
Isabel Briggs Myers and Type Development

by Katharine Myers

Katharine Downing Myers, daughter-in-law of Isabel Briggs Myers and co-owner of the MBTI, has been involved with the MBTI in her personal and professional life since 1942. Her activities in the type community include: first President of APT; co-author of the Type Resources program; and member of the original design team and steering committee for APT's qualifying training program, as well as serving on the original faculty of the program.

Katharine also helped develop a program to explore the mid-life passage of the 16 MBTI types.

She has been a teacher/counselor for pre-schoolers through adult populations and an MBTI consultant, primarily in schools and non-profit organizations. Currently, she is helping develop a program that uses type development for the 60+ years; using the EAR/TDI in developmental courses; and involved in the cross-cultural application and international development of psychological type and the MBTI.

I have looked at the world from the standpoint of type for more than fifty years and have found the experience constantly rewarding.

Myers, Gifts Differing

In *Gifts Differing* (1980, 1990), Isabel Myers gave us a gift — an elegant summary of her life's thinking about and experience with psychological type, the result of more than 50 years of studying Carl G. Jung's *Psychological Types* and 40 years of popularizing his ideas through the MBTI. Isabel would be very surprised to hear people talking about Jung's theory and Myers' theory. She believed Jung had developed the main structure but left it to others to complete and fill in the details, which she thought she was doing. However, more than she realized, she developed her own

views which not only extended Jung's ideas but also moved at some points in different directions. I want to note what she added to Jung's theory of type development in *Gifts* and also share with you her reflections on the subject shortly before she died, thoughts which never made it into print.

Balance from the dominant and auxiliary

In *Gifts*, Isabel defined "the essence of type development" very simply as "the development of perception and judgment and of appropriate ways to use them" (p. 175). Her extension of Jung's theory in this area came from her emphasis on **balance** and on the **complementary**

dominant, but they typically have held that the 2nd function is used in the **same attitude** as the dominant. Briggs and Myers, on the other hand, interpreted Jung's statement that the auxiliary is different "in every respect" to mean that it was customarily used in the **opposite attitude** to that of the dominant.

This is an important interpretation of Jung's theory: as Myers points out in *Gifts*, this picture of a well-developed type provides for **balance** — not only between perception and judgment but also between dealing with the inner and outer worlds. It's a crucial addition to our understanding of how effective people actually function.

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nature of the preferences, especially in explaining the dominant and auxiliary.

Jung's book focused primarily on extraversion and introversion and on describing each of the eight dominants (extraverted sensing, introverted sensing, etc.). He discussed the auxiliary in only one short section of *Psychological Types*, where he said it was "in every respect different from the nature of the primary [dominant] function" (para. 669). In this section, Jung makes it clear that, if the dominant is a judging function, the auxiliary will be a perceiving function, and vice versa.

The Jungian community has used this idea of the auxiliary as one of the other function pair from the

Myers' reflections in 1979

In 1979, I took a year's leave of absence in order to be available to Isabel Myers as her health deteriorated. Eventually, she put away her work on *Gifts Differing* and we spent our time together reminiscing and talking about type. We taped some of these conversations, but one day the conversation turned to type dynamics and development, and I felt it was important to record what she said in writing. The following are from my notes of that conversation.

Isabel talked about her differences with the Jungians, emphasizing her idea of the balancing role of the auxiliary. It was not only her interpretation of Jung that led her to believe the auxiliary was used in

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the opposite attitude. With a flash of humor, she said:

As an introvert, I could not accept that my first three functions were all introverted and that all I show to the world is my inferior!

She thought there was a reasonable explanation for why the Jungians did not interpret the attitude of the auxiliary in the way she did:

The dominant process expects and needs help from the auxiliary in *whatever the dominant wants to do*. If the dominant is *unusually* focused on the inner world, it will pull the auxiliary in to help; if on the outer world, it will pull the auxiliary outward.

Because of their intense involvement with the unconscious, many Jungians tend to pull their own auxiliary inward; so it would be natural for them to find the auxiliary in the same attitude as the dominant in themselves and to assume that's the way it is supposed to be in everyone.

She went on to say:

I am proposing no law in my model. The outcome in any case is the result of the wishes, needs, and amount of coercion exercised by the dominant, and also the demands of life situations.

Therefore, the totality of a person's type is more flexible than we have supposed, in that one's own preferences and life circumstances may create a need for something outside the theoretical pattern (whichever one you hold) so that all of us theoreticians will be right part of the time.

At this point, Isabel mentioned the story of the five blind men and the elephant, pointing out that the picture any particular theoretician has is based on his or her limited experience. She summarized by saying that, though she thought her

model was a correct interpretation of Jung and a positive picture of good type development, people don't necessarily develop according to the theoretical pattern. As always, her respect for individual uniqueness outweighed her love of theory.

The attitude of the tertiary

We also discussed a question that is now of some interest in the type community — the attitude of the tertiary function. This started with Isabel recalling an incident at the first international type conference in 1975, when Harold Grant presented his picture of type development. He presented a development model with an alternating pattern in attitudes: dominant E, auxiliary I, tertiary E, fourth I; or dominant I, auxiliary E, tertiary I, fourth E. Isabel listened with great interest and afterwards asked him, "Harold, where do you get that ordering?" to which Grant replied, "Why, of course, from you." She responded in some bewilderment that, "No, I always assumed that the tertiary would be in the same attitude as the auxiliary and fourth functions." In our conversation in 1979, Isabel

sure on it from the auxiliary is less than the pressure on the inferior from the dominant, it probably moves back and forth between extraverted and introverted more easily.

Type development — perspective of 50 years

Myers concluded the conversation with this observation about development of the non-preferred functions:

It is my private theory, and has been for a long time, that people are not nearly as shut off from the 3rd and 4th processes as some people would have you think. I believe that the key to practical use of the 3rd and 4th functions is to voluntarily shut off the 1st and 2nd for a bit when dealing with a problem, and listen to what the others can contribute **in the service of the dominant**.

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reflected on this, realizing that Jung had not been clear in this area and that she hadn't been either. As she said:

Well, I guess I had never paid much attention to the tertiary. I suppose that because the pres-

What can we learn from Isabel's "heresies"?

First, these conversations reminded me of the richness of looking at the world using the lens of type — especially the depth of knowledge that comes from studying type

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dynamics and development. Isabel was still learning, still developing her ideas, at the age of 80, after 50 years of study, and that has continued to be a model for me.

Her specific thoughts in these conversations also raise another issue that I think we need to integrate into our work in type development: each person's development must be looked at individually, rather than trying to impose the theory or a model of "good type development." I am reminded of another occasion, when Isabel commented on Chapter 19 in *Gifts Differing*. In that final chapter, written a number of years after the rest of the book, she said the following about type development:

Ten years ago I was less confident. Had this book been published then, it . . . might have given the impression that type development runs on a time table and must be achieved by a particular age or not at all. I do not think now that that is true. Good type development can be achieved at any age by anyone who cares to understand his or her own gifts and the appropriate use of those gifts.

Whatever stage people have reached, a clear understanding of the basics of type development will help them go on from there (p. 199).

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I believe Isabel's insight leads us to approach questions of type development by honoring the individual and his or her experience. If a particular structure is working and there is a reason for an out of pattern behavior, I think

we should leave it alone. If clients believe their "out of pattern" development is causing problems, then we can work with them to change areas they want to change.

Both Jung and Myers demonstrated enormous respect for the individual, even while searching for patterns common to all. Both saw many problems as developmental issues that awareness of type could assist, and both made a clear distinction between those and neurotic or pathological behavior. Deviations from expected patterns and innate preferences can be good adaptive behavior or they can be causing problems and strain to the individual; we cannot know until the person in question tells us. Jung and Myers certainly agreed that there is effective and ineffective type development; however, it is well to remember that negative judgments by observers could be the result of personal or cultural bias, and may not accurately indicate the individual's experience.

My conclusions from my own work, as well as these "conversations with Isabel" is that we need to approach type development with the same value system we use in helping people learn about their psychological type preferences: with respect for the individual and for differences. It is simple to say and much harder to do, but I believe this perspective will serve us well as we explore and learn about development.

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Myers on Type Development
Good type development, therefore, demands two conditions:

- first, adequate but by no means equal development of a judging process and a perceptive process, one of which predominates; and
- second, adequate but by no means equal facility in using both the extraverted and introverted attitudes, with one predominating. . . .

The need for such supplementing is obvious. Perception without judgment is spineless; judgment with no perception is blind. Introversion lacking any extraversion is impractical; extraversion with no introversion is superficial.

Isabel B. Myers
Gifts Differing (1980, 1990), p. 182