

Running head: WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS, COUPLES, AND FAMILIES

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Can Be Easier . . . a Lot Easier!

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The path of discovery that led to this conclusion began over seven years ago on a hunch involving work with couples. I was scanning a colleague's collection of books on psychology one day when a title caught my eye . . . *Please Understand Me; Character and Temperament Types*.¹ I had been in practice for over 20 years by then and still had not found a satisfactory way to help couples resolve their problems. I am not talking about couples with convoluting variables; I am talking about normal couples² that had not been able to accommodate their differences in preference on certain issues. Each believed his or her preference was right and hoped I would agree. They believed differences had to come from a lack of understanding or an act of intention by their significant other to get their own way. Someone had to be wrong and each was determined he or she was not going to be the one. These debates were at best unpleasant and seemed driven by a sense of urgency way out of proportion to the issues at hand. It was as if their very sense-of-self was at stake. Both seemed to consider compromise a partial self-abandonment and were determined, if possible, to avoid it.

I rarely felt their issues were a question of right or wrong. Both usually had a solid rationale behind their positions. The real culprit seemed to be genuine differences in preference and priority, but I had no way to prove this and they were seldom open to considering it. I wondered if *Please Understand Me* had information that might be of help.

David Keirsey, a psychologist and the primary author of *Please Understand Me*, identifies four core drives for meaning he believes are innate to human beings. He calls these drives *temperaments*. They are not behaviors; they are explanations for what drives behavior, what causes one child to find meaning and purpose in Science and another in English or History. Keirsey saw a connection between his four temperaments and the 16 personality profiles in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). He believed a combination of the two provided a more comprehensive explanation for individual differences in human behavior (personality) than the MBTI alone.³ In *Please Understand Me*, Keirsey explains how this works. Detailed information on each of the possible temperament/personality combinations is included. No value judgments are connected with these profiles. They are collections of information, accumulated through observation, research, and intuition, on behaviors felt to be natural and normal for each of the preferences profiles.

Please Understand Me includes a questionnaire for use in identifying your profile. The description of unique behaviors considered normal for individuals with my preferences was surprisingly accurate. A number of friends and colleagues took the test to help me determine if it could replicate these results on a regular basis. Their profiles were also accurate, consistently identifying characteristics and traits I knew to be unique to each.

At this point, I was ready to see if this tool could help couples understand when their differences were natural and not contrived. The first couple with whom I used the questionnaire filled it in before I met with them. They were both career professionals and had two young children. Their parents were from India, but my

clients were born in the United States. Her parents lived nearby. He felt her mother was inappropriately intrusive and the primary cause of their problems. She felt otherwise, and he had recently moved out. They had come to see me as a last resort.

I began this couple's first session by giving them very basic feedback on their profiles, noting areas where natural and normal differences in preference and priority could lead to conflicts. The impact was immediate and beyond anything I could have imagined. First, they agreed the profile descriptions were accurate for them both. Much to my surprise, before they had even disclosed them to me, my explanation of potential 'hot spots' covered every area they had come in to work on. Natural differences in preference were the real culprit. Their individual senses of self had been on the line. When their natural preferences were challenged, they had no recourse but to fight for or give up their right to have them. Once they understood these differences were natural, rather than intentional, they were more willing to accommodate and compromise. The counseling process moved from an acrimonious debate to finding ways of accommodating their differences in preference. It took them awhile to get use to discussions without accusations. When they forgot, I reminded them they were accusing each other of choosing to behave in a manner they had already acknowledged was natural and normal for them. This usually put out the fire before it could cause much damage. Their issues were complex, and took some time to resolve, but pointing fingers and placing blame gradually left the process. They both felt the key to saving their marriage came from understanding their differences were natural and normal, rather than acts of intention to get their own way. Most normal couples I have counseled since, have felt the same about the questionnaire.

I then started using this questionnaire with individual clients as well. The first was a 15-year-old girl on the adolescent unit at a local hospital. She was an extraordinarily bright, free-spirited individual, determined to explore and learn about life by experiencing it. At the time, she was dealing with her parent's recent divorce, a move to California from Virginia with her mother, and trying to find her place in a new peer group at a

local private girl's school.

Her preferences profile was a very distinct ENFP (Extraverted, iNtuitive, Feeling, Perceiving). ENFPs must deal with a unique contradiction. They are, at the same time, among the most independent, and the most dependent of all 'types.' Dynamic, positive orchestrator's of people and events, they tend to be very competitive and love to win. However, they are also susceptible to feeling guilt, way out of proportion to reality, if anyone they care about is upset by their success. This girl's efforts to 'orchestrate' in her new environment had upset a great many people. She was on the verge of being kicked out of her school, a number of her peers as well as their parents were upset with her, and her mother was preoccupied, frustrated, and unable to relate to her. Her father, with whom she had a closer bond, lived on the East coast.

By using her temperament/personality profile, I was able to help her realize there was nothing wrong with her. Her style of expressing herself was unsettling to authority figures and they had labeled her an 'oppositional trouble maker'; however, she was not. I was able to get her mother and school headmistress to consider this explanation, she 'curbed' her enthusiasm a bit, and things worked out. The day she left for college, she dropped by, gave me an amazing picture she had painted, and left me a note to read after she had gone, telling me how much I had changed her life. The depth of self-understanding and acceptance by others involved in this resolution would not have occurred without an understanding of natural individual differences in preference and priority.

Without intention, I had entered a new world where the language of normal human behavior is spoken. Nothing in my training to be a therapist had prepared me for this; psychology does not even have a definition for normal human behavior. Considering natural differences in preference and priority as a possible reason for conflicted relationships is practically unheard of, yet it is an understanding and acceptance of these differences that has proved so helpful to so many of my clients. Dealing with issues from their growing up

years are often still a part of the healing process; however, they usually point to understanding provided by the information on their core nature as the key to feeling better about themselves.

Isabel Myers and her mother, Katherine Briggs, developed a language of typology for use with the measure of normal human behavior they created, The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).⁴ Based on four human functions and attitudes found in Carl Jung's theory of personality,⁵ they indicate the likelihood that you will have a preference for either possibility in these four sets: (1) extroversion or introversion, (2) focusing more on facts or on possibilities, (3) making decisions based on logic or on people-centered concerns, and (4) how you choose to live your life: either by plan and foresight or by responding to events as they play out. To identify personality profiles, Myers uses a four-letter code based on these four preference dichotomies. Keirsey uses a two-letter code, also based on these profiles, to identify temperaments. Some of the words Myers uses in her letter code have meanings that differ from normal usage. A definition of terms is available on my website, www.HealthierFamiliesNow.com.

A few examples of natural and normal behaviors associated with different combinations of these preferences help to illustrate the value of identifying natural and normal preferences and priorities.

One of the sixteen personality types identified by Myers combines Introversion, Sensing, Thinking, and Perceiving (ISTP). ISTPs are introverts who focus on facts, make their decisions based on logic, and prefer to respond as events unfold rather than relying on planning them. They may show little interest in formal education and are not usually interested in language acquisition. Conventional personality tests like the Five Factor Model judge them harshly. Society, in general, makes it clear that ISTPs are not growing up right. I know an ISTP adolescent, referred for testing, who had been diagnosed with learning, speech, and conduct disorders. The tragic irony of the truth is quite depressing. ISTPs are natural warriors. They are the quickest to respond in times of danger of all types. They are our greatest protectors in times of war. George Patton and

Irwin Rommel are wartime examples of this type. Peacetime examples include Steffi Graf, Bob Dylan, Amelia Earhart, and George Harrison. There is something terribly wrong when our greatest protectors in time of need are lucky to survive childhood and adolescence with any self-worth at all.⁶

One of the four temperaments, Intuitive-Feelers (NFs) are natural guardians of the human spirit. It is vitally important for them that people feel good about them and are getting along with each other. This is a priority unique to NFs and very much unlike the other three temperaments, which make up 80-84% of the population. The stronger their intuitive and feeling preferences are, the greater their susceptibility to feeling guilt, blame, and responsibility, way out of proportion to reality, when they upset or disappoint someone (*even someone they do not like very much*). Their feelings of guilt can be unbearably painful and often make little or no sense to other temperament types. This vulnerability can turn childhood and adolescence into a miserable experience.

Parents of NF children seem to have predictable, temperament-specific reactions to their children's emotional sensitivity. Intuitive-Thinking [NT] parents tend to react with incomprehension, confusion, and/or annoyance. Parents who are Sensing-Judging [SJ], in combination with other preferences, tend to react with impatience and judgmental admonishments [STJ : Sensing-Thinking-Judging,] or by flipping back and forth between "should" messages and concern about hurting their children's feelings [ESFJ : Extraversion, Sensing, Feeling, Judging]. Intuitive-Feeling [NF] parents tend to over-identify with their children's feelings and blame themselves for the fact that their children are having these feelings. This can cause the child to feel guilty for causing the parent to feel guilty, which can cause the parent to feel even guiltier, and so on. You can imagine how confusing or annoying this might be for an NT or SJ spouse, who does not understand this is a normal challenge for an NF parent and child.

A number of natural parent/child differences in personality and temperament can unintentionally trigger

feelings of guilt, shame, and self-loathing in an NF child so extreme as to be life threatening. When such a child, adolescent, or adult comes to us for help, we do what we were trained to do: seek a cause for these feelings in family pathology or genetics. Considering as a possible cause of emotional distress the inherent differences in preference and priority between healthy parents and their children is practically unheard of.⁷

Thinking-based Individuals who rely on logic and an objective assessment of cause and effect when making decisions truly do not understand how a logical comment or decision can trigger such an emotional reaction in a *feeling*-based individual. *Feeling*-based individuals truly cannot comprehend how *thinking*-based individuals can possibly *not* be aware of how insensitive and upsetting their logical comments and decisions can be . . . at least to a feeling-based individual.

The Four Temperaments

An understanding of temperament has been extremely helpful to my clients in general and an essential component of my work with couples and families. The four temperaments are briefly defined, as follows.⁸

Sensing-Judgers [SJs] (approximately 47% of population)⁹ follow the rules and expect others to do the same. There is a right way and a wrong way to do things. They are conservative, responsible, and reliable.

Sensing-Perceivers [SPs] (approximately 21% of population) are life's opportunists. They must be free to do what they want when they want to. They are spontaneous, bored by routine, adapt well to the unexpected, and are the most generous of all types (*when they feel like it*).

Intuitive-Thinkers [NTs] (approximately 16% of population) are precise, analytical and direct. What is said and done must make logical sense. Competence is intricately connected to their self-worth.

Intuitive-Feelers [NFs] (approximately 16% of population) are described in the above example of

temperaments.

Conflicts among people with natural differences in core temperament occur because hardly anyone knows these differences exist. SJs feel everyone should be following the rules, and those who do not follow them warrant correcting. NTs feel people should make logical sense and, if they do not, their opinions are not valid. NFs experience as harsh or insensitive the blunt directness of NTs and the way SJs connect acceptability to 'right behavior.' NFs and SJs find the unpredictability and inconsistency of SPs regarding commitments to be an indication of insensitivity or unacceptably selfish and inconsiderate behavior. Each temperament has its own language that its members believe the other temperaments could understand and accommodate if they tried. This misperception of intent and comprehension is pervasive. Individuals, couples, and family members end up having to defend and justify their right to be who they naturally are. Protective walls are built by necessity, leaving an understanding and accommodating of natural and normal individual differences in preference and priority, out of the equation.

This is exactly what happened to my mother and me. We are polar opposites, in temperament and personality. I am an INFP, an idealist focused on understanding human relationships, whereas my mother is an ESTJ realist, making sure that people's actions are correct and proper. In many ways, she was a very good mother; however, I am an NF, with very different preferences and priorities. When criticized, I am vulnerable to feeling guilt, blame, and responsibility way out of proportion to reality. Consequently, I had always maintained an emotional distance from her.

Our ages were 61 and 92 when I began taking her to my chiropractor for her aches and pains. Now, my mother is no average 90+-year-old. She remains highly intelligent and alert, ridiculously knowledgeable, and still drives a car more responsibly than I do! Our trips to and from my chiropractor were filled with discussions on temperament, personality, and why this critical information is yet unknown in my profession.

We talked about how our natural differences in preference and priority had kept us apart. She wished she had had this information when she was raising her children. She had no idea her manner of communicating was so jarring. She was a thinker and I was a feeler. The concept of guilt made no sense to her. “I never intended to trigger guilt,” she said, “I just wanted you to do it right.”

My mother began working on her manner of communicating. She would practice with someone and ask me how she did. I had the humbling feeling that my mom, in her 90s, was more capable of change and growth than I was. I grew to love and cherish her. This would never have happened without an understanding of normal individual differences in human behavior.

The helpfulness of this information led to a couple of rather large questions: If normal human behavior exists, and clients benefit a great deal from knowing this, why are psychotherapists not being given this information? Why does psychology not even have a definition for normal human behavior? I wanted to know if there was a valid reason for this paradox and, if not, do what I could to correct the situation. With a great deal of help from Ross Reinhold, I was able to find answers in areas I knew very little about: personality theory, testing, and measurement.

Much of contemporary psychology employs a theory of personality based on ‘The Big Five’ personality traits: agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, extroversion, and neuroticism.¹¹ Often called the Five Factor Model (FFM), this measure of personality is built on the assumption that all behavior associated with personality development is learned and, to one degree or another, is abnormal. Conventional scales for personality assessment are value-weighted, separating healthier learned behavior from its opposite, thereby creating a *well-unwell* dichotomy. On a conventional scale, for example, Extraverts are considered healthier than Introverts, and Feelers are considered healthier than Thinkers. The Jung/Myers scales, by contrast, are based on a *well-well* model, which represents a paradigm shift: for example, the polar opposite

of Thinking is Feeling, and neither is inherently inferior or undesirable, and individual scores are interpreted in terms of degree of preference rather than in degrees of mental health.¹²

The mystery is why psychology continues to use the well-unwell, learned-behavior model for interpreting and explaining individual differences in human behavior. For over 25 years, molecular geneticists and personality psychologists have provided compelling evidence of nature's role in personality development. For over 15 years, psychologists have acknowledged this finding, admitting that a measure for normal human behavior would be useful.¹³ Psychology's peer review experts at The Buros Institute publish a *Mental Measurements Yearbook*, which has consistently acknowledged the validity of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a measure of personality. A 2007 review concludes, "The MBTI should not be ignored by scientists . . . and . . . is best used in situations where basic information regarding personality must be presented to lay individuals for self understanding."¹⁴

Logic suggests that we acknowledge that the learned-behavior model was wrong, build a new model that includes explanations for normal as well as out-of-proportion-to-normal human behavior, and move on. That has not happened. Psychology acknowledges that nature plays a role in personality development but continues to use a theory of personality that says it does not. Psychologists admit a measure for normal human behavior would be useful, but do not provide one. In fact, they insist that such a measure adhere to guidelines for construct validity based on a well-unwell paradigm that is guaranteed to reject it.¹⁵ The unavoidable question is why?

One possible answer is in the sheer magnitude of the implication. This is not a situation where a compromise is possible. Individual differences cannot be explained as natural and normal and, at the same time, as not natural and not normal. They are one or the other. Psychologists cannot give normal human behavior a definition (a well-well scale of measurement), without admitting that the well-unwell models of personality,

used for explaining individual differences in human behavior for over 80 years now, are wrong. The monumental upheaval this would cause is staggering. Every conventional theory of personality, developed during this period, is based on some variation of the well-unwell model. Even those theories that do not directly address the premise tacitly adhere to it. The entire body of work based on these models, in research and in practice, would immediately be subject to review and revision. Psychology, as it exists today, would cease to exist. Until psychology is willing to take that step, normal human behavior will not be defined, and therapists will not be introduced to the information the Buros Institute refers to and that I have found so helpful with my clients.

One more question needs answering: If well-unwell measures are invalid, what makes them so? Psychology's theory of personality rests on an assumption of relevance between mental health and behaviors measured by the Jung/Myers scales. I had never heard of such a connection. How could a preference for talking be healthier than a preference for listening, or a preference for thinking in terms of possibilities be healthier than a preference for thinking more literally? I could not find a study even attempting to connect the two. I contacted William Revelle, Head of the Department of Personality at Northwestern University and an acknowledged authority on personality theory,¹⁶ to see if he knew of such a connection. His answer was, "probably almost none."¹⁷

Conclusion

A theory is not reality. It is an explanation for reality intended to help us better understand it. It seems incomprehensible, but it appears that for a very long time, we have been providing explanations for individual differences based on a theory of personality with no basis in fact. Today, this theory is entrenched in psychology, protected by requirements for construct validity that reject any measures of personality that

differ from it. Normal human behavior has no definition and the Jung/Myers scales are treated by science and psychology alike as an invalid measure of personality. Consequently, human beings, and the therapists that help them, remain unaware of the wide range of possible differences in core nature they may have. These differences continue to be treated as learned behavior, as acts of intention individuals can change if they are motivated to. This has been going on so long that people are now on autopilot, accepting inaccurate assumptions as real and what is actually real, as false. Natural and normal individual differences in preference and priority are not perceived as natural and normal but as matters of choice. An individual who is unable to change is simply considered as refusing to change. Understanding and accommodating what, in fact, are natural differences is left out of the equation, replaced by a debilitating debate over who is right and who is wrong. The magnitude of damage this is causing to human relationships is beyond comprehension. Everyone suffers and no one knows why.

This state of denial cannot go on forever. A new paradigm is inevitable. Institutions resist change, however, so there is no telling when this will occur. Consequently, I have sought to make it easy for those of you who are interested to start using temperament and personality profiling with your clients. Go to my website, www.HealthierFamiliesNow.com, and double click on the questionnaire icon. You will find a self-scoring personality and temperament-profiling quiz¹⁸ and instructions on how to administer it. They are free for you to download and use with your clients. Please read the Terms, Conditions of Service, and Privacy Policy before you use the questionnaire. I also offer a workbook you can order, but it is not essential for administering this tool. You really do not need to provide much for your clients beyond basic, easy to understand information on their core natures. I have been doing profiling for over seven years now, and although my knowledge beyond these basics remains quite limited, I have witnessed its benefits in my clients.

With this tool, I believe you will find being of help to your clients easier . . . a lot easier!

Notes and References

1 Keirsey, D., & Bates, M. (1984). *Please understand me*. Del Mar, Ca: Prometheus Nemesis.

2 The meaning of the word **normal** in this context is unique. It applies to individuals who are able to utilize information on core nature to better understand themselves as well as those individuals whose core nature differs from their own. **Normal human behavior** refers to '*individual differences in processing and responding measured by the Jung/Myers/ scales, in conjunction with Keirsey's temperaments ,where an individual's preference, or degree of preference, is treated as natural and normal for that individual.*'

3 My experience strongly supports his belief.

4 The Myers & Briggs Foundation. (n.d.). *MBTI basics*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from <http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/>

5 Murphy, E., (1992). *The developing child: Using type to understand children*. Palo Alto: Davies-Black, pp.10-11; P. Geyer, personal communication, April 15, 2008.

6 The basic information in this section comes from the works of Keirsey and Myers, confirmed and augmented by observations of, and feedback from, my clients.

7 Over 90% of the MFTs attending a workshop at which I recently presented were NFs. Fifty percent of my individual clients are NFs. Seventy-five percent of the couples I see include at least one NF.

8 Sources for descriptions and frequency of the four temperaments: Hammer, A., & Mitchell, W. (1996). The distribution of type in general population, *Journal of Psychological Type*, 37, 2-15. Study of normative

sample of 1267 adults; Briggs-Myers, Isabell. B., McCaulley, M., Quenk, N. L., & Hammer, A. (1998).

MBTI Manual, 3rd: *A guide to the development and use of the Myers Briggs type indicator* (3rd ed.).

Washington, DC: Consulting Psychologists Press.

9 (“Research in this area is quite limited so these percentage figures must be considered to be rough estimates at this time.” (P. Geyer, Peter, e-mail correspondence, 4-15-2008 April 15, 2008).

10 Ross Reinhold’s Web site, www.personalitypathways.com, provides an excellent, concise explanation for the MBTI, type, and temperament.

11 Van Wagner, K. (2008). The "big five" personality dimensions. *About.com: Psychology*. Retrieved July 12, 2008, from <http://psychology.about.com/od/personalitydevelopment/a/bigfive.htm>

12 R. Reinhold, e-mail correspondence, March, 21, 2007

13 Pittenger, D. J. (1993). The utility of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. *Review of Educational Research*, 63, 467–488; Pittenger, D. (2005). Cautionary comments regarding the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 57(3) 210-221.

14 Geisinger, K. F., Spies, R. A., Carlson, J. F., & Plake, B. S. (Eds.). (2007). *The seventeenth mental measurements yearbook*. Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements.

15 Hogan, R., Hogan, J., & Roberts, B. W. (1996). Personality measurement and employment decisions: Questions and answers. *American Psychologist*, 51, 469–477; Pittenger, D. (2005). Cautionary comments regarding the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 57(3) 210-221.

16 William Revelle's webpage, www.personalityproject.org, is a great source for information on personality.

17 W. Revelle, e-mail correspondence, March 7, 2008.

18 A comparative sample of 50 friends and clients suggests this quiz is accurate, but I make no claim or guarantee to that effect.

