JUNGIAN TYPOLOGY AND RELIGION: A PERSPECTIVE FROM NORTH AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

This analysis reviews the development of Jungian typology and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). It provides a survey of empirical studies of Jungian personality type and religious phenomena and issues that use the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. It documents a) how individuals relate to and experience religion, b) what they expect from religious participation, c) how likely they are to affiliate with religious groups, and d) suggests that the sensing/intuitive preference-set is the most salient to religion. Sensing preferences were associated with sharper religious boundaries and discomfort with religious doubt and change, judging preferences with attraction to the structure of religion, and perceiving with religious experience. Sensing, feeling, and judging preferences were more common among religious joiners. A history of the development of Jung’s typology is provided.

Keywords: Jung, MBTI, Myers-Briggs, psychological type, religious expression

Swiss psychiatrist Jung (1875–1961), founder of analytical psychology, developed a personality typology based on the assumption that consciousness has a variety of orientations: Humans are always aware with something as well as aware of something. The value of cherishing and amplifying difference, a value that underlies Jung’s typology, was also reflected in the title that Briggs Myers chose for her classic text on her type indicator: Gifts Differing. Although Jung’s psychological reformulation of a religious orientation to life that permeates and underlies his analytical psychology has received attention in the sub-field of religious studies known as “psychology and religion,” his work has been largely ignored in mainstream psychology, including the psychology of religion. This may partly be because of the emphasis

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within the psychology of religion on quantitative empirical methods, which are largely absent from Jung’s studies, apart from his early word-association experiments (Jung, 1904). Since the publication of Jung’s *Psychological Types* in 1921, a number of measures have been developed based on his seminal formulations of personality differences. Of these, the instrument developed by Briggs Myers has generated the most empirical research, and many type frequency studies have been of people in religious settings. The purpose of the present survey was threefold: a) to review the development of Jung’s original theory of psychological types and connect this to the work of Myers and Briggs Myers that led to the development of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), b) to review empirical studies that have used the MBTI in religious contexts, and c) to demonstrate the contribution that Jungian typology makes to our understanding of religion and personality differences. Such an understanding has potential to reduce conflict about religious issues within individuals, religious groups, and society at large. The body of research and theory reviewed here shares common ground with the postmodern concern for diversity and post-structuralist attention to the construction of multiple subjectivities.

**Jung’s Theory of Psychological Types**

Jung published over a 60 year period from the heyday of European modernist scientific optimism to the decade which saw the rise of social liberation movements that are foundational to postmodern concern over the complexities of difference. His work was immense and diverse, ranging from the methods of experimental psychology employed in his early word association studies to arcane studies of alchemical symbolism in his middle and later years. Jung’s personality typology proved to be the part of his oeuvre that most influenced mainstream psychology (Shamdasini, 2000), not least because it drew on extremes that colored both his work and personality: intuitive speculation combined with an analytic orientation. Indeed, one measure of the impact of Jung’s typology is the fact it can be used to understand his own work: Jung’s scientific training strengthened his critical thinking function, but it could not subdue his stronger intuition. Typologies, such as those from Hippocrates and Galen regarding the four humors, have long attracted attention because they are a way of both intuitively summarizing clusters of characteristics and providing a framework for classification which spawns fresh predictions.