic society are two interrelated value premises of the American social work profession and are the basis upon which other key social work practice attitudes, principles, and practice behaviors emanate. They include the following:

- respect for the right of client self-determination, the need to individualize and “start where the client is” in mutual worker/client decision making
- respect for diversity and the need to demonstrate acceptance and a non-judgmental attitude toward clients
- adopt a strengths perspective and assume a non-labeling and non-stereotyping attitude toward clients

The graphic below depicts the values, attitudes, and core social work principles that flow from the core social work value, namely, respecting the innate dignity and worth of the individual:



4.1 Respect for the Innate Dignity and Worth of the Individual

The respect for the innate dignity and worth of the individual, as noted earlier, has been emphasized historically in social work. Type theory emphasizes the value of all psychological types and need for diverse people with different gifts to pursue happiness in a caring and just, democratic society. Each individual that plays out well their unique parts will then manifest their unique purposes in and contributions to society. One of the

main positive properties of the theory and practical applications of MBTI is that clients focus on their strengths and potential development that give them an appreciation of their own worth and dignity. Therefore, clients receive hope and gain motivation for the fulfillment of their rights to life (capacity growth and development), liberty (exercising self-determination), and the pursuit of happiness (creating or locating opportunities).

If the clients' personality types and their implications are not recognized by clients or

social workers during the initial engagement with clients there may be unintended negative consequences. What are initially seen in the presenting problems of clients may be concerns related to undeveloped potential. The concerns may be caused by a poor fit within the environment. The concerns may be caused by clients being overwhelmed by persistent and sustaining traumatic events to which any human being would succumb. Social workers at the initial point of contact with clients are often seeing clients in their weakest and most vulnerable states of being. Motivation and hope for both the client and social worker can come in part from knowledge of a client's psychological type potential or strengths as early as possible in the engagement, data collection and assessment phases with clients.

4.2 Respect for the Right of Client Self Determination, the Need to Individualize and "Start Where the Client Is" in Mutual Worker/Client Decision-Making

Social work has long espoused the primacy of the concept of the right of client self determination. Typing ultimately is an assessment that is determined by the client, not the social worker. Education, information, and feedback communication with and from the social worker is appropriate and needed, but in the final analysis, the client decides and acts upon any new insights and ideas derived from interaction with the social worker based upon type theory. In order for clients to communicate and tell their own stories in their own way, there must be an appreciation of individual psychological type and temperamental ways of expression. The social work maxim of "starting where the client is" becomes better actualized by allowing and encouraging the client to relate to the social worker concerning their situation uniquely according to their own individual psycho-

social communication style. Individualization is enhanced through a strengths perspective stance which combats the potential negative labeling of clients.

For example, if a client was primarily an extrovert, the social worker could possibly demonstrate respect for the client in the engagement phase and throughout the helping and problem-solving process by the following:

1. Attempt to generate and allow for active interaction with the client because extroverts would often need to talk problems out and get verbal feedback from the social worker.
2. Take a more introverted stance with the client by being an interested active listener.
3. Recognize and understand that extroverts tend to look outward (externalization) into their environments for problems and causes before reflection (internalization) and focusing upon the inward.

Conversely, if a client was primarily an introvert, the social worker could demonstrate respect for the client by the following:

1. Allow for long pauses, especially when asking the client questions, as introverts tend to process information and formulate what they may want to say and discuss.
2. Do not force introverts to share their thoughts and feelings before they are ready.
3. Allow introverts to ask questions to gain a better understanding of their concerns and situation before attempting a change in their behavior.

4.3 Respect for Diversity and the Need to Demonstrate Acceptance and a Non-Judgmental Attitude Toward Clients

The theory couches differentness and diversity as positives, focusing on strengths and uniqueness of individuals, and is very affirming of those gifts. The MBTI's nonjudgmental quality is a desirable feature of the instrument and facilitates the sharing of results with the client as client and worker together seek type development possibilities. As strengths become a focus, psychological type development can be emphasized. Psychological type development provides confidence and self direction. A greater appreciation for the aspects of one's life that come easily and those that are difficult also brings an appreciation and respect for individuals of different types whose strengths and struggles are different from one's own.

For example, if a social worker were working with a male sensing client and female intuitive client as a couple who were trying to learn to understand and better communicate with one another in their mutual problem-solving efforts around issues such as finances, child rearing, and use of leisure time, the social worker could demonstrate respect for each client's preference strengths by the following:

1. Asking the male sensing client to describe the current existing situation and relevant facts.
2. Use concrete examples with the sensing client to increase better understanding of communications.
3. Allow the sensing client to describe events with many circumstantial details without interruption.

Conversely, the social worker could demonstrate respect for the female intuitive

client in the above example by the following:

1. Recognize that the female intuitive will grasp generalities somewhat readily.
2. Use analogies with the intuitive client to increase better understanding of communications.
3. Recognize that the intuitive client would tend to understand and appreciate relationships between things, people, and concepts and have a holistic conscientiousness.

In working with this couple the social worker could focus on the relative strengths of each person's preferences that were assets in their mutual problem-solving efforts with their various issues. The sensing and intuitive couple could learn from each other's strengths and further their own preference development in areas that were not their preference.

4.4 Adopt a Strengths Perspective and Assume a Non-labeling and Non-stereotyping Attitude Toward Clients

Social work practitioners can well integrate psychological type knowledge in work with their clients by assuming and emphasizing a strengths perspective. Dennis Saleebey (1997) in his book addressing the strengths perspective in social work practice, says that this emphasis on strengths "has been part of social work lore...for decades, but...has rarely been extended and articulated in terms of philosophy, principle, and practice" (p. 15). He stresses to the practitioner the importance of "moving away from a deficit approach to one emphasizing the resources and resourcefulness of clients (p.15)." Although he said the strengths perspective is not a "model...paradigm...or a theory" at the time of his writing, I suggest that Jungian social work interventions can be theoretically

oriented on just such a strengths perspective and give “guidance to the student or worker about what the obligations and methods of such an orientation might be” (Saleebey, 1997, p.14). Thus, type theory helps in the search for the health and well-being, strengths, and assets of a person (in their environment) that can be utilized in the problem-solving process, rather than staying focused on deficits and negative labeling with consequent possible pitfalls. Looking for health and well-being, “normalcy,” strengths, assets, potentials, development, maturation, etc. within mental illness has been and is a hallmark of the social work profession.

Jungian psychological type theory is congruent with the strengths perspective of social work practice as both embrace a largely positive and hopeful view of human potential. This strengths perspective mitigates, or at least mediates, a more negative view of human nature that is seen as basically flawed and combats possible negative outcomes when people are negatively labeled. Myers & McCaulley (1985) observe that what counselors appreciate most about the theory is that “it gives clients a sense of worth and dignity about their own qualities” (p. 63). They assert that when clients find out about their own type, it becomes a “releasing experience, not a restricting one” (p. 63). For instance, when we discuss the right of client self-determination and the need to focus as much, if not more, on an individual’s or a family’s strengths, as well as weaknesses or problems, we actualize this basic value premise.

Psychological type “order”, strengths, and assets assessments focus on “ease” rather than “disease” and “disorder” and on goodness of fit” with the client’s environment. “When external influences cause falsification of type [meaning consistently relating and behaving in ways that are very untrue and unnatural to

one’s true self or psychological type], emotional difficulties will follow” (Myers & McCaulley, p. 64). They continue by saying “this is particularly important in counseling, because a goal of treatment [or intervention] is to identify and strengthen the inherent preferences, not to continue to the falsification process” (p. 64).

For example, when planning and performing interventions with a client who has a judging preference, social workers could consider the following:

1. Recognize that judging clients may find it relatively easier to make modifications and adaptations in their own behavior rather than become innovative and creative.
2. Understand that judging clients may need assistance in “planning” to be flexible.
3. Appreciate that judging clients may need to start with decisions that have been made, or are likely to be made, before suggesting other alternative decisions that could be made.

Conversely, when interventions are planned and performed with clients with a perceptive preference, social workers could consider the following:

1. Recognize that perceptive clients would tend to prefer interventions that focus more on their being understood rather than being directed.
2. Understand that perceptive clients may need help in partializing and focusing on one task or a few tasks at a time rather than trying to start and complete too many tasks.

3. Appreciate that perceptive clients may need to make choices and do need deadlines for task completion.

A final example comes from the author's direct social work practice experience with families and children. After gathering initial data regarding the parents' or families' concerns, this author would help guide family members (usually the parents if the initial concerns were for small children) to focus on psychological type strengths. For a child that had a thinking preference strength, an approach to discipline with that child that was direct, objective, clear and communicated logical consequences of the child's behavior could be beneficial. For a child with a feeling preference strength, the discipline approach might be different. Pointing out the effect of choices on people, giving praise and encouragement and allowing the child to express his or her feelings openly could be beneficial. Naturally both of the suggested approaches could work with either child in a given situation, but the relative merits of individualized approaches with children with different preferences had positive outcomes in the author's practice.

5. Summary and Conclusions

Social workers need to reference a number of diversity variables in their assessments and interventions. This practice will maximize the individualization of a client's self-determination and actualize a core historical social work value – to respect the dignity and worth of individuals.

This article has focused on Jungian psychological type theory as a diversity variable. Jungian theory was briefly explained, and examples of how the theory can be implemented into social work practice were

provided.

The literature review revealed that a number of scholars from other fields and professions, as well as scholars from social work, have embraced psychological type theory as part of their analyses of social work practice. However, none have explained the theory as a way of actualizing the value of respecting the dignity and worth of individuals.

Psychological type information should be used in conjunction with other theoretical and assessment approaches. Type theory cannot tell someone certain things about themselves. It cannot indicate specific skills and level of competency in the skills in social role functioning at work, home and the community. Any theory, knowledge, information, technique, or skill can be misunderstood, mistimed, misused and misapplied. This phenomenon is no less likely with Jungian psychological type theory. Therefore, a degree of caution should be exercised by social workers when using and applying Jung's theory in their work with clients.

Jungian theory is not a panacea for all the problems of people or for difficulties that social workers encounter with people, but it is certainly a powerful and useful tool that can be applied appropriately in a myriad of individualized ways consistent with historic social work values and principles. An advantage to using the "labels" suggested here is that they are more benign, emphasize strengths, and suggest interventions that give hope regarding development, growth, and fulfillment. Even in the most hopeless of situations there will be suggested the possibility of making "active and willing" choices (Keith-Lucas, 1994) at the most fundamental level - the level of the spirit and in one's attitude toward health and growth - and taking the necessary steps to begin to maximize psychological type potential in spite

of truly difficult, even harsh realities.

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