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Research Note

Psychological type profiles of biblical scholars: an empirical enquiry among members  
of the Society of Biblical Literature

Running head: Psychological type of SBL members

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## Abstract

Psychological type preferences of 333 biblical scholars (102 women and 231 men) were assessed using an on-line survey of members of the Society of Biblical Literature, who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales. Women showed preferences for introversion (74%) over extraversion (26%), thinking (67%) over feeling (33%), and judging (83%) over perceiving (17%), but no preference between sensing (49%) and intuition (51%). The two most frequent types were ISTJ (21%) and INTJ (17%). Men showed preferences for introversion (80%) over extraversion (20%), thinking (73%) over feeling (27%), and judging (87%) over perceiving (13%), but no preference between sensing (46%) and intuition (54%). The two most frequent types were ISTJ (29%) and INTJ (24%). Compared with a sample of clergy and USA population norms, the biblical scholars showed stronger preferences for introversion, intuition, thinking and judging. The women scholars in particular showed an unusually strong preference for thinking over feeling.

**Keywords:** Biblical scholarship, Francis Psychological Type Scales, psychological type, psychology, religion, Society of Biblical Literature

## Introduction

This paper contributes to the growing number of studies that compare psychological type preferences among religious groups with samples from the general population. The results of such comparisons vary depending on the nature of the religious group being studied and the population against which they are being tested (Francis, Duncan, Craig, & Luffman, 2004; Francis, Robbins, & Wulff, 2011; Robbins & Francis, 2011; Village, 2011; Village, Baker, & Howat, in press). A typical profile for Christian congregations is an over-representation of sensing (S), feeling (F) and judging (J) types compared with their parent populations (Francis, Robbins, Williams, & Williams, 2007; Robbins & Francis, 2011). Clergy often show differences from the congregations from which they are drawn: Anglican clergy in England, for example, typically show a higher proportion of intuitives (N) and (among men) a higher proportion of feeling types (F), compared with congregations (Francis, Robbins, Duncan, & Whinney, 2010; Village, 2011).

This paper reports the psychological type preferences of 333 members of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), the foremost organisation of biblical scholars, with over 8000 members in the USA and elsewhere. The society's online newsletters for February and March 2011 were used to invite participation in the survey, and valid replies were received 102 women and 231 men. Most of the participants were from the United States of America, so the results are interpreted in the light psychological type preferences of a sample of clergy from the Presbyterian Church (USA), and population norms for the United States of America.

## Sample

The respondents came from 24 different countries, though 74% were from the United States. The majority (69%) were male and 50% were aged 50 or older. When asked about their main role, 42% chose teaching/ supervision, 25% student, 11% research, 7% minister of religion and 7% retired. When asked to indicate their religious affiliation, 5% indicated none, 7% Jewish, 86% Christian and 2% other. In terms of qualifications, 70% had some sort of doctoral-level qualifications and 60% had doctoral qualifications in biblical studies. It was difficult to tell if this was a representative sample of SBL members, or biblical scholars generally, but the profile suggests a sample of largely religiously affiliated people, qualified in biblical studies and mostly engaged as students, teachers or researchers in the discipline.

## Method

The survey was delivered through Bristol Online Surveys (BOS, 2011) and included the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS, Francis, 2005), which measure preferences in the four dimensions of the psychological type model (extraversion (E) versus introversion (I); sensing (S) versus intuition (N); feeling (F) versus thinking (T); and judging (J) versus perceiving (P)). Type preferences were assigned according to which of the pair scored highest, with the few cases of ties assigned to I, N, F, or J. Internal consistency reliabilities of scales for each of the dimensions were satisfactory (EI: .79; SN: .74; FT: .71; JP: .76), and in line with those reported elsewhere (Francis, Craig, & Hall, 2008; Village, 2011; Village, et al., in press).

Distributions of the 16 types are reported for men and women, using conventional types tables (Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Quenk, 1999). In light of the sample size, comparisons with clergy or population norms were restricted to

preferences in each of the four dimensions of the type model: orientation (E/I), perceiving (S/N), judging (T/F) and attitude to the outer world (J/P). The clergy sample was that reported by Francis, Robbins, and Wulff (2011) for 561 clergy serving in the Presbyterian Church (PUSA), a mainstream Protestant denomination in the United States. The population norms were the United States National Representative Sample (NRS) reported for 1478 men and 1531 women by Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, and Hammer (1998, tables 7.14 and 7.15).

## Results

### *Psychological types of women and men in the sample*

The 102 women in the sample showed clear preferences for introversion (74%) over extraversion (26%), thinking (67%) over feeling (33%), and judging (83%) over perceiving (17%), but no preference between sensing (49%) and intuition (51%). The 231 men in the sample showed clear preferences for introversion (80%) over extraversion (20%), thinking (73%) over feeling (27%), and judging (87%) over perceiving (13%), but little preference between sensing (46%) and intuition (54%). In each of the four dimensions, there were no statistically significant differences in preferences between the sexes. Among women, the two most frequent types were ISTJ (21%) and INTJ (17%), which together accounted for over a third of the sample (Table 1). Among men, the two most frequent types were also ISTJ (29%) and INTJ (24%), which together accounted for just over half the sample (Table 2).

### *Comparisons other samples*

Table 3 shows the comparison of preferences with clergy and population norms from the USA. Women members of the SBL showed much stronger preferences for introversion and judging than either the Presbyterian clergywomen or the female

population at large. In the perceiving process, SBL women were slightly less likely than PUSA women to prefer intuition over sensing (51% versus 64%), but in both these groups this was much higher than the general population (25%). The most striking difference was in the judging process, where preference for feeling over thinking in the general population (76%) and among the clergywomen (80%) was reversed, with only 33% of SBL women preferring feeling over thinking.

Similar trends for much stronger preference for introversion and judging were apparent among the male members of the SBL when compared with the male clergy or men in the general population. In the perceiving process, SBL men were equally as likely as the clergy to prefer intuition over sensing (54% versus 55%), but much more likely to do so than men in general population (28%). In the judging process, SBL men showed a much stronger preference for thinking (73%) than either the male clergy (34%) or men in the general population (56%).

## Discussion

Biblical scholars represent a particular group of professional academics who are often linked to religious communities. In the present sample, 95% reported an affiliation with a religious group, and most of these were Christian. In some respects, the psychological type preferences of the sample were in line with the sorts of patterns reported for religious groups generally, or religious ministers in particular (Francis et al., 2004; Francis et al., 2010; Francis et al. 2011; Village, 2011). Preference for using the judging process in the outer world, for example, is often associated with people who value the sort of organised ritual and hierarchical structures associated with traditional religious groups. In the case of the scholars, this preference was extreme in both sexes, indicating a selection for people for whom being organized and working

to deadlines is a crucial part of their lives. A preference for introversion over extraversion is also apparent in some religious traditions that stress the inner, contemplative life of faith (Francis, Butler, Jones, & Craig, 2007). In the case of biblical scholars this preference is extreme and, among men in particular, stronger than levels reported for clergy from a range of churches (Francis, et al., 2010; Francis, Robbins, et al., 2011; Francis, Whinney, Burton, & Robbins, 2011; Village, 2011). A preference for working alone and processing information in the inner world would seem to suit the tasks required of this particular profession.

The two processes of perceiving and judging also showed that biblical scholars have preferences that seem to suit their particular profession. In the perceiving process, the preference for intuition over sensing was much more marked than in the general population, but on a par with that seen among clergy serving in the Presbyterian church (USA). A preference for intuition among biblical scholars may be related to the need to explore new ideas, and to bring together information from a range of different sources. Larger samples of religiously affiliated and non-religiously affiliated scholars would be needed to tell if it was also linked specifically to being a religious professional, as it seems to be among clergy.

It is in the judging process that the essential characteristic of the biblical scholars emerged, with a marked preference for thinking over feeling. This was evident even among women, and this makes female biblical scholars significantly different from women generally and women clergy in particular. Religious clergymen generally have a stronger preference for feeling than that found among men in congregations or in the general population (Francis, Robbins, et al., 2011; Village, 2011), and in some cases this is seen as a more 'feminine' profile. This may suit a profession where decisions often have to be made in conjunction with others, and in



ways that uphold shared community values and maintain harmony. Biblical scholars, however, work in a discourse that has traditionally valued the ability to make rational, objective decisions, and this seems to suit people who have a well-developed thinking function.

The results of this limited study give some insight into the profile of biblical scholars, and how this differs from religious clergy or the general population. Although the results are interesting, the study suffered from drawbacks that need to be remedied in future work. The sample was relatively small and it was not possible to tell if it was representative of biblical scholars generally. Comparisons were made with other samples from the United States because three-quarters of the scholars came from there: a larger sample might enable more focused matching with population norms. Despite these caveats, the preference of biblical scholars for introversion, intuition, thinking and judging reported here is very much in line with what might be predicted from type theory applied to this particular profession.

Type table for female members of the SBL.

9

Type table for male members of the SBL.

10

Table 3 Comparison of the psychological type preferences of SBL members with Presbyterian clergy (PUSA) and USA National Representative Sample (NRS)

	SBL	PUSA	NRS
Females <i>n</i> =	102	148	1531
E	26%	43% **	53% ***
I	74%	57%	47%
S	49%	36% *	75% ***
N	51%	64%	25%
T	67%	20% ***	24% ***
F	33%	80%	76%
J	83%	68% **	56% ***
P	17%	32%	44%
Males <i>n</i> =	231	413	1478
E	20%	47% ***	46% ***
I	80%	53%	54%
S	46%	45% NS	72% ***
N	54%	55%	28%
T	73%	34% ***	56% ***
F	27%	66%	44%
J	87%	74% ***	52% ***
P	13%	26%	48%

Note. Significance levels are for comparison of PUSA or NRS with SBL. Using chi-squared test with 1 *df*. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , NS = Not Significant.

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