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The perceiving process and mystical orientation: A study in psychological
type theory among 16- to 18-year-old students

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Abstract

This study builds on earlier work to test Ross' thesis that the perceiving process is core to individual differences in religious experience. Data provided by 149 adolescents (16- to 18-years of age) who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales alongside the Mystical Orientation Scale supported Ross' thesis. Intuitive types recorded a significantly higher score than sensing types on the index of mystical orientation, while no significant differences were recorded in terms of the judging process (thinking and feeling), the orientations (extraversion and introversion), or the attitudes (judging and perceiving).

Keywords: psychological type, mysticism, psychology, religion

Introduction

Psychological type theory has become more visible within the empirical psychology of religion, as a growing body of evidence has established the power of type theory to predict individual differences in religious expression, experience, and belief (for recent reviews see Francis, 2009; Ross, 2011). Particular contributions to this growing body of knowledge have been made by recent special issues of *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* (Village, 2011) and *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* (Lewis, 2012). Psychological type theory distinguishes between two core psychological processes, the perceiving process and the judging process. Each of these processes is expressed through two contrasting functions. The perceiving process is expressed through the sensing function and the intuitive function. The judging process is expressed through the thinking function and the feeling function. Psychological type theory also distinguishes between two orientations or directions of energy, introversion and extraversion, and between two attitudes toward the external world, judging and perceiving.

Jung (1971) considered the perceiving process as the irrational process, concerned with the ways in which people gather information. Sensing types focus on the realities of a situation as perceived by the senses. They are concerned with the actual, the real and the practical. They tend to be down to earth and matter of fact. Intuitive types focus on the possibilities of a situation, perceiving meanings and relationships. The judging process, on the other hand, Jung considered as the rational process, based on the Latin root *ratio* meaning ordering. This ordering process is concerned with the ways in which people judge or evaluate information. Thinking types focus on the abstract, logical and systematic aspects of a situation, thereby privileging consistency. They evaluate through the mind. Feeling types focus on the interpersonal values and the relational aspects of a situation, thereby privileging consideration and sensitivity to the human consequences. They evaluate through the heart.

The two orientations are concerned with the sources of psychological energy. Introverts are energised by the inner world of ideas and can be drained by too much engagement with the outer world of people and events. Extraverts are more energised by the outer world and by interaction with people and events. They can be drained or immobilised by too much solitude and isolation. The two attitudes are concerned with identifying which of the two processes (judging or perceiving) are engaged in the external world. Perceiving types engage their preferred perceiving function (sensing or intuition) in the outer world and consequently present an open, flexible, spontaneous approach to the outer world. Judging types engage their preferred judging function (thinking or feeling) in the outer world and consequently present an organised, planned and disciplined approach to the outer world.

Psychological type theory and religiosity

Assessing the connection between psychological type theory and individual differences in religious expression, experience, and belief, Ross (1992) argued that the perceiving process (sensing and intuition) is of central importance. In his initial empirical examinations of this thesis, Ross began to chart the distinctive profiles of religiosity among sensing types and among intuitive types. For example, Ross, Weiss and Jackson (1996) found intuitives contrasted to sensors in terms of greater comfort with regard to complexity of religious belief, while sensors tended to be more definite in regard to what counted as religious to them. Sensors evidenced firmer boundaries between what was secular and what was sacred. Intuitives showed a more welcoming attitude toward religious change, viewing new insights as essential for a healthy religious life and viewing narrow-minded religion as a significant problem. Sensing types, by contrast, saw religious change as a problem, and change in personal faith as an indication of weakness. Ross and Jackson (1993) concluded in their study of Catholics that the pattern of responses to individual items suggested that religion functioned in different ways for sensing and for intuitive types. According to this

study, religion tended to function as a guide to right living for sensors, and as a source of insight for intuitives. Studies of college students by Burriss and Ross (1996) confirmed the relevance of the perceiving preference of sensing or intuition for orientation to religion, even among less religiously committed groups.

In a subsequent paper, Francis and Ross (1997, p. 95) set out to examine differences between sensing types and intuitive types with regard to preferences in Christian spirituality, and to test the following two specific hypotheses.

As consistent with a preference for more traditional patterns of worship and more conservative forms of belief, it is hypothesised that sensors will display a greater preference for traditional expressions of Christian spirituality (like church attendance and personal prayer) in comparison with intuitives, while intuitives will display a greater openness to the experiential aspects of spirituality (like witnessing a fine sunset or being inspired by a star filled sky) in comparison with sensors. (Francis & Ross, 1997, p. 95)

Ross' general theory that the perceiving process (sensing or intuition) plays a central role in predicting preferred ways of being religious or expressing religiosity, together with the findings presented by Francis and Ross (1997) that intuitive types show a higher appreciation than sensing types of experiential spirituality, leads to the clear hypothesis that intuitive types will record higher scores than sensing types on indices of mystical orientation.

Exploring mystical orientation

From the early work of William James, the psychology of religion has shown both a theoretical and an empirical interest in mysticism (see James, 1982). Two theoretical discussions of mysticism in particular have led to the development of well-calibrated measures. The theoretical framework proposed by Stace (1960) formed the basis for the Hood Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975). The theoretical framework proposed by Happold (1963)

formed the basis for the Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale (Francis & Loudon, 2000a). The present study is set within the framework proposed by Happold as operationalised by the Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale, an instrument that has been used in a range of studies, including work reported by Bourke, Francis and Robbins (2004), Francis, Village, Robbins, and Ineson (2007), Edwards and Lowis (2008a, 2008b), Francis, Littler, and Robbins (2012), and Francis, Robbins, and Cargas (2012). A shorter instrument derived from the MOS, the Short Index of Mystical Orientation (SIMO), was proposed by Francis and Loudon (2004) and has been used by Francis and Thomas (1996), Francis and Loudon (2000b), and Francis (2002).

Happold's definition of mysticism embraces seven key characteristics, the first four of which were taken directly from James (1982): ineffability, noesis, transiency, passivity, consciousness of the oneness of everything, sense of timelessness, and true ego (or self). The Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale (MOS) proposes three indicators of each of these seven characteristics in order to construct a 21-item measure. In their foundation paper, Francis and Loudon (2000a) reported an alpha coefficient of internal consistency reliability of .94 for this instrument (Cronbach, 1951).

Ineffability is a negative description emphasising the private or incommunicable quality of mystical experience. According to James (1982, p. 380), those who have this kind of experience report that 'it defies expression, that no adequate report of its content can be given in words'. The MOS accesses ineffability with items like, 'experiencing something I could not put into words'.

Noesis emphasises how mystical experiences carry states of insight into levels of truth inaccessible to the discursive intellect. According to James (1982, pp. 380-381), those who have this kind of experiences regard them 'to be also states of knowledge ... They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they

remain.’ The MOS accesses noesis with items like, ‘knowing I was surrounded by a presence’.

Transiency emphasises how mystical experience is brief, inconstant, passing, and intermittent. According to James (1982, p. 381), mystical states do not endure for long though they may recur ‘and from one recurrence to another it is susceptible of continuous development in what is felt as an inner richness and importance.’ The MOS accesses transiency with items like, ‘the passing moments of divine revelation’.

Passivity emphasises both the experience of being controlled by a superior power, and the undeserved, gratuitous nature of the mystical experience. According to James (1982, p. 381), mystical states are ‘not passive interruptions, an invasion of the subject’s inner life with no residual recollection of significance, and this distinguishes them from phenomenon like prophetic speech, automatic writing, and mediumistic trance’. The MOS accesses passivity with items like, ‘being grasped by a power beyond my control’.

Consciousness of the oneness of everything emphasises how mystical experience conveys the sense in which existence is perceived as a unity. According to Happold (1963, p. 47), although it may be expressed in different ways by Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi and Christian contemplatives, the resolution of the dilemma of duality through this sense of the oneness of everything ‘is at the heart of the most highly developed mystical consciousness’. The MOS accesses consciousness of the oneness of everything with items like, ‘sensing the unity of all things’.

Sense of timelessness emphasises how mystical experiences appear to have a timeless quality and to occupy an entirely different dimension from that of any known sense of time and to be wholly unrelated to anything that can be measured by what is known as clock-time. According to Happold (1963, p. 48), ‘the mystic feels himself to be in a dimension where

time is not, where “all is always now”.’ The MOS accesses sense of timelessness with items like, ‘being conscious only of timelessness and eternity’.

True ego (or self) emphasises how mystical experience speaks to the deep, the true inner-self, and how such experience addresses the soul or the inner spirit. According to Happold (1963, p. 48) mystical experience gives rise to ‘the conviction that the familiar phenomenal *ego* is not the real *I*.’ The MOS accesses this notion of the true ego with items like, ‘feeling my everyday self absorbed in the depths of being’.

Psychological type and mystical orientation

So far five studies have examined the association between scores recorded on the MOS or the SIMO and individual differences recorded on the Jungian perceiving process. Two of these studies employed the SIMO. Francis and Louden (2000b) administered the SIMO together with the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey, 1998) to a sample of 100 student and adult churchgoers. These data supported Ross’ hypothesis with significantly higher scores of mystical orientation reported among intuitive types ($M = 30.6, SD = 7.5$) than among sensing types ($M = 25.6, SD = 8.7$). Francis (2002) administered the SIMO together with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) to a sample of 543 participants attending workshops concerned with personality and spirituality. These data did not support Ross’ hypothesis with no significant differences reported between intuitive types ($M = 30.2, SD = 7.6$) and sensing types ($M = 29.0, SD = 7.7$).

The other three studies employed the MOS. Francis, Village, Robbins, and Ineson (2007) administered the MOS together with the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005) to a sample of 318 guests who had stayed at a Benedictine Abbey. These data supported Ross’ hypothesis with significantly higher scores of mystical orientation reported among intuitive types ($M = 77.9, SD = 17.4$) than among sensing types ($M = 71.4, SD = 18.3$). Francis, Robbins, and Cargas (2012) administered the MOS together with the Francis

Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005) to a sample of 580 participants from a range of religious and spiritual traditions attending the Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, 2004. Again these data supported Ross' hypothesis with significantly higher scores of mystical orientation reported among intuitive types ($M = 78.7, SD = 18.5$) than among sensing types ($M = 71.3, SD = 15.8$). Francis, Littler, and Robbins (2012) administered the MOS together with the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005) to a sample of 232 Anglican clergymen serving in the Church in Wales. Again these data supported Ross' hypothesis with significantly higher scores of mystical orientation among intuitive types ($M = 65.1, SD = 15.8$) than among sensing types ($M = 59.8, SD = 15.1$).

Research question

The aim of the present study is to build on this research tradition by adding a sixth study to the series in order to discover whether there may be further support for the aberrant finding reported by Francis (2002) or further support for the growing consensus in favour of Ross' thesis as evidence by Francis and Louden (2000b), Francis, Village, Robbins, and Ineson (2007), Francis, Robbins, and Cargas (2012), and Francis, Littler, and Robbins (2012).

Method

Procedure

Within the school system of England and Wales, year 12 and year 13 students (16- to 18-years of age) are given the opportunity to study a range of subjects that may prepare them for access to higher education programmes within the university sector. Religious Studies is one of the options. Groups of students taking this option within year 12 or year 13 were invited to participate in a research exercise. Participation was voluntary, with assured anonymity and confidentiality. Completed data were provided by 149 participants.

Measures

Mystical orientation was assessed by the Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale (MOS: Francis & Louden, 2000a). This is a 21-item measure containing three items to access each of the seven key characteristics of mysticism identified by Happold (1963): ineffability, noesis, transiency, passivity, consciousness of the oneness of everything, sense of timelessness, and true ego. Respondents were asked to assess 'how important each experience is to your own faith', using a five-point scale anchored by: 1 = low importance, 3 = medium importance, 5 = high importance.

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS: Francis, 2005). This 40-item instrument comprises four sets of 10 forced-choice items related to each of the four components of psychological type: orientation (extraversion or introversion), perceiving process (sensing or intuition), judging process (thinking or feeling), and attitude toward the outer world (judging or perceiving). A number of studies have demonstrated this instrument to function well in church-related contexts. For example, Francis, Craig, and Hall (2008) reported alpha coefficients of .83 for the EI scale, .76 for the SN scale, .73 for the TF scale, and .79 for the JP scale.

Sample

The participants (N = 149) comprised 77% male and 23% female; 32% aged 16, 50% aged 17, and 18% aged 18; 37% self-identified as having no religion, 49% as Christian, 6% as Hindu, 6% as Muslim, 2% as Sikh; 24% never attended a place of worship, 44% did so weekly, 5% once a month, 5% at least six times a year, and 21% occasionally.

Data analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS package, using the correlation, reliability and t-test routines. The scientific literature concerned with psychological type has developed a highly distinctive way of presenting type-related data. The conventional format of 'type tables' has been employed in the present paper to allow the findings of this study to be

located easily alongside other relevant studies in the literature.

Results

The first steps in data analysis concerned an examination of the internal consistency reliability of the Francis Psychological Type Scales. Adequate alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) were reported for all four scales: EI, .73; SN, .65; TF, .61; JP, .78.

- insert table 1 about here -

The type distribution of the sample of 149 adolescents is presented in table 1 in the conventional format. In this study, the participants displayed preferences for extraversion (60%) over introversion (40%), for intuition (58%) over sensing (42%), for thinking (58%) over feeling (42%), and for judging (73%) over perceiving (27%). The most frequently occurring types were ESTJ (13%) and ENTJ (12%).

- insert table 2 about here -

The second step in the data analysis comprised an evaluation of the measure of mystical orientation. Table 2 presents the 21 items of the Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale, together with the item rest-of-test correlations and the proportions of the respondents who rated the importance of the experience for their own faith as four or as five on the five-point scale. The scale achieved the satisfactory alpha coefficient of .92. All the 21 items contributed positively to the homogeneity of the scale, with item rest-of-test correlations ranging between .39 and .71.

- insert table 3 about here -

The third step in data analysis explored the connection between psychological type and scores recorded on the Mystical Orientation Scale in terms of the four dichotomous type preferences. The data presented in table 3 supported Ross' hypothesis with significantly higher scores of mystical orientation reported among intuitive types ($M = 49.7$, $SD = 18.6$) than among sensing types ($M = 42.7$, $SD = 15.3$). These data also demonstrate that there are

no significant difference in the scores of mystical orientation recorded by introverts and extraverts (the two orientations), by thinking types and feeling types (the two judging functions), or by perceiving types and judging types (the two attitudes).

Discussion and conclusion

The present study has built on previous research by means of careful and deliberate replication, in order to test the empirical grounds for Ross' thesis that individual differences in mystical orientation are related to the perceiving process (sensing and intuition). Now in four studies the measures have been held constant (the Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale and the Francis Psychological Type Scales) and the samples have been varied to include 318 guests who had stayed at a Benedictine Abbey (representing Christians from a range of denominations), 580 participants attending the 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions (representing a wide range of spiritual and religious traditions), 232 Anglican clergymen (representing religious professionals within one tradition), and 149 religious studies students (representing a mix of adolescents actively engaged with public worship attendance and adolescents not so engaged). Data from all four studies confirmed Ross' thesis by demonstrating significantly higher mystical orientation scores among intuitive types than among sensing types.

As well as providing further evidence in support of the general thesis that significantly higher mystical orientation scores are recorded by intuitive types than by sensing types, the present study adds to knowledge by demonstrating for the first time that this association holds true relatively early in the human life cycle. While previous research had been conducted among groups of adults, the present study was conducted among adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 years. The questions arise 'What is it about intuition that makes for more openness to mystical experience', and 'Why do more intuitive perceivers report more experiences that share characteristics with customary definitions of mysticism'?

The findings are indeed consonant with classical formulations of type theory. Whereas sensation or sensing types (Ross, 2012) preserve specific sensations (extraverted sensing) and registration of details (introverted sensing) in consciousness, intuitives immediately cognise patterns of meaning between or within discrete sensory experiences, and resonate to and store these patterns. As a result the boundaries between different entities are blurred making it more likely that intuitives will cognise ‘wholes’ rather than ‘parts’. Mysticism is usually understood to encompass a sense of oneness.

Future studies might investigate the possible reasons and dynamics that may account for the lower occurrence of mystical experiences among those with sensing preferences. An important question that deserves investigation is whether those with sensing preferences may in fact have mystical experiences but do not remember or report them because they are appraised in a different manner, because their habitual way of perceiving is more defined, boundaried and focused, and therefore more discrepant with mystical experience. From the perspective of cultural psychology (Shweder, 1991) mysticism occurs in a particular socio-historical context, and use of the term mysticism in its current meaning can be traced to when science and technology became dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The sensation function plays an essential role in scientific method and in the application of its findings through technology. Furthermore, an empirical philosophy undergirds both science and technology. As a result it can be argued a sensing preference becomes privileged in the problem-solving culture of scientific modernity. If sensing then has become the ‘normal’ form of perceiving because of its central role in problem solving, then it should come as no surprise that intuition and mysticism may be associated as both are marginalised and rarer in technologized societies.

Two further conclusions emerge from these studies that are of wider significance within the empirical psychology of religion. The first conclusion concerns the

conceptualisation and measurement of the construct of mystical orientation. These four studies, together with other studies that have used the same instrument (Francis & Loudon, 2000a; Bourke, Francis, & Robbins, 2004; Edwards & Lewis, 2008a, 2008b), have demonstrated the usefulness of the Mystical Orientation Scale (MOS) both in the sense of high internal consistency reliability and in the sense of generating stable findings over different studies. This instrument can be commended for further use. The second conclusion concerns the contribution made to the empirical psychology of religion by psychological type theory. These four studies, together with the wider developing literature reviewed by Francis (2009) and by Ross (2011), have demonstrated that psychological type theory is capable of generating useful, insightful and empirically testable theories relevant to illuminating individual differences in religious experience, religious expression, and religious belief.

This study has also demonstrated the contribution that can be made to the psychology of religion through patient replication and extension of previous work. Further studies testing the present findings among different samples should be welcomed.

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Table 1

Type distribution for religious studies students

The Sixteen Complete Types				Dichotomous Preferences	
ISTJ <i>n</i> = 15 (10.1%) +++++ +++++	ISFJ <i>n</i> = 10 (6.7%) +++++ ++	INFJ <i>n</i> = 16 (10.7%) +++++ +++++ +	INTJ <i>n</i> = 11 (7.4%) +++++ ++	E <i>n</i> = 89 (59.7%)	I <i>n</i> = 60 (40.3%)
				S <i>n</i> = 63 (42.3%)	N <i>n</i> = 86 (57.7%)
				T <i>n</i> = 87 (58.4%)	F <i>n</i> = 62 (41.6%)
				J <i>n</i> = 109 (73.2%)	P <i>n</i> = 40 (26.8%)
ISTP <i>n</i> = 1 (0.7%) +	ISFP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	INFP <i>n</i> = 3 (2.0%) ++	INTP <i>n</i> = 4 (2.7%) +++	Pairs and Temperaments	
				IJ <i>n</i> = 52 (34.9%)	IP <i>n</i> = 8 (5.4%)
				EP <i>n</i> = 32 (21.5%)	EJ <i>n</i> = 57 (38.3%)
				ST <i>n</i> = 40 (26.8%)	SF <i>n</i> = 23 (15.4%)
				NF <i>n</i> = 39 (26.2%)	NT <i>n</i> = 47 (31.5%)
ESTP <i>n</i> = 5 (3.4%) +++	ESFP <i>n</i> = 3 (2.0%) ++	ENFP <i>n</i> = 10 (6.7%) +++++ ++	ENTP <i>n</i> = 14 (9.4%) +++++ ++++	SJ <i>n</i> = 54 (36.2%)	SP <i>n</i> = 9 (6.0%)
				NP <i>n</i> = 31 (20.8%)	NJ <i>n</i> = 55 (36.9%)
				TJ <i>n</i> = 63 (42.3%)	TP <i>n</i> = 24 (16.1%)
				FP <i>n</i> = 16 (10.7%)	FJ <i>n</i> = 46 (30.9%)
ESTJ <i>n</i> = 19 (12.8%) +++++ +++++ +++	ESFJ <i>n</i> = 10 (6.7%) +++++ ++	ENFJ <i>n</i> = 10 (6.7%) +++++ ++	ENTJ <i>n</i> = 18 (12.1%) +++++ +++++ ++	IN <i>n</i> = 34 (22.8%)	EN <i>n</i> = 52 (34.9%)
				IS <i>n</i> = 26 (17.4%)	ES <i>n</i> = 37 (24.8%)
				ET <i>n</i> = 56 (37.6%)	EF <i>n</i> = 33 (22.1%)
				IF <i>n</i> = 29 (19.5%)	IT <i>n</i> = 31 (20.8%)

Jungian Types (E)			Jungian Types (I)			Dominant Types		
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
E-TJ	37	24.8	I-TP	5	3.4	Dt.T	42	28.2
E-FJ	20	13.4	I-FP	3	2.0	Dt.F	23	15.4
ES-P	8	5.4	IS-J	25	16.8	Dt.S	33	22.1
EN-P	24	16.1	IN-J	27	18.1	Dt.N	51	34.2

N = 149 (NB: + = 1% of N)

Table 2

Scale of mystical orientation: correlation coefficients for each item with the rest of test and item endorsement

	<i>r</i> with rest of test	% important
<i>Ineffability</i>		
experience something I could not put into words	.38	53
feeling moved by a power beyond description	.59	26
being aware of more than I could ever describe	.64	36
<i>Noesis</i>		
sensing God in the beauty of nature	.64	21
knowing I was surrounded by a presence	.69	20
hearing God speak to me	.58	7
<i>Transiency</i>		
brief glimpses into the heart of things	.61	23
transient visions of the transcendental	.72	8
passing moments of divine revelation	.71	13
<i>Passivity</i>		
being overwhelmed by a sense of wonder	.65	35
being in a state of mystery outside my body	.73	14
being grasped by a power beyond my control	.69	11
<i>Oneness</i>		
feeling at one with the universe	.69	16
feeling at one with all living things	.73	12
sensing the unity in all things	.67	21
<i>Timelessness</i>		
losing a sense of time, place and person	.55	24
being conscious only of timelessness and eternity	.68	13
the merging of past, present and future	.64	17
<i>True ego</i>		
being absorbed within the divine	.79	8

losing my everyday self in a greater being	.75	9
feeling my everyday-self absorbed in the depths of being	.72	13

	N	Mean	SD	t	P<
extraversion	89	44.8	15.8		
introversion	60	49.6	19.8	1.6	NS
sensing	63	42.7	15.3		
intuition	86	49.7	18.6	2.5	.05
thinking	87	44.8	16.4		
feeling	62	49.5	18.9	1.6	NS
judging	109	48.0	18.4		
perceiving	40	43.2	14.9	1.5	NS

Table 3

Mean mystical orientation scores by dichotomous preference