

Jungian Psychology as a Tool for the Counselor

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In an approach to a helping relationship, it is essential to have a framework for describing or understanding what is going on inside the person. For me, an important, encompassing model was presented by Carl Gustav Jung. This is a complex and controversial view of human psychology. His theories are far reaching, confusing, innovative and sometimes mystical. In my life, however, they fit the experiences that I have observed from myself and others. Jungian psychology includes many areas of thought that are not covered or sufficiently explained in most mainstream psychology. He was an extremely prolific writer and used information from all areas of science, philosophy and religion in his thoughts and works. Jung's psychology includes a model for the psyche, for development, typology, and therapy. From his ideas and experiences we can gain great insight upon the human condition and further, with this framework, shed some light on our client's issues.

The "building blocks" of the client's mentality is termed as the psyche. Jung's view was that the psyche consisted of three parts: the *conscious*, the *personal unconscious*, and the *collective unconscious*. The conscious is the part of us that we feel we "are". It includes the four basic mental functions : thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting (Jung, 1931). The *ego* is the name used for the organization of this conscious mind. It manages all of the thoughts, feelings, etc. It protects the self by forming a consistent reaction to these experiences so that the personality is itself, consistent. The personal unconscious is where these experiences go that the ego doesn't want, were too weak to remain in consciousness, or cannot be accepted. (Jung, 1919) This works with the ego to protect the ego by denying and distorting

reality so that the ego can cope with reality. Unaware to the person it turns wants into needs. The personal unconscious is a necessary part of the person and we should strive to make it healthier in therapy. The collective unconscious differs from the personal unconscious because it is that part that is shared by everyone, or at least it is independent of personal experiences. The collective unconscious is composed of *archetypes*. These are images that are generated over past lifetimes of people in the world that are connected to us through the collective unconscious. These primordial images (Jung, 1936) are not represented specifically to us, they are prototypes which are shaped by our own experiences. "A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it becomes conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience" (Jung, 1936, p 79). These archetypes act, along with experiences, as building blocks of the person. Jung identified many of the archetypes : persona, shadow, anima, animus, self, and others which he investigated in great detail. Each part of the psyche must be considered depending on the client and the problem. Other frameworks don't acknowledge the existence of the collective unconscious, since it is unprovable. Whether it is provable, it fits many situations in Jung's observations where it seems to present itself as a possible explanation.

Another important factor in any psychological framework is in describing the reasons and mechanisms by which changes develop in the individual. Jung thought people change in two stages during their individual development. In the first half of life (about 35 to 40 years) the person develops due to instinctual adaptations, while through the rest of their life the development is due to adaptations to themselves. (Jung, 1934) This manifests itself in the process of *individuation*. This means that the individual has an inborn archetypal part that wants to grow into a fully differentiated person. Each part of the person will continue to grow more complex and unique.

Since this will happen anyway, the individual needs the proper education and experiences to go through healthy individuation. In the case of the shadow archetype (which holds many “animal” type instincts) for example, its expression is often punished by society therefore leading to its repression in the unconscious in an undifferentiated state. Jung thought that many of societies ugliness like modern warfare came about as the result of an undifferentiated shadow. For healthy development each part of the person must be given equal attention and opportunity to be individuated. If one part is given priority, the person will have an “inflated persona” and their conscious behavior will be affected by this. Another part of development is the “transcendent function”. Jung defines its aim as “The realization in all of its aspects, of the personality originally hidden away in the embryonic germplasm; the production and unfolding of the original potential wholeness”. (Jung, 1925) This is called *integration* of the personality where all parts are combined to form the person. Perfect selfhood occurs (rarely) when the person has fully integrated and individuated their psyche. Jung thought both the environment and heredity influenced this growth process. Jung also listed stages of life and examined them in great detail. They were : childhood, youth young adulthood (puberty), middle age (35 to 40 years), and old age. In a counseling situation, these developmental changes need to be considered, not only for their own sake, but combined with the rest of a consistent model.

Jung examined typology as a means to define the unique characteristics of a particular person. The main distinction was in a persons *attitudes* and *functions*. Attitudes were either extraverted or introverted. Jung compares introverts and extroverts, respectively, as follows “Everyone Knows those reserved, inscrutable, rather shy people who form the strongest possible contrast to the open, sociable,

joyful or at least friendly and approachable characters who are on good terms with everybody, or quarrel with everybody, but always relate to them in some way and in turn are affected by them.” (Jung, 1921, p 330). He goes on to define the functions as *thinking, feeling, sensation* and *intuition*. Further, thinking and feeling are categorized as *rational* functions because they require an act of judgement. The other two, sensation and intuition, are the *irrational* functions because they require no reason. These four functions are combined with the two attitudes to form eight types (extroverted sensation, introverted thinking, etc.).

Jung seems to have quite an eclectic view of therapy, at least from his point of view. If some other theories were available, he certainly would have used them as he saw fit. Jung summarized his view of therapy “To my mind, therapy only really begins after the investigation of that wholly personal story. It is the patient’s secret, the rock against which he is shattered. If I know his secret story, I have a key to the treatment. The doctor’s task is how to gain that knowledge.” (Jung 1961, p117). Therapy was dependent on the particular case and as such he devised no specific approach. In Jungian therapy examining the unconscious is usually required. As Jung states “In most cases exploration of the unconscious material is insufficient.” (Jung, 1961, p117). The therapeutic philosophy treats the whole person, not just the symptom. Many counselors are moving toward a more eclectic approach.

In many areas we need to diagnose disorders. Jung didn’t have a particular approach to this. Jung used the convention at that time and described specific complexes as problems with the previously described structure. People had individual problems, so what the disorder was called didn’t matter. He discusses a woman “The diagnosis was schizophrenia or ‘dementia praecox,’ in the phrase of

those days. The prognosis : poor.” (Jung, 1961, p 115), he later went on to question the diagnosis and help the patient who his colleagues wouldn't. Generally, the diagnosis wasn't examined in great detail in Jung's theories. For this, we will have to go to the current standards for the diagnosis.

These pieces of the Jungian framework can be very useful in many counseling situations. The model of the psyche can describe the individual workings of the three parts, combined together for form the person. These can apply to many other psychological theories. It can be used as a tool for perceiving where the client is at in their situation. The model for the collective unconscious is valuable in the case of a client understanding circumstances which may not be readily discernable without looking at what society has brought to them. His thoughts on individuation and integration of the individual are a description on the mechanism, not the *result* of, development of the person. This, to me, is a more complete understanding of the process. Other theories can supply the specifics of the development, yet, I can use this to describe the dynamics of it. The modern, Myers-Briggs test is based on Jungian views of personality typology. In many cases, this is an invaluable tool to find out, formally, more information about the client. I have found it helpful and revealing just discussing the test. These pieces fit together in therapy quite well. They don't dictate what type or method of therapy is used, they simply provide an understanding of what's happening within the client (and us). These concepts have contributed a multitude of insight in today's ideas and it is important to understand how these pieces fit together and interact. The helping relationship is improved the more we understand and can perceive models for our client's and our own behavior. This theory assists in building that model.

“...the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being.” (Jung, 1961, p326)

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