

The phenomenon of individuation in Jungian psychology and personality tests

*Wanting He**

ABSTRACT. – This study explores the intersection of the Jungian concepts of individuation with personality testing with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), emphasizing how personality assessments influence self-discovery and personal growth. It begins by examining the limitations of the MBTI, where participants often feel constrained by binary choices that fail to capture the complexity of their identities. Through the lens of a workshop led by a psychological types expert, the study reveals the tension between fixed personality types and the dynamic nature of individual development. While the MBTI has gained popularity as a tool for self-awareness and identity exploration, it faces criticism for oversimplifying personality into rigid categories, which can obstruct the individuation process. The discussion also points toward Jung's notions of *persona* and *shadow*, illustrating how societal expectations can shape self-perception and hinder authentic expression. Despite its shortcomings, the MBTI can serve as a starting point for individuation, prompting individuals to engage in deeper self-reflection and integration of their multifaceted selves. Ultimately, the study argues that to achieve true individuation, individuals must move beyond the confines of MBTI classifications, embracing a more nuanced understanding of their identities to foster meaningful personal growth and wholeness.

Key words: individuation, persona, shadow, personality testing, Jungian psychology.

Introduction

Individuation is a necessary core process of human development in Jungian psychology (analytical psychology). Individuation is necessary for completing the aim of human beings or making whole the subjectivity or Self (the entire structure of the soul) in a specific condition, and to find a way to meet the subject itself (Gray, 2008). In general, individuation is considered present in the process of growth and, in psychoanalysis with analysts, it is confronted with complicated processes such as dream symbols, paintings, or

*College of Communication Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand. E-mail: s65584946023@ssru.ac.th

writing, *etc.* (Jung, 1969, p. 289). In this process, a part of the identity plays this role, that of the psychological types, sometimes expressed in the first phase of individuation (Reppen, 2006, pp. 200-212). In other words, individuation cooperates with psychological types closely. The psychological types are usually applied in the transit of the individuation process to describe the function of human development. Jung's psychological types, which describe different modes of perceiving and interacting with the world, play a crucial role in individuation. Psychological types are generally categorized by four fundamental functions (thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition) and two attitudes (introversion and extroversion). Individuation often entails balancing these types within oneself, as different types emerge at different stages of personal development.

However, psychological types are combined and referenced in the personality test that became popular in the 1980s, namely the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Paul, 2010). The MBTI, a popular adaptation of Jung's psychological types developed by Katharine Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers in the 20th century, transplanted and applied Jung's theories into a personality assessment tool. Though it differs from Jung's original concepts, the MBTI is widely used today, particularly in career assessments, team-building, and personal reflection.

Recently, the MBTI became a topic of discussion as it is used as a tool for identity recognition on social media. It is not the first time that the MBTI has become popular, but it is the first time it has been available online. Although the MBTI is not the same as psychological types, it seems that people have begun using the MBTI to learn about themselves, and it has gained significant popularity on social media platforms, where individuals use it to explore and discuss aspects of their identity, both for entertainment and self-understanding. The link will be discussed below.

The study aims to examine the relations between Jungian psychological types and the MBTI, with a focus on how people use these frameworks in the digital age to facilitate individuation. It also seeks to understand how online discourse around the MBTI contributes to individuals' pursuits of psychological wholeness and self-completion, particularly in the fast-paced, ever-evolving landscape of social media. The research may shed light on the ways psychological tools influence personal growth and identity formation in the modern era.

Individuation

'Individuation' is the term published in the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* (Seven Sermons to the Dead) in 1915 (Jung, 1969, p. 298), where Jung discusses individuation with archetypes and alchemy (Reppen, 2006, p. 198).

Individuation is similar to the story of life; when Jungian psychoanalysts conduct therapy, they will ask questions and check details to examine the analysand's psychological narrative and figure out the developmental level. Jungian psychoanalysts always underline that feature of psychological fact of fragility or vulnerability in patients. Even though physical stability is important in a human being's health, individuation is also crucial and should be considered as being shaped by cultural factors.

The individuation process is classically divided into three basic steps to achieve personal integrity and realization. The three steps are: 1) containment or nurturing (in adolescence and early adulthood); 2) adapting or adjusting (during midlife); and 3) centering or integrating. These categories are defined from the archetype model by the researcher Neumann (Neumann & Manheim, 1983). The three steps cannot be seen as individual or separate, but are connected to a specific period.

The first stage, containment or nurturing, is a place of care, such as the mother's womb; the feeling mimics warm water or milk from the mother (Jung, 1969, p. 292). Indeed, the mother's womb is a metaphor with many meanings, such as '*jouissance*' in Lacanian psychoanalysis, where it represents protection and a barrier in the connection and space between mother and child, away from the external environment. Human beings are unlike other mammals who live in nature; mammals have the inborn instinct to grow quickly from birth, and do not need to undergo the long, educated process of learning how to live in civil society. Human beings need to be nourished by mothers and protected from dangers in the environment: they are vulnerable infants. In other words, during this period, mothers have a crucial role that contributes to the survival of human offspring (Reppen, 2006, pp. 200-202). This period commonly lasts for a long time, from primary to tertiary education, but it generally occupies adolescence until adulthood. The human being begins to adapt to modern culture; in other words, the nurturance process is for the child to be loved unconditionally, and the ego begins to separate from the womb towards the world. Unconsciousness is influenced by separation from the mother and her consciousness; it leads to ego identity. Children then grow older; care and nurturing lessen to a minimum.

Spiritual barriers between the child and the parental figure gradually form as the child starts to recognize and differentiate themselves from others. Despite this growing awareness, a deep unconscious identity with a nurturing environment accompanies humans during this phase. The child's true individuality only fully emerges after they separate from the parents' psyche in what can be seen as a metaphorical second birth, a Jungian psychological birth of the ego, where the child becomes a distinct, autonomous Self (Jung, 1969, p. 303). This process allows parents to exert a profound influence over their children, not only through the conscious permeation into culture, tradition, teaching, and discipline, but even more so through unconscious communication of

attitudes and mental frameworks. It is through this unconscious channel that a form of psychological programming shapes the child's inner world, for better or worse. It is not the parents' words, but their being and actions that leave the deepest imprint on the child's psyche. The family environment thus becomes the adaptive setting where much of its emotional atmosphere is absorbed into the child's inner world.

In the second stage, that is, the adapting/adjusting stage, this educational position shifts to the father. This shift happens not through replacement but gradually, driven by psychological necessity. The father figure is crucial for the development of the ego, as it seeks freedom from the nurturing containment provided by the mother (Jung, 1969, p. 305). This shift, driven by psychological necessity, introduces the rigor needed for functioning in the world. The father figure helps the ego grow by introducing anxiety and challenges that require mastery. It is important to interpret 'father' and 'patriarchal' symbolically rather than literally. While the first stage is characterized by nurturance and containment, the second stage is governed by the reality principle. The demands of performance and achievement become central. Individuals are exposed to a world where standards of performance are crucial, and consequences for behavior are inevitable. This is what Jung refers to as the 'father world', which contrasts with the unconditional love of the earlier stage. The 'reality principle' is ideally introduced gradually. Excessive pressure can cause anxiety or defensive retreat, while too few demands can hinder the ego's development (Jung, 1969, pp. 307-310). Moderate frustration and tension, introduced at the right time, promote ego growth.

In the third stage, the centering/integrating stage, individuals move through the process of individuation; they begin to release the collective definitions of identity and persona, turning instead toward a self-image that originates from within (Jung, 1969, pp. 350-352). While social reality remains influential, the emphasis shifts to seeking meaning and exploring deeper aspects of life beyond mere survival. In the second stage of individuation, much of one's identity is shaped by societal images, stereotypes, and parental influences. The persona formed during this stage is constructed to fit within cultural norms, comprising elements that, although appropriate for the individual, are largely socially determined. Personality at this phase is primarily a product of external forces, helping individuals conform to social expectations. Within the continuing individuation process, a widening gap appears between the socially constructed persona and the authentic Self, creating space for personal choice in defining who one wants to become. In the third stage, the ego starts to distinguish between its true inner nature and the socially dominant identity (Jung, 1969, p. 358). This growing separation gives individuals the freedom to consciously decide the kind of person they wish to be. Although traits from earlier developmental stages – such as narcissism, immaturity, defensiveness, and a sense of mystical connection with others –

may persist, they are no longer the central focus in therapy during the third stage. Instead, the emphasis is on breaking away from the persona formed in the second stage and discovering an inner core of integrity that transcends societal expectations and reflects the deeper insights of the Self. The aim is to integrate the internal opposites present in the Self, achieving a sense of balance and vitality in everyday life. Jung stresses the importance of embracing the shadow and developing a conscious relationship with the *anima* or *animus* as part of this process.

At the same time, the relationship between the collective and individual is inevitable, this relationship is always mentioned with a gender/sex distinction, but here, we will formally discuss the process without gender/sex distinction, however the gender/sex problem is a magnificent issue in individuation; here we will talk about the archetype and how gender/sex are developed. Both women and men learn to imitate behaviors deemed appropriate for their gender (Jung, 1969, pp. 353-354). In this framework, girls emulate both the femininity and womanhood of adult women when there is a harmonious alignment between body and identity. Similarly, boys imitate the masculinity and manhood of adult men when there is a corresponding alignment between body and Self (Gray, 2008, p. 53). This stage indicates that the gender/sex is gradually spreading and differentiating within individuation; nonetheless, the gender/sex process is indicated by the main culture and physical sex. They are encouraged to be the gender that is the same as their physical sex, rather than the gender that they desire. Even though gender/sex are results of individuation, so too is ego identity integrated and derived in individuation.

The persona forms during early life and young adulthood as a response to societal demands and expectations. It becomes the individual's way of interacting with the world. A man may identify with his persona, often seeing it as a mature expression of himself. Typically, this identification aligns with a masculine image, as Jung discusses in *Anima and Animus* (Jung, 1966a). However, unconscious identification with the persona, which is inherently mimetic, leads to a false sense of individuality. The persona feels as if the true Self, the 'I', but it is something from which the man can eventually distinguish himself, similar to how the anima, representing the feminine, is a 'not-I'. Thus, a man can experience both the anima (feminine) and the persona (masculine) as 'not-I' elements. This allows him to reflect on his identity as distinct from how he perceives himself. Who he is to the world and to himself is a mode of his subjectivity, and who he is in the world corresponds to a subject position that allows him to locate himself within his social reality. Meanwhile, subjectivity is creating itself; the subject is searching for their position in the world.

It is necessary to mention that the feigning of the persona enables the subject to believe he is an individual unit. The subject uses the mask persona to express himself with others and facilitate entry into the collective

psyche sphere. Persona is the image as a constructional protection away from external reality; nevertheless, it is an illusion that reminds the subject that he can have individual needs. Jung stated that self-discovery depends on the breaking of the illusion of the persona with the collective; therefore, the persona truly is the fruit of connection with reality, the product to reach the real collective (Jung, 1966b, pp. 156-162). Conversely, once the subject rejects or resists the external pressure or risk, he approaches the archetype (Gray, 2008, p. 55).

Unconsciousness and projection

In Jungian psychology, the collective's self-expression through its members, combined with the unique nature of sexed/gendered bodies – some of which may be biologically atypical – influences the fluidity of both the collective and the body. This reciprocal relationship ensures adaptability and the potential for transformation. Consciousness arises from both the collective and the sex/gendered body as a dynamic life force, driving the process of self-formation. While there is always an *a priori*, or something given, this does not imply that it is fixed, timeless, or unchanging. Rather, the unconscious is a result of social structures shaped over many lifetimes and multiple collectives. The unconscious is inherently collective, already embedded in each psyche, while individual consciousness is shaped by the sex/gendered nature of both body and collective. Additionally, the personality of consciousness regards the collective as well. Meanwhile, Jung clarified that consciousness originates in unconsciousness (Jung & Hull, 1978, p. 40). The collective's history is embedded in its actions. Yet, the members of the habitus are never fully aware of the social structures that shape them as a 'natural' product of the collective.

Typical meanings and problems of personality tests (including the MBTI) and discussion on social media

Personality tests are multifaceted and changeable depending on the era we find ourselves in, for example: Rorschach Picture testing, The Five-Factor Model, and the MBTI we referred to. In this article, we chose the most popular and general personality testing, the MBTI, as the object of observation. The timespan of the MBTI development is a long period; the first model was created in 1944, revised in 1956, but the creators, Briggs and Myers, had a long time to research and set up this self-report indicator test. It became fashionable in the 1980s and, after Myers died in 1980, the popularity of the test continued to grow significantly; it was administered to 750,000 individuals in

1983 and reached 3 million by 1993. Thousands of companies utilize it, including 89 of the Fortune 100 Best Companies. Initially unknown before the mid-1970s, it is now regarded by its publisher as “the world’s most popular personality assessment”. I must point out that the MBTI is applied in many settings, the test has been translated into sixteen languages, and chapters of the Association for Psychological Type have emerged in various locations, from Australia to Korea and South Africa, with over two dozen chapters in the United States alone (Paul, 2010, p. 148).

The MBTI is different from Jung’s psychological type theory. Jung believed that psychological types are not divided into a binary system, but that the dominant function operates independently within its preferred environment: extroverts in the external world, introverts in the internal world (Jung, 1971, pp. 109-110). He argued that the remaining three functions have opposite directional orientations. However, some MBTI practitioners have questioned this view, suggesting that, compared to other related research findings, it may be a misclassification due to a lack of empirical support. Despite this doubt, the theory remains part of Myers and Briggs’ interpretation of Jung’s original ideas. However, the MBTI divided people into ‘thinkers’ or ‘feelers’, ‘sensors’ or ‘perceivers’.

In this chapter, the aim is not to focus on the internal difference between the MBTI and psychological types, but rather to discuss the meaning and implications for the test recipients and the attitude between Jung and Myers. First of all, the ambiguity of the MBTI is ordinarily seen in the options presented to the user (Paul, 2010, p. 147). The writer Annie Murphy Paul (Paul, 2010, p. 147) has a critical view of the MBTI.

During a workshop in New York, about 20 professionals (ranging from PR executives to IT consultants) gathered to explore how a personality test might help them reshape their careers. Leading the session was Shoya Zichy, an executive coach and self-described ‘type expert’, who once worked as a private banker at Citibank.

Zichy administered a version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator popularized by David Keirsey to a group of discontented professionals hoping to realign their careers. As participants completed the test, some expressed frustration at its forced-choice format, even jokingly asking for a third option. Zichy, however, asserted control over the situation, urging them not to overthink and to trust their first instincts, indicating her confidence in the test’s intuitive clarity.

Once the tests were completed, Zichy categorized participants into four main psychological type groups. Although initially reserved, the group gradually became more animated as Zichy explained the categories. When questioned about the possibility of personality types changing over time, Zichy responded with emphatic certainty: “No, they don’t. They are there from infancy, from cradle to grave”. She illustrated her point by referencing

her own type – an extrovert who had merely learned to regulate outward behavior, not change core personality. Another participant challenged her again, suggesting people might shift types depending on their comfort level, but Zichy remained firm: “No, I don’t. People don’t change their basic orientation”. Her absolute conviction subdued further doubt; the group, seemingly persuaded by her authority, surrendered themselves to her typological framework.

This moment illustrates not only the perceived scientific authority of MBTI-type systems in such settings but also how the facilitator’s certainty can suppress ambiguity and shape participants’ acceptance of a fixed psychological identity. And this is quite a remarkable scenario in reality, where the MBTI is recommended or suggested, perhaps by someone to their family, friends, or others. Unquestionably, the MBTI has become the most popular personality test in modern society. It is difficult from an external point of view to explain the reason why people prefer to believe this type of test. Nonetheless, it is obvious that recipients do not feel content with this option, because it cannot describe the whole personality; people cannot find the options for their specific personality. On the other hand, although people cannot find reciprocity and equal symmetry within the test, they find a compromising position to understand themselves.

People tend to place their trust in the test rather than question or dismiss it, which can lead to an even more complex situation. Companies began using personality testing as an auxiliary tool to analyze and select the most suitable candidates for career positions. Company executives do not think that they can choose people well, or they are afraid to make mistakes by delving into the personality of candidates. They would rather choose to carry out personality testing during the interview with candidates. What explains the most surprising aspect of the Myers-Briggs’s popularity? Its passionate advocacy. Unlike most personality tests, the Myers-Briggs has developed a loyal following among ordinary people who value the self-awareness and understanding of others that it provides (Paul, 2010, p. 154).

Interestingly, the MBTI has so many supporters and followers who want to keep using it and expand its application. Thus, they try to integrate the MBTI so that more people trust it; in psychology, theology, and anthropology, *etc.* Despite this, there are a lot of critics of the MBTI, who are skeptical of its validity and legitimacy, such as academics or psychologists. Psychology researchers have, for a long time, challenged the central premise of the Myers-Briggs test: the personality types. Psychologists point out that most people’s personalities do not neatly fit into strict categories but rather fall somewhere in between, making type assignments both imprecise and arbitrary. These concerns are further supported by how often test-takers’ supposedly fixed, innate types change. One study – conducted by the indicator’s proponents – found that only 47% of participants got the same four-part type

after retaking the test. In other words, more than half of the people were assigned a different type when they completed the same questionnaire again shortly afterward. Another study showed that a person's type can even change depending on the time of day (Paul, 2010, p. 154). Surely, there are an increasing number of published articles and research that prove that the MBTI lacks scientific validity, that folk concepts and psychological theories do not overlap. Lay concepts are likely quite different from trait terms and have little connection to established academic theories of personality (Furnham & McClelland, 2022).

The relative theory about personality testing is based on the Barnum effect, which suggests that personality descriptions are ubiquitous and one-sided. These options and profiles include broad, ambiguous statements that nearly anyone can read and think that this feature belongs to them. On the one hand, people who have used the MBTI, or accept the type they belong to, prefer to use the four types to introduce/identify themselves with, rather than narrating a story in more words to describe who/where/how they are. Undoubtedly, people are prone to using convenient and easy ways to categorize and introduce themselves. On the other hand, from an academic psychological perspective, the MBTI faces numerous criticisms, and it is even considered by some to be contrary to Jungian Psychology.

Jung recognized that psychological type is not stable or permanent but can change over the course of a lifetime (Freeman, 1977, p. 435). In contrast, Myers insisted that personality types were innate and unchangeable (Myers, 1980). Moreover, while Jung sought to deepen and enrich our understanding of people and the world, Myers aimed to simplify and categorize. Jung criticized typology, especially Jungian typology, for labeling people at first impression. Jungian typology should not be misunderstood as a method for reading personality based on appearance or cultural background. In other words, it is neither a form of physiognomy (face-reading or character judgment based on physical traits), nor an anthropological or ethnographic system for classifying people. Jung criticized simplistic or superficial applications of typology and emphasized that psychological types should emerge from deep, inner processes, not from first impressions or observable traits (Jung *et al.*, 2014, p. 15).

Using the MBTI is currently a generalization; Rao and Chen (2024) defined it as a personality social currency because the MBTI assessment has become increasingly popular on Chinese social media, with users viewing their results as personal symbols to showcase publicly. This trend has given rise to a cultural phenomenon where individuals experience an identity crisis shaped by the influences of technological embodiment and the changes brought about by meta-media ecology. The study, which utilized structured interviews, reveals that the behaviors exhibited by users on social platforms can be seen as a type of unseen emotional labor. On the other hand, Lee and

Shin (2024) point out that the MBTI has gained significant popularity on social media, with a 90.9% utilization rate in South Korea, highlighting its status as a prevalent tool for self-understanding and interpersonal connection among users. This trend is reflected in the public sentiment surrounding the MBTI, where 68.5% of individuals expressed positive feelings towards its use. Additionally, the emotional engagement with the MBTI is multifaceted, with the top sentiments including ‘Good Feeling’ and ‘Interest’, which suggest that it serves as a catalyst for discussions about individual identities and relationships in contemporary society. However, to harness the full potential of the MBTI for fostering social well-being, it is crucial to reshape societal perceptions surrounding its application. Emphasizing individual psychological health as a foundation, this transformation involves implementing reliable scientific tests and educational initiatives to prevent the negative impacts of stereotyping, as evidenced by the 31.5% of respondents expressing negative sentiments. By rebuilding how the MBTI is understood and utilized, people create an environment that supports individual growth while contributing to the development of sustainable society axiology.

The current word-of-mouth recommendation systems on social media are often based on ‘homophily’, connecting individuals by identifying similar external traits like age, race, occupation, location, and lifestyle (Sridevi & Mamidi, 2021, p. 6883). While this homophily-based approach is effective in matching physical or social characteristics, it may fall short in addressing personality compatibility. To address this limitation, a personality-traits-based recommendation system has been introduced, differing from homophily in that users with similar personalities may not necessarily be compatible. The MBTI exemplifies this in social media, where it is widely used for self-exploration and social interaction. Instead, it is clear that social media is effectively identifying the four MBTI dimensions and allowing SMS providers, businesses, and educational institutions to tailor their online offerings based on users’ posts, tweets, and comments, thereby predicting their personality behaviors. However, the MBTI’s categorization may also reinforce fixed self-perceptions, potentially limiting deeper understanding of oneself and others.

Some trends emerge whereby people usually continue the discussion about the MBTI and its results on social media. They even sometimes prefer to discuss these within homogeneous MBTI type groups. Otherwise, they explore the differences with followers of other MBTI types or debate with supporters of different types.

Persona and MBTI as persona

In people’s everyday lives, it is crucial to be aware of how we are integrated into collectives. Without this awareness, people risk becoming lost and

remaining unindividuated. Various mechanisms help transform members of collectives into distinct selves. By understanding projection, we can significantly enhance our prospects for individuation and, in turn, greater freedom. The projection mechanism is described as *mirroring*: whatever the subject is doing, any movement in the mirror reflects the image of itself. This process can create an 'I', but not only an 'I'. This process is always happening around subjects; thus, Jung deemed this mechanism an illusion (Jung, 1966b, pp. 156-162). The 'I' originates from the others and its influence – the persona mask – is in this mechanism as well. At most, this mirroring mechanism can lead to the loss of the possibility of subjectivity, because the criteria are referring/mirroring others. Thereafter, 'I' is generally a broken, fragile, and complicated existence, which is without a center, a blurring and ambiguous ego-being. Subsequently, one person perceives what is already familiar and recognizes aspects of oneself through the knowledge or perspective they already possess. This familiarity forms the basis for self-reflection, allowing one to see oneself as a distinct entity. This familiar dialectic has been corroborated many times; for instance, Lacan likewise applied the mechanism to chimpanzee learning via mirroring (Muller, 1985). The emergence of 'I' and subjectivity carries a narcissistic structure, in that the subject comes to love an idealized image of itself that is reflected from the other (or the mirror). In this process, projection plays a key role: the subject projects an imagined or fantasized self onto the other and then recognizes and loves that imagined self through mirroring. In short, the subject doesn't love itself directly, but loves the image of itself that it imagines the other is reflecting.

The idea that the continuous process of projection and mirroring – where the subject recognizes itself through others – ultimately leads to the construction of the persona, which is a kind of socially adapted mask. This persona is not the true inner self but rather a product of the subject's identification with external reflections, expectations, and familiar images. Because consciousness often flows outward, identifying with what is projected and mirrored back, the subject fails to return to itself. This lack of return results in a self that is fragile, ambiguous, and fragmented, relying on what is familiar or already known rather than on inner authenticity. Hence, the self becomes entangled or woven into the fabric of the persona, shaped by social mirroring and projection mechanisms.

In the meantime, after integrating mirroring/projection and individuation, a strong desire emerges to reconcile opposites: the persona (the 'good' Self) and the shadow (the 'bad' Self), as well as the masculine and feminine, and the child and adult. In the first two stages, individuals typically develop into a specific psychological type, identifying with one gender and its associated preferences, while adopting a persona from those presented by family and broader culture. In contrast, during the centering and integrating stage, individuals reach back to reclaim the lost or denied aspects of themselves and

weave these into the fabric of their whole being. Ultimately, humans remain foreign to the Self. Some forms of projection are not unconscious but rather constitute conscious activity (Jung, 1923, p. 478). Consequently, projection can be both conscious and unconscious, as well as active and passive. In line with the assertion that projection is typically not under conscious control, unconscious passive projection involves the unintentional transfer of negative or positive emotions, traits, or sentiments from one's own psyche onto another person.

As development progresses, the life (integrity) becomes differentiated, breaking into distinct parts. Ego-consciousness emerges and, as it develops, leaves much of the original whole self in what becomes the 'unconscious'. The unconscious, in turn, organizes itself around images, internalized experiences, and traumas, forming sub-personalities known as complexes (Stein, 1998, p. 106). In Jungian Psychology, we can consider the archetypes and the persona symbolized in many images or symbols, such as a constellation. Sometimes, the different ideals and attitudes can make various personalities. Certainly, there are sub-personalities, for example, the persona and shadow. In fact, the component that the subject-ego cannot control is the shadow, and every ego has a shadow; something is blocked or repressed by the consciousness or cognition dissonance when the personality is integrated. Persona and shadow are complementary pairs of sub-personality; sometimes, they are totally different or opposite, but they are intimate. The persona is the version of ourselves shaped by acculturation, education, and subjective adaptation to physical and social environments. Therefore, it is able to get in touch with daily life or the official duty of the subject in reality. Persona is a term that has been propagandized in many articles and journals; it is a psychological structure for a subject's specific goals (Stein, 1998, p. 111). At the same time, Jung identified two sources of the persona: first, society's expectations and demands, which include behaving according to social norms, adopting prescribed beliefs, and fitting into a specific role. Second, the individual's own social ambitions and aspirations (Stein, 1998, p. 115).

Subsequently, Jung stated that the relationship between inner and outer reality is formed via Hegel's master and slave dialectics (Gray, 2008, p. 87). At the beginning, self-consciousness, in its state of being-for-itself, negates the other, perceiving the other as an object that is not essential to its own existence. However, since the other is also a self-conscious being, both perceive each other as independent entities, much like ordinary objects, immersed in the immediacy of life. For self-consciousness to be certain of its own truth, it must also be certain of the other. The abstraction of being-for-self is only realized when this mutual recognition occurs through the actions of both. Self-consciousness becomes aware of itself as an independent individual only when it can see itself as ontologically distinct from the other. At a certain point, however, the actions of the other lead to a critical struggle, as each

seeks to assert dominance over the other. This struggle is then replaced by a new dynamic, in which one consciousness becomes independent – the Master – and the other becomes dependent – the Slave (Gray, 2008, p. 4).

The tension between self-expression and societal expectations is a primary source of anxiety. This problem is at the heart of the relationship between the ego and the persona. The ego does not consciously choose a specific persona; it develops in response to our environment. We often find ourselves adapting to survive, doing our best to navigate social situations. Factors as birth order and gender can influence these adaptations. Young children, for instance, learn by observing and imitating the behavior of those around them. Adolescence and early adulthood are particularly challenging periods for the persona development. The inner world is rich with impulses, fantasies, dreams, desires, and ideals. At the same time, peer pressure can push individuals towards conformity. During this stage, relationships with the broader social world may be influenced by a ‘herd mentality’, leading to strong identification with peer groups and their shared values.

Yet, MBTI types account precisely for the position of identification in peer groups. While the MBTI identifies which types individuals belong to, they may develop loyalty or attachment to a specific psychological type — an early expression of individuation. As previously mentioned, when the ego is in the earlier stages of nurturance and adjustment, individuals commonly engage in projection, using external symbols for orientation. Later, they may introject imaginary elements or the expectations and demands of others into their ego. When this occurs at the appropriate developmental level, it represents a healthy function and expression. Nonetheless, the MBTI might be the pretentious mask of ego growth, as it often acts in the role of a kind of persona for MBTI supporters to constantly increase the imagination of a certain type – or to consistently present themselves as one type to others or the public – in order to negate the heterogeneous types, structures, or materials.

This process has become overly complex, concealing the true ego and the potential of a real subject’s Self. Ultimately, this may pose an obstacle to individuation. Although the MBTI is not accepted by reality or official roles, it might be a replacement for the form of the shadow. MBTI supporters often unconsciously discover new ways to suppress the opposing aspects of the ego, guided by their ego’s own intentions, will, and defense mechanisms; I mean the unconscious aspects that are often repressed or denied, commonly referred to as the shadow in Jungian terms. This shadow represents parts of the self that are hidden from conscious awareness, including fears, weaknesses, and undesirable traits from the collective culture. Also, it conceals the real self-growth possibilities from separation or individuation.

Furthermore, the evaluation of main functions, such as being an extrovert or introvert, is also likely a limitation to human beings. People always deem extroverts as more friendly, easier to converse with, open-minded, and active;

introverts are seen as gloomy, hard to make friends with, stay at home, and are unsociable. This is also a stereotype of personality, despite many psychologists having already shown that this bipolarity is not fundamentally divided into easy external expressions in social activities, and does not consider all the traits that can take on various forms. But there is a belief in society, as well as in companies and firms, that extroverts are more popular and acceptable among their colleagues. Because nowadays, the capitalistic society has itself these social traits, it laid the basic groundwork for a study which showed that capitalistic and political societies with capitalistic markets embody extraversion, agreeableness, calmness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Chung, 2017). Studies have shown that the extrovert trait is much better suited for societal preferences.

According to Jiang's research (2024), since the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, the MBTI test has surged in popularity among young people in South Korea, evolving into a nationwide trend. It explores the characteristic popularity of the MBTI in Korea and the public's perceptions of this phenomenon. Jiang analyzed 231 news articles related to the MBTI, sourced from the Korea Integrated News Database System (KINDS). This research revealed that the rising interest in the MBTI among South Korea's youth stems from a post-pandemic desire for self-exploration, emotional management, and community engagement online. The MBTI has attained a quasi-scientific reputation akin to horoscopes, bolstered by endorsements from celebrities and a robust online following. While the test is widely employed for entertainment and social interaction, there are verified concerns that excessive labeling could unintentionally affect individuals' self-perception and obstruct the development of a well-rounded, objective understanding of themselves.

Additionally, there are a few studies that discussed the MBTI's disadvantages of misuse, for instance, the lack of reliability and validity, and its use in an increasing number of organizations (Boyle, 1995). However, ego development is a continuous negotiation between the individual's inner self and the external social world, with persona and shadow representing opposing but interconnected aspects of this process (Reppen, 2006, p. 205). In other words, during the popular MBTI trend, the dominant societal voice and more emphasis on a certain type of character or personality means the malpractice is progressively clearer: the minor group that is not chosen in preference is likely to feed more persona and shadow. Therefore, it will stunt ego development for the people living in a specific cultural system, leading them to develop a disadvantageous shadow in the process.

The ego makes up the main position, the MBTI persona constitutes the slave; this is Hegel's structural relationship as well. As the research expressed, not only were a few participants suspicious of the test options and results, but gradually, they would begin to know or learn the category of the MBTI. In the process, in the subjective recognition of the options, with regard to the popu-

lar trend of MBTI on social media, individuals are already aware of the information and the existence conditions of the test, and they want their followers to keep following them, so they try to obtain the result they desire. After the dual subjective controversy, people might become familiar with the symbol of the MBTI and choose to accept it. This is to say that after the master-slave dialectics, the MBTI is likely to be the master position; conversely, people's consciousness becomes the dependent position, the slave, for introducing people to themselves or discerning their personalities via the use of the MBTI.

In the discourse surrounding Jungian psychology, the concept of the collective unconscious is often misconstrued as merely a reflection of individual adherence to social pressures, obscuring its deeper implications for personal identity and development. Within this framework, the MBTI emerges as a popular tool for self-exploration, yet it carries inherent drawbacks that can complicate the individuation process. The MBTI categorizes individuals into distinct personality types, fostering a simplified understanding of complex human behaviors and traits. This rigid classification system can inadvertently reinforce the persona – the social mask individuals wear to conform to societal expectations – while simultaneously neglecting the shadow, which represents the repressed, hidden aspects of the self that contradict the persona. When individuals align their identities too closely with their MBTI types, they risk overlooking these shadow elements, leading to a one-dimensional understanding of themselves. This dynamic is particularly pronounced among younger individuals (Wu *et al.*, 2024), who are drawn to the MBTI as a means of navigating their identities in a socially driven landscape. The collective unconscious, characterized by shared experiences and cultural narratives, influences how these individuals perceive themselves and others through the lens of the MBTI. As they engage with the framework, they may find themselves conforming to prevailing social narratives that emphasize certain personality types over others, further entrenching their personas while stifling their authentic selves. Moreover, the popularity of the test can create a feedback loop where societal pressures dictate the traits individuals should embody, leading them to adopt characteristics that align with their assigned types. This reliance on the MBTI framework may hinder their individuation process, which requires a holistic integration of both persona and shadow. By not confronting the shadow – those aspects of themselves that society deems unacceptable – individuals may develop a fragmented sense of identity, leading to internal conflict and psychological distress. Critics of the MBTI highlight its lack of empirical support, noting that the tool often oversimplifies the complexities of personality and fails to account for the fluidity of human behavior. The binary choices inherent in MBTI assessments can lead to dissatisfaction and frustration, as individuals struggle to reconcile their lived experiences with the fixed categories imposed by the framework. This dissatisfaction echoes the tension between the persona and shadow, where the

desire for social acceptance clashes with the need for authentic self-expression. Ultimately, while the MBTI may provide a convenient starting point for self-reflection, it is crucial for individuals to engage with their identities beyond these simplistic classifications. Recognizing the interplay between the collective unconscious, the social pressures shaping their personas, and the shadow aspects they must confront can lead to a more profound individuation process. By transcending the limitations imposed by the MBTI, individuals can foster a more authentic understanding of themselves, integrating their persona and shadow to achieve psychological wholeness.

Integration

I must mention the third stage of individuation that everyone must go through, even if it has less impact. As mentioned above, we discussed that individuation is about the whole development of the individual; subjects go through the separation of the persona in the second stage of individuation, and get into the next stage, namely, the centering or integrating stage, which is the third and final stage of individuation. In this process, subjects would learn again how to integrate the persona and shadow after separation, even for approval by the ego and consciousness.

To discuss this part, the first topic is about persona separation and transformation. It must be said that the archetype living in the subject remains relatively stable throughout life, but the persona can always change, as we move through different life stages, from childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood, and so on. The subject adapts to new environments, resulting in changes in self-perception and the way they express themselves to others. These adjustments are reflected in our self-concept, lifestyles, and preferences, for instance, the appreciation of art, which is influenced by factors such as age, educational status, socioeconomic class, and peer group preferences. In the societal structure, people are constructed into different types but obey the axiology of the main culture. Personas stick to people due to identification, familiarity, and the avoidance of shame. Shame, a powerful motivator, is more prominent in shame cultures (such as in Eastern countries) than in guilt cultures (as in Western nations) (Stein, 1998, p. 122). While guilt can be addressed and resolved, shame erodes one's self-worth. The persona protects against shame by maintaining a socially acceptable image. Shadows, representing hidden aspects of the personality that conflict with the persona, often lead to feelings of shame. These shadows can include aggression, sexual desires, or physical flaws. At the same time, the MBTI as the persona and the social structure may limit people from finding out their real heterogeneity, away from the others, as the standard of personalities. If subjects turn to the standard or criteria of the acknowledged standard without sufficient develop-

ment of individuation, they might become regretful and ashamed to be a part of the shadow.

Conversely, going beyond controversy and integration of persona and shadow can lead to personal growth. When the ego encounters a conflict between societal or social expectations (persona) and personal desires (shadow), a creative solution can emerge. The integration must happen by letting go of both the persona and the shadow and creating a mental blank where the unconscious can offer a new symbol or perspective. This symbol can lead to a new attitude and a different way of relating to the world. This process is evident both in therapy and daily life, as individuals grow, resolve conflicts, and integrate previously unacceptable aspects of themselves. Rather, integration can be applied via classic transcendental functions, such as in drawing, psychoanalysis, meditation, free association, *etc.* With no doubt, there are plenty of new and modern activities (and there will be in the future, we are just waiting to find them) for personal and collective individuation.

Conclusions

Individuation, a cornerstone of Jungian psychology, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human development, particularly through its close relationship with psychological types. The MBTI, though an adaptation of Jung's work, has gained widespread popularity, especially in today's digital age. While it simplifies Jung's complex theory of psychological types into a more accessible personality framework, it has helped people engage in self-reflection and identity exploration. This study elucidated the connection between Jung's individuation process and the use of the MBTI in modern contexts, especially on social media, where it serves as both an entertainment tool and a means of identity recognition. Despite criticisms regarding its empirical foundation and divergence from Jung's original theory, the MBTI remains influential in shaping individuals' understanding of themselves and their paths toward psychological wholeness. The study underscores how tools as the MBTI play a role in navigating personal growth, identity formation, and the individuation process in contemporary society. Through this, it is evident that psychological models, even when simplified, continue to offer valuable insights into the complexities of self-development. This study aims to explore the implications and meanings of the MBTI rather than delving into the differences between it and Jung's psychological types. Notably, the ambiguity of the MBTI is often evident in how test recipients grapple with forced binary choices during assessments. For instance, the workshop led by Zichy, a type expert, illustrated this struggle as participants expressed dissatisfaction with the limited options. Despite her insistence that personality types remain fixed, participants questioned the rigidity of this view, revealing the tension

between categorizations of the MBTI and individual self-understanding. The widespread acceptance of the MBTI, however, indicates a societal tendency to favor simplified personality frameworks, despite the inherent limitations of such classifications. This acceptance often leads individuals to use MBTI types as convenient identifiers, ultimately risking a superficial understanding of the self. Critics from the academic community are skeptical of the arbitrary nature of these types, noting that personality traits often resist strict categorization and can change over time. The Barnum effect further complicates this landscape, as vague descriptors lead individuals to identify with MBTI classifications that may not accurately reflect their complexities. The rise in popularity of the MBTI is partly fueled by a passionate advocacy that resonates with the public's desire for self-awareness, even as it remains contentious within psychological research.

Moreover, the study discusses the significance of the persona within Jungian psychology, emphasizing how individuals develop their identities in response to societal expectations. The process of individuation involves recognizing and integrating various aspects of the self, including the persona and shadow. As individuals navigate their social environments, they may feel pressured to conform, leading to an internal struggle between authentic self-expression and societal roles. The MBTI may serve as both a tool for identity exploration and a potential hindrance to genuine self-discovery, as it simplifies complex identities into rigid categories. The MBTI, while rooted in Jungian theory, presents a simplified and somewhat rigid interpretation of personality that contrasts with Jung's nuanced understanding of psychological types and the collective unconscious. Its widespread adoption and popularity on social media illustrate a cultural phenomenon where individuals seek frameworks to navigate their identities, often leading to superficial categorizations rather than deeper self-exploration. This trend reflects the influence of the collective unconscious, as shared symbols and archetypes permeate contemporary culture, shaping how people perceive themselves and others. As psychological assessments as the MBTI are increasingly utilized as tools for understanding oneself and others, they reveal the interplay between individual identity and societal norms. However, the reliance on the MBTI as a conversational tool on social media can both facilitate self-discovery and impose limitations, potentially reinforcing fixed personas rooted in collective expectations rather than promoting the fluidity inherent in the individuation process. As individuals engage with these frameworks, it becomes crucial to encourage critical reflection on how such tools influence their understanding of self and others.

By recognizing the impact of the collective unconscious in shaping perceptions and interactions, ultimately, this tension exemplifies the importance of understanding the interplay between the ego, persona, and societal influences in the journey toward individuation. While the MBTI offers a

framework for self-reflection, it is crucial for individuals to engage deeply with their identities, transcending simplistic classifications to foster true personal growth.

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