

How the system works

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Structure

The Enneagram's structure may look complicated, although it is actually simple. It will help you understand the Enneagram if you sketch it yourself.

Draw a circle and mark nine equidistant points on its circumference. Designate each point by a number from one to nine, with nine at the top, for symmetry and by convention. Each point represents one of the nine basic personality types.

The nine points on the circumference are also connected with each other by the inner lines of the Enneagram. Note that points Three, Six, and Nine form an equilateral triangle. The remaining six points are connected in the following order: One connects with Four, Four with Two, Two with Eight, Eight with Five, Five with Seven, and Seven with One. These six points form an irregular hexagram. The meaning of these inner lines will be discussed shortly.

The Enneagram



Your Basic Personality Type

From one point of view, the Enneagram can be seen as a set of nine distinct personality types, with each number on the Enneagram denoting one type. It is common to find a little of yourself in all nine of the types, although one of them should stand out as being closest to yourself. This is your *basic personality type*.

Everyone emerges from childhood with *one* of the nine types dominating their personality, with inborn temperament and other pre-natal factors being the main determinants of our type. This is one area where most all of the major Enneagram authors agree—we *are born with a dominant type*. Subsequently, this inborn orientation largely determines the ways in which we learn to adapt to our early childhood environment. It also seems to lead to certain unconscious orientations toward our parental figures, but why this is so, we still do not know. In any case, by the time children are four or five years old, their consciousness has developed sufficiently to have a separate sense of self. Although their identity is still very fluid, at this age children begin to establish themselves and find ways of fitting into the world on their own.

Thus, the overall orientation of our personality reflects the totality of all childhood factors (including genetics) that influenced its development. (For more about the developmental patterns of each personality type, see the related section in the type descriptions in [Personality Types](#) and in [The Wisdom of the Enneagram](#). There is a discussion of the overall theory in [Understanding The Enneagram](#), 67-70).

Several more points can be made about the basic type itself.

1. People do not change from one basic personality type to another.

2. The descriptions of the personality types are universal and apply equally to males and females, since no type is inherently masculine or feminine.
3. Not everything in the description of your basic type will apply to you all the time because you fluctuate constantly among the healthy, average, and unhealthy traits that make up your personality type.
4. The Enneagram uses numbers to designate each of the types because numbers are value neutral—they imply the whole range of attitudes and behaviors of each type without specifying anything either positive or negative. Unlike the labels used in psychiatry, numbers provide an unbiased, shorthand way of indicating a lot about a person without being pejorative.
5. The numerical ranking of the types is not significant. A larger number is no better than a smaller number; it is not better to be a Nine than a Two because nine is a bigger number.
6. No type is inherently better or worse than any other. While all the personality types have unique assets and liabilities, some types may be considered to be more desirable than others in any given culture or group. Furthermore, for one reason or another, you may not be happy being a particular type. As you learn more about all the types, however, you will see that just as each has unique assets, each has unique liabilities. The ideal is to become your best self, not to imitate the assets of another type.

Identifying Your Basic Personality Type

If taken properly, our questionnaire, the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (RHETI® version 2.5), will identify your basic personality type for you. This short section is included so that we can have a basic understanding of the types in our discussion without having to go to the longer descriptions in the next section.

As you think about your personality, which of the following nine roles fits you best most of the time? Or, to put it differently, if you were to describe yourself in a few words, which of the following word clusters would come closest?

The Enneagram with Riso-Hudson Type Names



These one-word descriptors can be expanded into four-word sets of traits. Keep in mind that these are merely highlights and do not represent the full spectrum of each type.

Type **One** is principled, purposeful, self-controlled, and perfectionistic.

Type **Two** is generous, demonstrative, people-pleasing, and possessive.

Type **Three** is adaptable, excelling, driven, and image-conscious.

Type **Four** is expressive, dramatic, self-absorbed, and temperamental.

Type **Five** is perceptive, innovative, secretive, and isolated.

Type **Six** is engaging, responsible, anxious, and suspicious.

Type **Seven** is spontaneous, versatile, acquisitive, and scattered.

Type **Eight** is self-confident, decisive, willful, and confrontational.

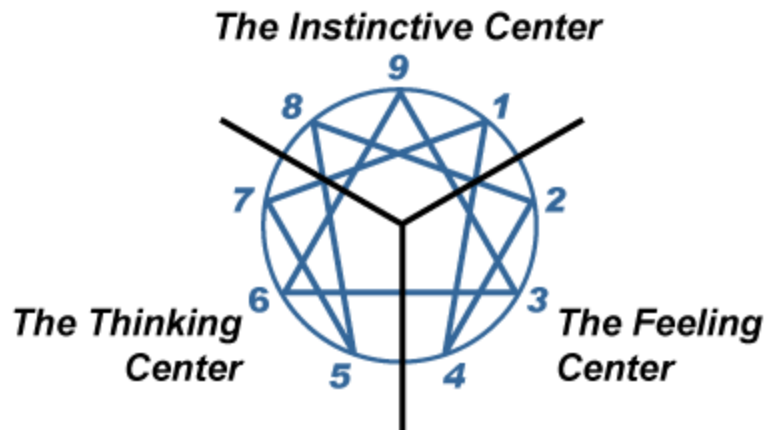
Type **Nine** is receptive, reassuring, complacent, and resigned.

The Instinctive Centers

The Enneagram is a 3 x 3 arrangement of nine personality types in *three Centers*.

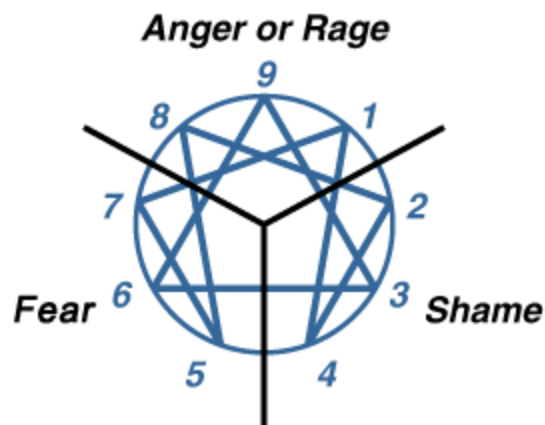
There are three types in the *Instinctive Center*, three in the *Feeling Center*, and three in the *Thinking Center*, as shown below. Each Center consists of three personality types that have in common the assets and liabilities of that Center. For example, personality type Four has unique strengths and liabilities involving its feelings, which is why it is in the Feeling Center. Likewise, the Eight's assets and liabilities involve its relationship to its instinctual drives, which is why it is in the Instinctive Center, and so forth for all nine personality types.

The Centers of the Enneagram



The inclusion of each type in its Center is not arbitrary. Each type results from a particular relationship with a cluster of issues that characterize that Center. Most simply, these issues revolve around a powerful, largely unconscious emotional response to the loss of contact with the core of the self. In the Instinctive Center, the emotion is *Anger* or *Rage*. In the Feeling Center, the emotion is *Shame*, and in the Thinking Center, it is *Fear*. Of course, all nine types contain all three of these emotions, but in each Center, the personalities of the types are particularly affected by that Center's emotional theme.

The Dominant Emotion of each Center



Thus, each type has a particular way of coping with the dominant emotion of its Center. We can briefly see what this means by examining each type, Center by Center. In the Instinctive Center, **Eights** act out their anger and instinctual energies. In other words, when Eights feel anger building in them, they immediately respond to it in some physical way, raising their voices, moving more forcefully. Others can clearly see that Eights are angry because they give themselves permission to express their anger physically.

Nines deny their anger and instinctual energies as if to say, "What anger? I am not a person who gets angry." Nines are the type most out of touch with their anger and instinctual energies, often feeling threatened by them. Of course, Nines get angry like everyone else, but try to stay out of their darker feelings by focusing on idealizations of their relationships and their world.

Ones attempt to control or repress their anger and instinctual energy. They feel that they must stay in control of themselves, especially of their instinctual impulses and angry feelings at all times. They would like to direct these energies according to the dictates of their highly developed inner critic (superego), the source of their strictures on themselves and others.

In the Feeling Center, **Twos** attempt to control their shame by getting other people to like them and to think of them as good people. They also want to convince themselves that they are good, loving people by focusing on their positive feelings for others while repressing their negative feelings (such as anger and resentment at not being appreciated enough). As long as Twos can get positive emotional responses from others, they feel wanted and are able to control feelings of shame.

Threes try to deny their shame, and are potentially the most out of touch with underlying feelings of inadequacy. Threes learn to cope with shame by trying to become what they believe a valuable, successful person is like. Thus, Threes learn to perform well, to be acceptable, even outstanding, and are often driven relentlessly in their pursuit of success as a way of staving off feelings of shame and fears of failure.

Fours attempt to control their shame by focusing on how unique and special their particular talents, feelings, and personal characteristics are. Fours highlight their individuality and creativity as a way of dealing with their shameful feelings, although Fours are the type most likely to succumb to feelings of inadequacy. Fours also manage their shame by cultivating a rich, romantic fantasy life in which they do not have to deal with whatever in their life seems drab or uninteresting to them.

In the Thinking Center, **Fives** have fear about the outer world and about their capacity to cope with it. Thus, they cope with their fear by withdrawing from the world. Fives become secretive, isolated loners who use their minds to penetrate into the nature of the world. Fives hope that eventually, as they understand reality on their own terms, they will be able to rejoin the world and participate in it, but they never feel they know enough to participate with total confidence. Instead, they involve themselves with increasingly complex inner worlds.

Sixes exhibit the most fear of all three types, largely experienced as anxiety, which causes them to be the most out of touch with their own sense of inner knowing and confidence. Unlike Fives, Sixes have trouble trusting their own minds, so they are constantly looking outside themselves for something to make them feel sure of themselves. They might turn to philosophies, beliefs, relationships, jobs, savings, authorities, or any combination of the above. But no matter how many security structures they create, Sixes still feel doubtful and anxious. They may even begin to doubt the very people and beliefs that they have turned to for reassurance. Sixes may also respond to their fear and anxiety by impulsively confronting it—defying their fear in the effort to be free of it.

Sevens have fear about their inner world. There are feelings of pain, loss, deprivation, and general anxiety that Sevens would like to stay clear of as much as possible. To cope with these feelings, Sevens keep their minds occupied with exciting possibilities and options— as long as they have something stimulating to anticipate, Sevens feel that they can distract themselves from their fears. Sevens, in most cases, do not stop merely at thinking about these options, however. As much as possible they attempt to actually do as many of their options as they can. Thus, Sevens can be found staying on the go, pursuing one experience after another, and keeping themselves entertained and engaged with their many ideas and activities.

The Wing

No one is a pure personality type: everyone is a unique mixture of his or her basic type and usually *one* of the two types adjacent to it on the circumference of the Enneagram. One of the two types adjacent to your basic type is called your *wing*.

Your basic type dominates your overall personality, while the wing complements it and adds important, sometimes contradictory, elements to your total personality. Your wing is the “second side” of your personality, and it must be taken into consideration to better understand yourself or someone else. For example, if you are a personality type Nine, you will likely have either a One-wing or an Eight-wing, and your personality as a whole can best be understood by considering the traits of the Nine as they uniquely blend with the traits of either the One or the Eight. In our teaching experience over the years, we have also encountered some individuals who seem to have both wings, while others are strongly influenced by their basic type and show little of either wing.

There is disagreement among the various traditions of the Enneagram about whether individuals have one or two wings. Strictly speaking, everyone has two wings—in the restricted sense that both of the types adjacent to your basic type are operative in your personality since each person possesses the potentials of all nine types. However, this is not what is usually meant by “having two wings,” and proponents of the so-called two-wing theory believe that both wings operate more or less equally in everyone’s personality. (For example, they believe that a Nine would have roughly equal amounts of his or her Eight and One wings.)

Observation of people leads us to conclude that while the two-wing theory applies to some individuals, most people have a dominant wing. In the vast majority of people, while the so-called second wing always remains operative to some degree, the dominant wing is far more important. (For example, Twos with Three-wings are noticeably different from Twos with One-wings, and while Twos with Three-wings have a One-wing, it is not nearly as important as the Three-wing.) It is therefore clearer to refer simply to a type’s “wing” as opposed to its “dominant wing,” since the two terms represent the same concept.

One other observation about wings is worth mentioning. In the course of teaching the Enneagram in workshops and Trainings, many people in the latter half of their lives have reported the development of their so-called “second wing.” And in individuals who have been pursuing psychological and/or spiritual work, we have seen evidence that this is true. We do not know, however, whether these students were merely seeing all of the positive potentials of the nine types unfolding in them as they matured—their second wing being one of the other seven types—or whether this was a specific development of the second wing type. We will continue to investigate this idea in our work with our students and colleagues.

It is, of course, necessary to identify your basic type before you can assess which wing you have. Besides indicating your basic type, the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator may also indicate your wing. Even so, the best way to understand the influence of your wing is to read the full descriptions of your type and its wings in *Personality Types*. You can also read the descriptions of the two types adjacent to your basic type and decide which best applies to you.

The Levels of Development

There is an internal structure within each personality type. That structure is the continuum of behaviors, attitudes, defenses, and motivations formed by the nine Levels of Development which make up the personality type itself. This discovery (and the working out of all the traits that comprise each type) was originally made by Don Riso in 1977, and was further developed by Don with Russ Hudson in the 1990s. They are the only Enneagram teachers to include this important factor in their treatment of the Enneagram. The Levels are an important contribution not only to the Enneagram but to ego psychology — and the personality types of the Enneagram cannot be adequately explained without them. The Levels account for differences between people of the same type as well as how people change both for better or worse. Thus, they can also help therapists and counselors pinpoint what is actually going on with clients and suggest solutions to the problems they are having.

The Levels of Development provide a framework for seeing how all of the different traits that comprise each type fit into a large whole; they are a way of conceptualizing the underlying “skeletal” structure of each type. Without the Levels, the types can seem to be an arbitrary collection of unrelated traits, with contradictory behaviors and attitudes often part of the picture. But by understanding the Levels for each type, one can see how all of the traits are interrelated—and how healthy traits can deteriorate into average traits and possibly into unhealthy ones. As pioneering consciousness philosopher Ken Wilber has noted, without the Levels, the Enneagram is reduced to a “horizontal” set of nine discrete categories. By including the Levels, however, a “vertical” dimension is added that not only reflects the complexity of human nature, but goes far in explaining many different, important elements within personality.

Further, with the Levels, a dynamic element is introduced that reflects the changing nature of the personality patterns themselves. You have probably noticed that people change constantly—sometimes they are clearer, more free, grounded, and emotionally available, while at other times they are more anxious, resistant, reactive, emotionally volatile and less free. Understanding the Levels makes it clear that when people change states within their personality, they are shifting within the spectrum of motivations, traits, and defenses that make up their personality type.

To understand an individual accurately, it is necessary to perceive where the person lies along the continuum of Levels of his or her type at a given time. In other words, one must assess whether a person is in their healthy, average, or unhealthy range of functioning. This is important because, for example, two people of the same personality

type and wing will differ significantly if one is healthy and the other unhealthy. (In relationships and in the business world, understanding this distinction is crucial.)

The continuum is comprised of nine internal Levels of Development—briefly, there are three Levels in the healthy section, three Levels in the average section, and three Levels in the unhealthy section. It may help you to think of the continuum of Levels as a photographer's gray scale which has gradations from pure white to pure black with many shades of gray in between. On the continuum, the healthiest traits appear first, at the top, so to speak. As we move down the continuum in a spiral pattern, we progressively pass through each Level of Development marking a distinct shift in the personality's deterioration to the pure black of psychological breakdown at the bottom. The continuum for each of the personality types can be seen in the following diagram.

The Continuum of the Levels of Development

Healthy

- Level 1: The Level of Liberation
- Level 2: The Level of Psychological Capacity
- Level 3: The Level of Social Value

Average

- Level 4: The Level of Imbalance/ Social Role
- Level 5: The Level of Interpersonal Control
- Level 6: The Level of Overcompensation

Unhealthy

- Level 7: The Level of Violation
- Level 8: The Level of Obsession and Compulsion
- Level 9: The Level of Pathological Destructiveness

At each Level, significant psychological shifts occur as is indicated by the title we have given to it. For example, at Level 5, the Level of Interpersonal Control, the person is trying to manipulate himself and others to get his or her psychological needs met. This invariably creates interpersonal conflicts. By this Level, the person has also fully identified with the ego and does not see himself as anything more than that: the ego

must therefore be increasingly defended and inflated for the person to feel safe and to keep their identity intact. If this activity does not satisfy the person, and anxiety increases, he or she may deteriorate to the next state, Level 6, the Level of Overcompensation, where their behavior will become more intrusive and aggressive as they continue to pursue their ego-agenda. Anxiety is increasing, and the person is increasingly disruptive, and focused on getting his needs met, regardless of the impact on people around them.

One of the most profound ways of understanding the Levels is as a *measure of our capacity to be present*. The more we move down the Levels, the more identified we are with our ego and its increasingly negative and restrictive patterns. Our personality becomes more defensive, reactive, and automatic—and we consequently have less and less real freedom and less real consciousness. As we move down the Levels, we become caught in more compulsive, destructive actions which are ultimately self-defeating.

By contrast, the movement toward health, *up the Levels*, is simultaneous with being more present and awake in our minds, hearts, and bodies. As we become more present, we become less fixated in the defensive structures of our personality and are more attuned and open to ourselves and our environment. We see our personality objectively in action rather than “falling asleep” to our automatic personality patterns. There is therefore the possibility of “not doing” our personality and of gaining some real distance from the negative consequences of getting caught in it.

As we become more present, we see our personality traits more objectively and the Levels become a continuous guide to self-observation, a map that we can use to chart where we are in our psycho-spiritual development at any given time. As we move “up” the Levels, we discover that we are freer and less driven by compulsive, unconscious drives and therefore able to act more effectively in all areas of our lives, including in our relationships. When we are less identified with our personality, we find that we respond as needed to whatever life presents, actualizing the positive potentials in all nine types, bringing real peace, creativity, strength, joy, compassion, and other positive qualities to whatever we are doing. (For more, see *Personality Types*, 45-51, 421-6; 465-93; *Understanding the Enneagram*, 136-66, and *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*.)

Directions of Integration (Growth) and Disintegration (Stress)

As we have seen with the Levels of Development, the nine personality types of the Enneagram are not static categories: they reflect our change over time. Further, the sequence of the types and the arrangement of the inner lines of the symbol are not arbitrary. The inner lines of the Enneagram connect the types in a sequence that denotes what each type will do under different conditions. There are two lines connected to each type, and they connect with two other types. One line connects with a type that represents how a person of the first type behaves when they are moving toward health and growth. This is called the Direction of Integration or Growth. The other line goes to another type that represents how the person is likely to act out if they are under increased stress and pressure—when they feel they are not in control of the situation. This second line is called the Direction of Stress or Disintegration. In other words, different situations will evoke different kinds of responses from your personality. You will respond or adapt in different directions, as indicated by the lines of the Enneagram *from your basic type*. Again, we see the flexibility and dynamism of the Enneagram.

The **Direction of Disintegration** or **Stress** for each type is indicated by the sequence of numbers 1-4-2-8-5-7-1. This means that an average to unhealthy One under stress will eventually behave like an average to unhealthy Four; an average to unhealthy Four will act out their stress like an average to unhealthy Two; an average to unhealthy Two will act out under stress like an Eight, an Eight will act out under stress like a Five, a Five will act out like a Seven, and a Seven will act out like a One. (An easy way to remember the sequence is to realize that 1-4 or 14 doubles to 28, and that doubles to 57—or almost so. Thus, 1-4-2-8-5-7—and the sequence returns to 1 and begins again.) Likewise, on the equilateral triangle, the sequence is 9-6-3-9: a stressed out Nine will act out like a Six, a stressed out Six will act out like a Three, and a stressed out Three will act out like a Nine. (You can remember this sequence if you think of the numerical values diminishing as the types become more stressed and reactive. For a longer explanation and examples, see *Personality Types*, 47-52, 413-8.) You can see how this works by following the direction of the arrows on the following Enneagram.

The Direction of Disintegration (Stress)

1-4-2-8-5-7-1

9-6-3-9



The **Direction of Integration** or **Growth** is indicated for each type by the reverse of the sequences for disintegration. Each type moves toward integration in a direction that is the opposite of its unhealthy direction. Thus, the sequence for the Direction of Integration is 1-7-5-8-2-4-1: an integrating One goes to Seven, an integrating Seven goes to Five, an integrating Five goes to Eight, an integrating Eight goes to Two, an integrating Two goes to Four, and an integrating Four goes to One. On the equilateral triangle, the sequence is 9-3-6-9: an integrating Nine will go to Three, an integrating Three will go to Six, and an integrating Six will go to Nine. You can see how this works by following the direction of the arrows on the following Enneagram.

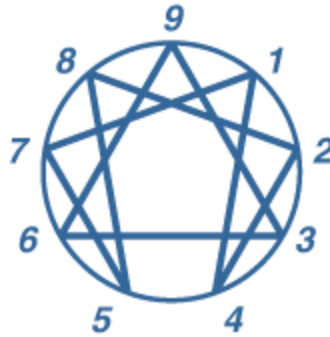
The Direction of Integration (Growth)

1-7-5-8-2-4-1

9-3-6-9



It is not necessary to have separate Enneagrams for the Direction of Integration and the Direction of Disintegration. Both directions can be shown on one Enneagram by eliminating the arrows and connecting the proper points with plain lines.



The Direction of Integration (Growth)

1-7-5-8-2-4-1

9-3-6-9

The Direction of Disintegration (Stress)

1-4-2-8-5-7-1

9-6-3-9

No matter which personality type you are, the types in *both* your Direction of Integration or Growth and your Direction of Disintegration or Stress are important influences. To obtain a complete picture of yourself (or of someone else), you must take into consideration the basic type and wing as well as the two types in the Directions of Integration and Disintegration. The factors represented by those *four* types blend into your total personality and provide the framework for understanding the influences operating in you. For example, no one is simply a personality type Two. A Two has either a One-wing or a Three-wing, and the Two's Direction of Disintegration (Eight) and its Direction of Integration (Four) also play important parts in his or her overall personality.

Ultimately, the goal is for each of us to “move around” the Enneagram, integrating what each type symbolizes and acquiring the healthy potentials of *all the types*. The ideal is to become a balanced, fully functioning person who can draw on the power (or from the Latin, “virtue”) of each as needed. Each of the types of the Enneagram symbolizes different important aspects of what we need to achieve this end. The personality type

we begin life with is therefore less important ultimately than how well (or badly) we use our type as the beginning point for our self-development and self-realization.

The Three Instincts

The three Instincts (often erroneously called “the subtypes”) are a third set of distinctions that are extremely important for understanding personality. A major aspect of human nature lies in our instinctual “hard wiring” as biological beings. We each are endowed with specific instinctual intelligences that are necessary for our survival as individuals and as a species. We each have a *self-preservation* instinct (for preserving the body and its life and functioning), a *sexual instinct* (for extending ourselves in the environment and through the generations), and a *social instinct* (for getting along with others and forming secure social bonds).

While we have all three Instincts in us, one of them is the dominant focus of our attention and behavior—the set of attitudes and values that we are most attracted to and comfortable with. We each also have a second Instinct that is used to support the dominant Instinct, as well as a third Instinct that is the least developed—a real blind spot in our personality and our values. Which Instinct is in each of these three places—most, middle, and least developed—produces what we call our “Instinctual Stack” (like a three-layer cake) with your dominant Instinct on top, the next most developed Instinct in the middle, and the least developed on the bottom).

These instinctual drives profoundly influence our personalities, and at the same time, our personalities largely determine how each person *prioritizes* these instinctual needs. Thus, while every human being has all three of these instincts operating in him or her, our personality causes us to be more concerned with one of these instincts than the other two. We call this instinct our *dominant* instinct. This tends to be our first priority—the area of life we attend to first. But when we are more caught up in the defenses of our personality—further down the Levels of Development—our personality most *interferes* with our dominant instinct.

Further, our Enneagram type flavors the way in which we approach our dominant instinctual need. Combining our Enneagram type with our dominant instinct yields a much more specific portrait of the workings of our personality. When we apply the distinctions of these three instincts to the nine Enneagram types they create 27 unique combinations of type and dominant instinct that account for differences and variability within the types. We call these combinations the Instinctual Variants.

The Enneagram Institute® offers an online test, the Instinctual Variants Questionnaire (IVQ), for helping people determine not only their dominant instinct, but also their Instinctual Stack. The IVQ also provides a detailed personality profile derived from the combination of the test taker's Enneagram type, wing, and Instinctual Stack.

The following are brief descriptions of the three instincts:

Self Preservation Instinct

People who have this as their dominant instinct are preoccupied with the safety, comfort, health, energy, and well-being of the physical body. In a word, they are concerned with having enough *resources* to meet life's demands. Identification with the body is a fundamental focus for all humans, and we need our body to function well in order to be alive and active in the world. Most people in contemporary cultures have not faced life or death "survival" in the strictest sense; thus, Self-Preservation types tend to be concerned with food, money, housing, medical matters, and physical comfort. Moreover, those primarily focused on self-preservation, by extension, are usually interested in maintaining these resources for others as well. Their focus of attention naturally goes towards things related to these areas such as clothes, temperature, shopping, decorating, and the like, particularly if they are not satisfied in these areas or have a feeling of deficiency due to their childhoods. Self-Pres types tend to be more grounded, practical, serious, and introverted than the other two instinctual types. They might have active social lives and a satisfying intimate relationship, but if they feel that their self-preservation needs are not being met, still tend not to be happy or at ease. In their primary relationships, these people are "nesters"—they seek domestic tranquility and security with a stable, reliable partner.

Sexual (aka "Attraction") Instinct

Many people originally identify themselves as this type because they have learned that the Sexual types are interested in "one-on-one relationships." But all three instinctual types are interested in one-on-one relationships for different reasons, so this does not distinguish them. The key element in Sexual types is an intense drive for stimulation and a constant awareness of the "chemistry" between themselves and others. Sexual types are immediately aware of the attraction, or lack thereof, between themselves and other people. Further, while the basis of this instinct is related to sexuality, it is not necessarily about people engaging in the sexual act. There are many people that we are excited to be around for reasons of personal chemistry that we have no intention of "getting involved with." Nonetheless, we might be aware that we feel stimulated in

certain people's company and less so in others. The sexual type is constantly moving toward that sense of intense stimulation and juicy energy in their relationships and in their activities. They are the most "energized" of the three instinctual types, and tend to be more aggressive, competitive, charged, and emotionally intense than the Self-Pres or Social types. Sexual types need to have intense energetic charge in their primary relationships or else they remain unsatisfied. They enjoy being intensely involved—even merged—with others, and can become disenchanted with partners who are unable to meet their need for intense energetic union. Losing yourself in a "fusion" of being is the ideal here, and Sexual types are always looking for this state with others and with stimulating objects in their world.

Social (aka "Adaptive") Instinct

Just as many people tend to misidentify themselves as Sexual types because they want one-on-one relationships, many people fail to recognize themselves as Social types because they get the (false) idea that this means always being involved in groups, meetings, and parties. If Self-Preservation types are interested in adjusting the environment to make themselves more secure and comfortable, Social types *adapt themselves to serve the needs of the social situation* they find themselves in. Thus, Social types are highly aware of other people, whether they are in intimate situations or in groups. They are also aware of how their actions and attitudes are affecting those around them. Moreover, Sexual types seek intimacy, Social types seek *personal connection*: they want to stay in long-term contact with people and to be involved in their world. Social types are the most concerned with doing things that will have some impact on their community, or even broader domains. They tend to be warmer, more open, engaging, and socially responsible than the other two types. In their primary relationships, they seek partners with whom they can share social activities, wanting their intimates to get involved in projects and events with them. Paradoxically, they actually tend to avoid long periods of exclusive intimacy and quiet solitude, seeing both as potentially limiting. Social types lose their sense of identity and meaning when they are not involved with others in activities that transcend their individual interests.

Typing Yourself and Others

Once you have taken the [Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator \(RHETI® version 2.5\)](#) to discover your dominant type, and perhaps also the [Instinctual Variants Questionnaire](#) to further refine your understanding of the Enneagram types, you may be

curious about the personality types of others. Since you will usually not be able to administer the RHETI® or IVQ to business associates or to strangers, you might wonder how you can become more skilled at discovering which type someone else is. By studying the descriptions in *Personality Types*, *Understanding the Enneagram*, and *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, you will, in time, become more adept at typing people. As you do so, however, you might keep several points in mind.

You may be able to figure out the types of a few close friends rather quickly, or you may find it difficult to categorize people and not know where to begin. Either state is normal. It is not always apparent which type someone is, and it takes time and study to sharpen your skills. Remember that you are like a beginning medical student who is learning to diagnose a wide variety of conditions, some healthy and some unhealthy. It takes practice to learn to identify the various “symptoms” of each type and to see larger “syndromes.”

Despite the subtleties and complexities involved, there is really no secret about typing people. You must learn which traits go with each type and observe how people manifest those traits. This is a subtle undertaking because there are many subtypes and quirks to each personality type. Different types can sometimes seem similar, particularly if their motivations are not taken into account. This is why it is not sufficient to focus on a single trait in isolation and make a diagnosis based on it alone. It is necessary to see each type as a whole— its overall style, approach to life, and especially its underlying motivations—before you can determine someone’s type reliably. Many elements must come together before you can be sure that you have typed someone accurately.

Moreover, when we diagnose others, we are always on thinner ice than when we use the Enneagram to deepen our own self-knowledge. It is, of course, more appropriate to apply this material to ourselves than to type others while we avoid looking at our own lives. Nevertheless, it is unrealistic to think that anything as interesting (or as insightful) as the Enneagram will not be used for better understanding others. In fact, we categorize people all the time. No one approaches others without some sort of mental categories. We automatically perceive people either as male or female, black or white, attractive or unattractive, good or bad, friend or enemy, and so forth. It is not only honest to be aware of this, it is useful to have more accurate and appropriate categories for everyone, including ourselves.

Although the Enneagram is probably the most open-ended and dynamic of typologies, this does not imply that the Enneagram can say all there is to say about human beings.

Individuals are understandable only up to a certain point beyond which they remain mysterious and unpredictable. Thus, while there can be no simple explanations for persons, it is still possible to say something true about them. In the last analysis, the Enneagram helps us to do that—and only that. The Enneagram is useful because it indicates with startling clarity certain constellations of meaning about something that is essentially beyond definition: the mystery that we are.