

Challenges in Identifying Your Type: The Inner Triangle

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While all Enneagram Types struggle with various forms of dissociation in their Personalities, Types Nine, Three, and Six most exemplify this difficulty. These types, which lie on the inner triangle of the Enneagram symbol, represent the core gifts and challenges of the Body, Feeling, and Thinking Centers. Their internal conflicts and dynamics can help everyone to better understand the pitfalls and issues that commonly arise in trying to [find your Enneagram Type](#).

Nines

Nines typically see themselves in nearly every Type, and it can take years for some Nines to recognize their “Nine-ness.” Part of the struggle of the Nine Personality is that although they long for wholeness, they see and experience themselves in parts. This pattern of “omitting themselves”, letting themselves only be partially present, is their Personality’s way of trying to identify with only the parts that feel comfortable.

Nines can identify as Fours or Fives because Nines are often sensitive, imaginative, withdrawn, and can have a great deal of longing. Fours, however, in their egoic patterns, can be obsessively self-referential and tend to enroll others in their inner strife and drama when imbalanced, while Nines tend to minimize negativity and drama. Fives are typically high strung, even obsessive, and despite their withdrawn tendencies, are rarely relaxed and mellow. Nines may not always be calm, but they prefer things to be easeful and relaxed.

The Nine Personality demonstrates the universal preference to stay at a distance from our Essential nature. What Nines teach about the Typing journey is having the courage to accept, with honesty and clarity, where and who you are, instead of how you’d like to be. Developing Nines are willing to engage in whatever reality brings, including seeing what you’d rather avoid or not know about yourself, and being open to the possibility of the true nature of your presence in the world.

Threes

The core struggle of the Type Three Personality is losing touch with what is valuable in their own hearts. Threes have internalized other people’s ideas about value, and as a result, will readily take on whatever seems to be a “valuable” persona for a particular situation. This leaves Average Threes confused about who they are at their core, and afraid to look for fear that there may be nothing there at all.

Threes can mistake themselves for Sevens and Eights, as these types all share a common trait of being assertive and goal-oriented, often putting aside their feelings to move toward their aims. Unlike Sevens and Eights, however, Threes tend to be very sensitive to feedback and put a lot of energy into being viewed in a good light.

Threes can also mistake themselves for the other two types in the Heart triad: Twos and Fours. All three of these types are preoccupied with presenting a self-image as a substitute for the true nature of their hearts.

Twos, like Threes, tend to be action-oriented, but their aims are different. The activity of the Two Personality is motivated by the desire to be relational: to be seen as loving and feel connected. Threes, on the other hand, deeply value effectiveness and results. They want to feel valued and seen as inspirational, but they don’t like to rest in soft, loving feelings for very long.

Threes may see their own struggle for identity, hidden sensitivity, and strong aesthetic preferences in Type Four. Yet unlike Threes, Fours typically have a great deal of trouble being functional and effective through action, getting lost in digesting their impressions, moods, and feelings.

Threes may also identify as Fives or Ones, because these Types are competent problem solvers with an interest in remaining objective. Intellectual Threes in particular may see themselves as Fives, but their adaptability usually differentiates themselves from Fives, who tend to occupy a limited niche in their interests and social self-expression.

What Threes can teach us about the typing journey is the willingness to be sincerely curious about the source of your identity, and to connect to your value from your inner experience rather than from the expectations that you have internalized from the outside world. A good way to distinguish between these two is to ask yourself who your parents or other important caregivers needed you to be (outside expectations) and to see how that squares with what you know in your own heart.

Sixes

While Nines see a bit of themselves in everyone, and Threes can adapt to seem like almost anyone, Sixes are unsure that they see the complete picture of themselves in anyone. The Six highlights the pervasiveness of doubt in the human psyche, which creates a frenetic inner mental activity to try to find certainty, or prevents us from making any decisions at all because we can’t imagine how we’ll ever resolve all of our tensions and misgivings. Sixes struggle with landing in their own felt sense of knowing, and tend to over-rely on comparison, doubt, and

point-counterpoint to arrive at knowledge. What's often prominent in the Six Typing journey is the feeling of "no, that one can't be right," and thus continuing to spin their mental wheels to "figure it out" for sure.

Sixes also represent the human confusion around apparent dualities, as Sixes tend to have qualities and characteristics on both ends of a polarity. They can be strong, protective, and fierce, like Eights, and sensitive, creative, fearful of abandonment, and conflicted inside, like Fours. They may be very intellectual and brilliant, like Fives, but scattered and indecisive, like Sevens. They may be accepting, imaginative, and thoughtful like a Nine, and effective, hardworking, and determined like a Three. What finally helps Sixes land in their type is the understanding that these dualities and polarities are not in conflict with each other, but co-exist as part of the "characteristic fingerprint" of Type Six.

Landing on our Type usually inspires a mix of laughter, compassion, shame, and humility. It's not a knowing that occurs only in the head – when we 'get' our Type, even after years of knowing it, it's an understanding that unfolds in the body, heart, and mind all together.

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