

Archetypes

Carolyn Myss on Archetypes:

Most archetypes are psychological patterns derived from historical roles in life, such as the mother, child, trickster, servant; they can also be universal events or situations, such as initiation, death and rebirth. Along with our individual personal unconscious, which is unique to each of us, Jung believed that “there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature that is identical in all individuals.” The “collective unconscious,” as he called it, is inherited rather than developed and is composed largely of archetypes and mythological figure.

Although archetypes are both ancient and universal, they become personalized when they’re a part of your own psyche.

Archetypes are not passive entities floating around in the psyche like old family portraits hanging in a dusty castle. They take an active role as guardians and inner allies, awakening you when you’re in danger of falling into destructive behavior. The saboteur, for instance, comes into play when you’re in a situation in which you tend to sabotage your best interests - or allow others to sabotage you. When you learn to recognize such a pattern, instead of ignoring it or denying its presence, it becomes your friend and helper.

All archetypes have shadow manifestations as well as positive aspects. The rebel can be a powerful force leading you to reject illegitimate authority and strike out on a bold new path of action. But if you let your awareness lapse, its shadow aspect can induce you to rebel against constructive, positive leaders, or to fall in love with the image and trappings of rebellion.

Exercise to do with your archetypes:

1. Pay attention to which archetypes are present for you and name them. Use the attached list or make up your own.
2. Ask them what they have to say about the situation.
3. Explore what the emotions are behind their statements. Name those too.
4. When you deny someone’s reality they will become more entrenched in it. Do not deny or argue with their statements or emotions.
5. The archetype is there trying to protect you in some way.
6. Reassure them. What can you say to them to reassure their feelings? Reassurance is not about agreeing. It is about validating the archetype’s perspective.

Archetype Examples

The Victim

While the label "victim" has negative connotations, in its healthy state, this archetype provides a quality of perception and strength that protects against victimization from others. It alerts us to become more conscious in situations that are conducive to being taken advantage of. In its underdeveloped state, the victim feels that it is always taken advantage of, and never at fault. The purpose of the Victim is to teach us how to develop the courage and strength to stand up for oneself and to no longer invite victimization in. We are not meant to be victimized in life, but are meant to learn how to face our challenges and overcome them.

The Saboteur (The Guide, The Protector, The Facilitator)

This archetype often is the most difficult to comprehend as it is associated with the concept of betrayal. In truth, the purpose of this archetype is to help you learn the many ways in which you challenge, or sabotage, yourself. Our fears frequently cloud the quality of our decisions. There are numerous examples of cases in which the underdeveloped saboteur surfaces. We begin a new relationship and then destroy it because we are afraid of a painful outcome. We begin a working relationship and find ourselves in a power struggle when we fear the talents of the other person. The developed Saboteur guards self, home and everything else important. It guides us in and out of situations by allowing us to feel incredibly creative and vulnerable at the same time. The combination of these two energies activates our potential to rise out of self-destruction. Once maturity is accomplished, the Saboteur becomes an ally that alerts us when we are in a vulnerable state, and thereby allows us to consciously exercise empowered choice.

The Prostitute

The term "Prostitute" also implies a negative meaning, but we learn from this archetype not to compromise or sacrifice our mind, body, or spirit. Prostitution takes many forms that all include compromising one's morals or ethics, sacrificing any aspect or expression of yourself. For example, have you ever "sold out" to people or organizations that you did believe in? Have you remained in a bad marriage for financial protection, put someone else in a compromising position in order to gain power, or bribed another for loyalty, support or silence? Have you ever judged as weak those who continually compromise themselves? These examples represent the negative energy of this archetype. Yet, in the case of the developed prostitute, one engages in lessons of integrity and dignity that allows one to refuse sacrificing any expression of the self.

The Actor/Storyteller

The Actor/Storyteller brings pleasure to all by acting out events in life, and shares lifelong wisdom and insight through story, myth, and legend. The shadow, or the underdeveloped side of the Actor has a need to exaggerate the drama of his or her own life by telling untrue stories, including everything from gossip to attempts to defame another person in the public eye. When living the dark side of this archetype, we might find ourselves as the recipient of our own falsehoods, or living out the legend of the "Boy Who Cried Wolf," so that no matter what we say, others no longer accept it as truth. Characteristics of this energy include exaggerating, dramatizing, attention seeking behavior, fabricating information, and lying.

The Artist

This archetype is associated with aesthetic creativity. It plays a dominant role in those skilled in the fine arts such as literature, poetry, music, painting and photography. The artist is often a social voice or visionary, representing the energy of the human conditions through his/her particular talent. The shadow side of this archetype believes that in order to achieve success great suffering and psychological pain is required as a type of initiation; there is little hope to be recognized until after death. Examples include Van Gogh, Beethoven, and Mozart.

The Addict

The developed Addict helps you recognize when an outside substance, habit, relationship or other expression of life has more authority over your will than your spirit does. The liberated slave who has earned integrity, self-esteem and dignity represents its light side. The undeveloped Addict gives up their will for survival and struggles with the absence of self-control.

The Disciple

The disciple is devoted to a teacher or cause. Often a covenant of support is involved. The shadow disciple emerges when individual will is forsaken, thereby losing the ability to discern fact from fiction. A type of hypnotic condition results, allowing seduction by the ruling group or authority figure, even if it leads to death.

The Alchemist

This archetype is associated with "turning lead into gold," using a combination of chemistry, magic, and philosophy, thriving on the mysterious relationship between matter and the creation of life. Alchemy does not have to relate to money, it often can be a Pollyanna, or someone who takes something worthless and makes it powerful. By example, drug seekers and con artists do this through storytelling. The negative aspect of this archetype seduces people into believing that they can out run the natural speed of creation through a "get rich quick scheme". The lesson of the Alchemist is to look for gold within the context of human challenges, allowing the divine to do the transmitting. The Alchemist is not a wizard, who is associated with the use of supernatural powers, or a magician, who tends to be seen more as an entertainer.

The Avenger/Mercenary

This archetype must transcend vengeance as well as the capacity to be "bought" for the task of harming another. It is often a part of those who are attracted to street gangs. The positive side teaches the futility of revenge. The lesson inherent in this archetype is to attain victory over the dark energy of vengeance and to reestablish a connection to spiritual morality. The developed mercenary teaches the futility of vengeance.

The Celibate

The celibate transmits sexual energy into alternative forms of expression, sometimes based in spiritually and other times for therapeutic reasons. To be celibate from an archetypal perspective does not mean that life is lived without sexuality. It does mean, however, that there are no physical relationships. You can be a celibate and a lover. Romance novels are popular with those in this situation. In its positive side, being alone is a way of regrouping creativity. The shadow side refrains from sexual expression for reasons of fear, either self-imposed or absorbed by others. In this instance the presences of others creates greater feelings of loneliness.

The Coward

The coward faces circumstances that require courage until it is a part of his/her spirit. Once developed, it radiates strength and the inability to be threatened. Coward energy need not be dramatic, as in facing the enemy in a military confrontation. It more often takes the form of less obvious encounters such as difficulty in admitting to deeds at work or home. Symbolically, the Coward within must stand up to being bullied by his own inner fears.

The Damsel/Knight

This is the archetype of the romantic duo. The damsel waits to be rescued by her knight, the chivalrous man who comes with the promise of a life of romance and bliss "forever after." The damsel represents a woman with little ability to handle the forces in the outside world (note the protective boundaries of the castle), and the Knight is the portrait of honor, strength, and chivalry who embodies the promise of everlasting safety and protection. From the damsel's point of view, the Knight is automatically elevated, no matter what package he comes in. The shadow side of this duo is the illusion it contains of a perfect union capable of creating an endless non-threatening environment that is not only a fortress, but one in which neither the damsel nor knight will have to experience ordinary challenges such as aging or illness. The Damsel represents the classic "helpless" and contains all of the elements of the wounded child and the shadow Knight must depend on a weak female to be held in esteem. The positive side of the Damsel is an innocence that consciously asks to help, rather than for help.

The Hermit

The Hermit is frequently misunderstood, labeled eccentric, and chooses isolation as a lifestyle. In general those with this archetype look toward the arts, philosophical pursuits or something creative to fill the gap of empty space. Others choose this lifestyle because of fear of the outside world, and when that is the motive, isolation can lead to phobic behavior. Ultimately, this archetype leads to the journey into the soul. The extrovert may be a frightened Hermit.

The Judge

The Judge has the capacity to use the combination of wisdom and compassion to rule with fairness. King Solomon is the icon of this archetype. This archetype is involved with attorneys and arbitrators and other decision makers. The shadow side smells of foul play and is seduced into unfair decisions.

The Gambler (The Risk taker)

This archetype thrives on the "high" that comes from beating the odds. Someone can gamble with money, emotions, or the truth, and the desire to take risk can result in serious addictions. The positive side has the ability to take risk in areas that would frighten others, such as gambling on an investment behind a new technology.

The Detective/Sleuth

At the symbolic level, this archetype journeys into the underworld, the deep psychological warehouse that contains answers to the mysteries as to why people do what they do. At the ordinary level of expression, this is the energy behind detectives such as Sherlock Holmes. The researcher, who may be skilled as an investigator, is not a sleuth as the underworld element is absent. The dark side of the detective is the spy who seeks out information for dishonorable use, such as the snoop or stalker. A therapist with a shadow sleuth projects personal problems onto others in their search for personal meaning.

The Goddess

The Goddess represents the many faces of the feminine spirit. For example, Aphrodite, the goddess of eternal beauty, hopes to develop internal beauty as well. The shadow Aphrodite believes there is no power without beauty. In an attempt to hold onto beauty with age, anorexia can result. Aphrodite's are untouchable and therefore don't become a mothers.

Other goddesses include Athena (the guide), Diana (the hunt), Sophia (wisdom), and Venus (love). Each transmits qualities of feminine capacities from the height of sexual energy and eroticism to the depths of wisdom. They have the ability to protect the male in victorious battles on the physical plane of life.

The Femme Fatale

As the counterpart of Don Juan, seducing men with power and money, or manipulating them without investing emotion for the sake of personal control and survival is a classic part of this archetype. The twist of killing her conquests as an expression of her ability to dominate, thereby reversing the conventional sexual stereotypes, may be present as well. The positive aspect of this pattern is the opening of the heart, which often occurs when the male object rejects their manipulations and dependency, as Rhett Butler rejects Scarlett O'Hara at the end of Gone With The Wind.

The Fool/Court Jester

The Fool can disguise and transmit wisdom into the lives of others through giving a non-threatening appearance of the naked eye. The expression that "God takes care of fools and little children" captures the essence of this archetype. Historically, courts had fools and court jesters to amuse its members, but the fool always stood behind the king offering him "insights" about the deceitful behavior or actions of others. When evolved, this energy uses, or finds a soft way to tell the truth; however, if to lie, the fool will choke over the task or quit. The shadow Fool generates critical remarks, manipulates the truth and looks to dismiss the wisdom of others. The Fool is not a clown, which transfers sorrow into joy. The shadow clown mocks sorrow, or uses it to control you.

The Healer

While the genuine healer is a rare find, the desire to heal is common. The Wounded Healer is frequently initiated into the profession, usually after having successfully endured a challenge stemming from life, death or health. The Intuitive Healer, by their very nature and personality, can inspire others to release their painful history or make changes in their lives that redirect the course of their future. The ability to heal others is not a self-appointed profession, it is ordained. The shadow Healer has endless forms, most of them stemming from the need to help others for personal fame or gain, by pushing a personal agenda on others, exaggerating ability, or inferring to others that he/she is the only means of achieving health.

The Hero/Heroine

The Hero is accurately represented in the legend of Hercules, one who confronted numerous battles alone, on behalf of others much weaker than he. Joan of Arc represents a female hero, who led an army to triumph centuries ago in France. The Hero's journey is one fraught with challenges, and all those surrounding him lack the stamina to fully assist in succeeding victory over the tasks at hand. The Hero is usually drafted and does not choose the position. The shadow Hero chooses a self appointed target to prove his strength to others. Inevitably, these individuals fail.

The King/Queen

These archetypal patterns represent the need to rule others in a courtly fashion, or dictate law without the need of a court at all. They seek lavishness and surroundings that bestows status both at home and at work. When manifested in the positive, the desire to protect those "under the rule of their court" manifests itself. Parents might hold this attitude toward their children, but that does not mean that they possess the archetype. When negatively manifest, the Queen and King rule harshly.