**Psychological-type functions and biblical scholarship: an empirical enquiry among members of the Society of Biblical Literature**

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Author note

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**Abstract**

Psychological type theory would suggest that the two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) and the two judging functions (thinking and feeling) shape the way that readers engage with biblical texts. Previous studies of churchgoers have demonstrated associations between psychological function preferences and preferences for interpretation. Building on this work, the current study examines whether biblical scholars engage with texts in ways that are predicted by their psychological function preferences. A sample of 338 members of the Society of Biblical Literature completed an online survey that measured their subject disciplines and methods of study, four psychological functions, and four corresponding text-handling styles. Scholars that used ‘postmodern’ methods such as reader-response, ideological criticism or cultural studies were more likely to prefer intuition to sensing and feeling to thinking. There were significant correlations between text handling styles and psychological type preferences, suggesting that psychological function has some influence on how biblical scholars perceive and evaluate texts.

**Keywords:** biblical interpretation, personality, psychological type, SBL, scholarship

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**Introduction**

The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) is the foremost organisation of biblical scholars, boasting over 8000 members and hosting well-attended conferences in the USA and elsewhere. The number and diversity of the 200 or so programme units at the SBL annual conference (SBL, 2012) is evidence of the multiplicity of approaches within this scholarly discourse. The well documented shift in biblical studies from the use of mainly historical-criticism to a greater variety of methodological approaches (Anderson & Moore, 2008; Barton, 1998; Meyer, 1991; Tate, 2008; Thiselton, 1992) has been accompanied by an interest in ‘real’ readers and what is sometimes referred to as ‘ordinary hermeneutics’ or ‘cultural studies’ (Barton, 2002; Briggs, 1995; Cranmer & Eck, 1994; Fowler, 1985; Freund, 1987; Kitzberger, 1999; Lategan, 1996; Mesters, 1991; Segovia, 1995a, 1995b; Svensson, 1990; Village, 2007; West & Dube, 1996). Biblical scholars are increasingly realizing that interpretation is not simply a matter of what lies within a text, but also that it depends on what individual readers bring to the text. The emphasis in biblical scholarship has been on the way that socially derived locations such as gender, nationality, ethnicity and economic status influence the way that biblical texts are understood and interpreted (Segovia, 1995a, 1995b; Segovia & Tolbert, 1995a, 1995b).

Biblical scholars operating within the discourses of cultural studies, ideological criticism or reader-centred criticism are becoming familiar with having to include a self-aware description of their background as a preamble to, or integral part of, their analysis of biblical texts. In some cases this description may be highly personalized and autobiographical (Kitzberger, 1999). Although every interpreter is a unique individual, it is not unusual for scholars to assume that common social factors may shape the handling of biblical texts in particular ways, hence the notion of discourses such as ‘feminist’, ‘post-colonial’ or ‘queer’ biblical studies. These may be very diverse disciplines, but they share a common understanding that some attention must be given to who is doing the interpretation. Given these kinds of interests, it is perhaps surprizing that there has been relatively little attention given to the role psychology in shaping Bible reading.

Psychological approaches to the Bible draw on insights from the field of psychology to examine texts and their interpretations (Cranmer & Eck, 1994; Kille, 2001). The emphases to date have been on analysing the psychology of Bible characters, the psychological power of biblical images and symbols, the psychological dynamics operating within texts, and the interaction of biblical texts on reading communities (Rollins & Kille, 2007). To judge by what is probably the definitive work to date (Ellens & Rollins, 2004), relatively little attention has been given to ways in which the psychology of ‘real’ Bible readers (as opposed to the implied readers of literary-critical studies) may shape interpretation. There are, however, a growing number of empirical studies that examine how people in churches interpret the Bible. Some of these stem from liberation hermeneutics in places such as South America (Mesters, 1980, 1991; Segovia & Tolbert, 1995a, 1995b) and South Africa (Sibeko & Haddad, 1997; West, 1991, 1994; West & Dube, 1996), which have a strong focus on the contexts of Bible readers. More recent empirical and ethnographic studies of readers in Europe and North America (Bielo, 2009; Malley, 2004; Todd, 2005; Village, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007) have shown how people in churches interpret the Bible in relation to their particular social contexts, beliefs, attitudes or tradition.

One strand of these studies has used psychological type to understand how personality influences the way that churchgoers respond to biblically-based sermons or Bible reading (Francis & Atkins, 2000, 2001, 2002; Francis & Village, 2008). A number of studies based on self-reported quantitative or qualitative data have now shown that psychological type predicts several different aspects of biblical interpretation among lay people (Village, 2009; Village & Francis, 2005), lay preachers (Francis, Robbins, & Village, 2009) and clergy (Village, 2010, 2012a). The evidence that both lay people and clergy show similar effects of psychological-type function preferences on biblical interpretation led Village (2010) to suggest that psychology may also affect how biblical scholars interpret the Bible. He made predictions about the way in which different styles of handling texts might be linked to different psychological-type function preferences. This paper reports on a survey among members of the SBL designed to test these ideas.

***Psychological type and biblical interpretation***

The core of the psychological type model of personality lies in the two processes of perceiving and judging, thought to represent the mechanisms by which individuals acquire and evaluate information (Jung, 1923; Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Myers & Myers, 1980). Jung and those who later developed the model postulated that each of these two processes operates with two functions, and that individuals tend to have a preference for one or other function in each process. For perceiving, the functions are sensing (S) and intuition (N); for judging the two functions are feeling (F) and thinking (T).

The two perceiving functions are concerned with the ways in which people gather and process information. The sensing function processes the realities of a situation as perceived by the senses, drawing attention to specific details rather than to the wider picture. The interests of those who prefer to use their sensing function lie mainly with practical issues and they are typically down-to-earth and matter-of-fact. The intuitive function, on the other hand, processes the possibilities of a situation as perceived by the imagination, attending to wider patterns and relationships rather than to specific details. The interests of those who prefer to use their intuitive function lie mainly with abstract theories and they are typically imaginative and innovative.

The two judging functions are concerned with the ways in which people make decisions and judgments. The thinking function processes decisions objectively, attending to logic and principles rather than to relationships and personal values. Those who prefer to use their thinking function value integrity and justice, and they are typically truthful and fair, even at the expense of harmony. The feeling function, on the other hand, processes information subjectively, attending to personal values and relationships rather than to abstract principles. Those who prefer to use their feeling function value compassion and mercy, and they are typically tactful and empathetic, even at the expense of fairness and consistency.

The theory linking psychological type and interpretation is based on the idea that preferred ways of psychological functioning might shape the way that readers attend to different aspects of texts (Francis, 1997, 2003; Francis & Village, 2008). Sensers, it is argued, will value interpretations that highlight the details in the text, especially those that draw on sensory information. They will be drawn to factual details and may take a fairly literal approach. Interpretations that begin with a repeat of the text and draw attention to minor details will appeal to sensing types, who will be reluctant to speculate too widely on ‘what else’ the text might mean. For the senser, interpreting a text may be largely about attending to what is actually there.

Intuitives, it is argued, will value interpretations that fire the imagination and raise new possibilities and challenges. They will be drawn to brain-storming links, which may not always be obvious but which draw parallels with analogous ideas and concepts. Interpretations that raise wider questions and that look for overarching or underlying concepts will appeal to intuitive types, who may find the plain or literal sense rather uninteresting. For the intuitive, interpreting a text may be largely about using the text as a springboard to imaginative ideas.

Thinkers, it is argued, will value interpretations that highlight ideas, concepts and abstract principles. They will be drawn to analysing the ideas in a text and the particular truth-claims that it makes. Interpretations that apply rationality and logic to highlight theological claims in a text will appeal to thinking types, who may be less interested in trying to understand the characters described by the text. For the thinking type, interpreting a text may largely be about seeing what the text means in terms of evidence, moral principles or theology.

Feelers, it is argued, will value interpretations that stress values and relationships. They will be drawn to empathizing with the characters in a narrative, and will want to understand their thoughts, motives and emotions. Interpretations that try to understand what it was like to be there will appeal to feeling types, who may be less interested in the abstract theological ideas that might be drawn from the text. For the feeling type, interpreting a text may largely be about applying the human dimensions to present-day issues of compassion, harmony and trust.

These ideas have previously been examined in a study of 404 lay Anglicans from the Church of England (Village, 2007; Village & Francis, 2005) and 718 recently ordained clergy from the same denomination (Village, 2010). Short interpretative statements that were related to a particular healing story in Mark 9:14-29 were developed using psychological type theory and following interviews with around 30 people from a range of Anglican congregations. A pool of items designed to appeal to particular psychological functions were then tested by asking psychological type practitioners to assign them 'type-unseen' to one of the four functions in the perceiving and judging processes. Those that were most often assigned to the intended function were used in questionnaires given to lay and ordained Anglicans. Interpretative items were presented in pairs to respondents who, having read the test passage in Mark, were then asked to choose between sensing and intuition interpretations and between feeling and thinking interpretations. The results showed that there were significant associations between preferences for different types of interpretative items and corresponding psychological type preferences in both the perceiving and judging processes. People with high sensing scores (and therefore low intuition scores) were more likely to prefer sensing interpretations to intuitives ones, and vice versa. People with high feeling scores (and therefore low thinking scores) were more likely to prefer feeling interpretations to thinking ones, and vice versa.

The fact that clergy (who have some training in biblical studies) showed similar responses to lay people suggested that biblical scholars might also interpret texts in ways that are related to their psychological type preferences. Village (2010) speculated on ways that different psychological functions might influence how scholars read the Bible:

The sensing function will help scholarly readers to negotiate the complexity of texts, noticing small details that are easily missed. The tendency to ‘stay with the text’ is important to those who examine passages for clues about their historical origin or literary structure. The ability to attend to the sensory information in texts may foster interpretations that highlight the rich meanings associated with words and the ways in which they work together to produce complex patterns of meaning.

The intuitive function may enable scholarly readers to draw on apparently unconnected material from a range of sources to create new insights. The ability to handle Scripture by analogy, allegory and metaphor may foster access to some valuable interpretative traditions that have stressed the ‘fuller’ meaning of Scripture. The ability to see the same underlying ideas expressed in very different ways might foster canonical readings that allow Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament to witness to continuing truths.

The thinking function would seem to be connected to the traditional skills required for scholarly engagement with Scripture. The ability to analyse logically, discern theological principles and apply objective reason has long been the hallmark of biblical and theological study, suggesting that many biblical scholars will prefer their thinking function when they evaluate ideas. Thinking types should favour rational and logical interpretations but resist subjectivity in their interpretative strategies. In a postmodern environment, with its stress on personal contexts and individuality, the thinking function may help scholars avoid overly subjective or absurd interpretations.

The feeling function may help scholarly readers to identify more closely with the authors of texts, the characters within them or the emotional content of texts. This sort of reading might sometimes produce unwarranted harmonization of original and current contexts, but its strength is the ability to recognize the commonality of values expressed in Scripture and owned by contemporary reading communities. Scholars who prefer the feeling function may use it to evaluate texts in terms of the relationships, values and ethics of interpreting communities.

This application of psychological type theory to biblical scholarship focuses on the ways in which scholars handle texts, rather than the particular disciplines in which they work. Although there may be a link between disciplines and styles of handling texts, the theory posits a more direct relationship between psychological type and style than between psychological type and discipline. What area a scholar works in may be related to a wide range of factors, but the way they operate within it should be more closely shaped by their general psychological functioning.

This study tests these ideas in two stages. First, by creating new scales that relate to the ways in which the four psychological type functions are predicted to influence how scholars handle texts. Second, by presenting these scales, along with recognized psychological type scales, to a sample of biblical scholars through an online survey.

**Method**

***Developing the text-handling styles instrument***

Using type theory, four sets of items were produced to reflect how the sensing, intuitive, thinking and feeling functions might influence the way that biblical scholars handle texts. Each set consisted of around ten statements that were designed to appeal to one of the four functions in the perceiving and judging psychological processes. Items were randomized and tested for validity on a group of 20 psychological-type practitioners who were familiar with type theory, but not necessarily its application to the handling of texts. The purpose of the study was explained, and for each item the practitioners were asked to decide which style it represented. Items that were correctly linked to their psychological function by at least 75% of the experts were used to produce the final instrument, which consisted of seven items in each function group.

The chosen items were used as Likert-type items (Likert, 1932) with a five-point response scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ (= 5) to ‘strongly disagree’ (= 1). The two styles related to the perceiving process (sensing and intuitive) were introduced by the heading: *‘How do you study texts in general? Below are a number of statements that describe different ways in which you might operate, or different priorities you might have, when you study texts. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.’* The items were then preceded by: *‘When I study texts I tend to….’*, followed by 14 items (seven related to sensing style and seven to intuitive style) in random order. The two styles in the judging process (thinking and feeling) were introduced by the heading: *‘How do you decide about texts? Below are a number of statements that describe different ways in which you might operate, or different priorities you might have, when you come to interpret or evaluate texts. This might be evaluating texts themselves, or other people's ideas about texts. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement’* and preceded by: *‘When I decide about texts I tend to….’*. For each style, the sum of item scores was used as an indication of strength of preference for that style.

***The survey***

The survey was delivered through Bristol Online Surveys (BOS, 2011) and consisted of 70 questions in three main sections. Section 1 enquired about disciplines of study, methods employed, and styles of handling texts. Section 2 consisted of a widely used measure of psychological type, the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS). Section 3 included questions related to country of residence, age, sex, educational qualifications, and religion. Most answers required participants to click boxes or select from a list and were coded automatically by the software.

***Sample***

The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) online newsletters for February and March 2011 were used to invite participation in the survey. The newsletter is circulated to those members who have email addresses in the society membership database, and 338 replies were received by the time the survey closed in June 2011. The respondents came from 24 different countries, though 74% were from the United States. The majority were male (69%) 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.

***Dependent variables***

The first set of dependent variables related to the disciplines of study and methods used by participants. The complexity and diversity of biblical studies makes it difficult to collect data on subject specialism without being either too restrictive or soliciting open answers that are then difficult to categorize. As a compromise, questions were grouped by broad discipline or methodological approaches, and each of these had options specifying sub-disciplines or particular methods within the general area (see Appendix 1). Participants could click on any answer in any section, so there was a wide choice of how they could describe their work. For analysis, responses within the main sections were coded as 1 or 0 depending on whether any of the options in the section were chosen. This allowed individuals to be classified according to whether or not they engaged in specified disciplines of biblical studies or used specified methodological approaches. The items related to text-handling styles were scored and used to create four summated rating scales, which were tested for internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951).

***Predictor variables***

The main predictor variables were psychological preferences within each of the four dimensions as measured by the FPTS (Francis, 2005) which are similar to other measures of type such as the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey, 1998; Keirsey & Bates, 1978) and the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (Myers, 2006). The FPTS have been used to study psychological type in a wide range of Christian denominations and other religions in different parts of the world, and seem to function well in these contexts (see, for example: Burns, Francis, Village, & Robbins, 2013; Francis & Datoo, 2012; Francis, Robbins, & Wulff, 2011; Lewis, 2012; Lewis, Varvatsoulias, & Williams, 2012; Powell, Robbins, & Francis, 2012; Robbins & Francis, 2011; Village, 2011b). The instrument consists of 40 forced-choice items with ten related to each of the four dimensions (E/I, S/N, F/T and J/P) of the psychological type model.[[2]](#footnote-2) Items were presented in pairs and respondents were asked to select the one in each pair that was closest to their preference. Choices were summed to give a score for each function, and preferences assigned according to which of the pair scored highest. Alpha reliabilities for the type scales in this study were: E/I = .79, S/N = .74, F/T = .71, J/P = .76, which is similar to those reported elsewhere from other samples (Francis, Craig, & Hall, 2008; Francis, Robbins, & Wulff, 2008; Village, 2011a).

***Controls: sex and religiosity***

Sex was used as a control variable because of the widely reported difference between men and women in the judging process, where women in most populations are more likely to prefer feeling over thinking compared with men (Kendall, 1998; Myers, 2006). Psychological type has also been shown to be related to a range of religious variables, some of which might in turn be related to interpretative choices (Village, 2010). The questionnaire included a widely used question related to religiosity, ‘*How religious are you’* measured on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very). This was strongly correlated with another item in the questionnaire measuring attendance at religious services (*r* = .53, *p* < .001).

***Research questions and analyses***

The analysis of data was designed to answer two main research questions:

1. Did a scholar’s psychological type preferences in the perceiving or judging processes predict either their disciplines of study or the methods of study? The usual practice for handling psychological type is to dichotomize the scores to indicate preferences, and this enables the type classification to be produced. This procedure was suitable for comparing the relationships between psychological type and scholarly discipline/method because the latter were measured as binary scores, suitable for contingency table analyses. Counts were used to test associations using chi-squared analysis, though results are presented as percentages for ease of comparison.
2. Did psychological type scores predict text-handing styles in accordance with theory? Dichotomizing psychological type scores results in some unnecessary information loss (DeCoster, Iselin, & Gallucci, 2009), so analyses for style preferences used the scores in each psychological type process as predictor variables. Due to the way that the FPTS operate, scores for sensing and intuition are complementary, as are those for thinking and feeling, so it was necessary to use only one score per process in a multiple regression analysis. The psychological type score used depended on which one was predicted to be positively correlated with a given text-handing style. So, for example, sensing psychological type score was used with sensing style, and intuition psychological type score was used with intuitive style, and so on. Sex and religiosity were included as controls in multiple regression analyses.

**Results**

***Psychological type***

Psychological type preferences for this sample are reported in detail elsewhere (Village, 2012b). There was an overall preference for introversion over extraversion, thinking over feeling,and judging over perceiving, but no preference between sensing and intuition. These preferences are similar to those reported in a sample of Anglican clergy (Village, 2011a), except for the judging process, where the scholars showed a much higher preference for thinking than the clergy. This was true for both sexes, which is unusual because women in most populations show a preference for feeling over thinking (Kendall, 1998; Myers, 2006). The main types were ISTJ (27%), INTJ (22%) and INFJ (10%), which is as might be expected from this particular population of people who belong to a guild of scholars.

***Text-handling style scales***

All four scales showed acceptable internal reliability, with alpha values between .70 and .75 (Tables 1 & 2). The high endorsement of some items suggested they may be common features among scholars irrespective of psychological function preferences, whereas most items showed some variation in endorsement. Mean (SD) scores for each were: sensing 24.1 (4.3), intuitive 25.9 (4.4), thinking 26.9 (3.6), and feeling 21.0 (4.5). As expected, there was a negative correlation between sensing style and intuitive style, and between thinking and feeling style (Table 3), indicating these scales may indicate opposite text-handling preferences. Style scores showed some positive correlations across the perceiving and judging processes, that is between sensing and thinking, and intuition and feeling. It seemed that a sensing style of studying texts was partially linked to a thinking style of evaluating them, and an intuitive style of studying was linked to a feeling style of evaluation.

[Tables 1, 2 & 3 about here]

***Associations between discipline or method and psychological functions***

Engagement in biblical texts was (as expected) virtually universal, as was work in the areas of hermeneutics and interpretation. Less frequent disciplines were theological or historical/archaeological, while philosophical/ethical disciplines were the least reported. There was little difference between an individual’s reported frequencies of using various disciplines and psychological function preferences in either the perceiving or judging processes (Table 4a). Thinking types showed slightly more frequent engagement with biblical disciplines than feeling types, but in both cases engagement was over 90% and the difference was barely statistically significant. There were more differences when it came to methods (Table 4b), with intuitive types being more likely to use literary, reader-centred, ideological or philosophical methods than sensing types. These methods may require imaginative ability, or the ability to work across different disciplines, which would suit intuitives. In the judging process, feeling types were more likely to use literary, reader-centred or ideological criticisms than were thinking types. Evaluation in these disciplines may require more subjective attention to values, and less attention to the objective analysis of data, than with historical-critical, theological or philosophical analyses.

[Table 4 about here]

***Associations between handling texts and psychological functions***

The two perceiving text-handling styles were each positively correlated with the relevant psychological function scores (Table 5, columns 3 & 4). Those who scored high for sensing psychological function also scored high in the sensing text-handling scale, and those who score high for intuitive psychological function also scored high in the intuition text-handling scale. There were also significant correlations with religiosity (positive for sensing, negative for intuition), suggesting that text handling that draws on the sensing rather than the intuitive function is more likely to be adopted by religious than non-religious scholars, irrespective of their psychological function preferences.

A similar pattern emerged for the judging text-handling styles (Table 5 columns 5 & 6), with positive correlations between feeling psychological function and feeling text-handling style, and between thinking psychological function and thinking text-handling style. For feeling text-handling, there was also a positive correlation with religiosity, suggesting that this style of evaluating texts is favoured by more religious scholars, irrespective of their psychological type preferences. There was also a small but statistically significant correlation between feeling text-handling style and intuitive psychological function score which indicated that intuitive types may have been slightly more likely to favour feeling text-handling styles than were sensing types.

[Table 5 about here]

**Discussion**

***Subject area, method and psychological functions***

There was little or no relationship between a scholar’s discipline specialism within biblical studies and their psychological preferences. Perhaps the areas that scholars work in depend on particular interests that arise for a host of reasons, or even by chance. When it came to the methods employed, however, there was some evidence that psychology may be more important in shaping choices. The most obvious trends were between a preference for intuitive perception and those approaches that might broadly be described as ‘postmodern’, in particular reader-centred and ideological criticisms. Within these, examination of associations with particular methods suggested that intuitives were particularly likely to work with cultural studies, autobiographical, post-colonial, and postmodern criticisms. It seems that the intuitive function is suited to methods that draw on multidisciplinary discourses that cross methodological boundaries. There was also a link between preference for feeling-type judging and the broad areas of reader-centred and ideological criticism. This may be because these areas are developing more values- based ethics of interpretation which require application of the feeling rather than the thinking function.

***Biblical text-handling and psychological functions***

The results support the idea that psychological functions may shape the way that biblical scholars handle texts, as suggested by Village (2010). Each of the four different text-handling scales was positively correlated with the corresponding score on the psychological function scales. These different styles of handling texts thus seem to represent the application of different psychological functions applied to the perception and judging of biblical information.

Sensing engagement tends towards establishing fact, rather than speculating on possibilities. It encourages the meticulous gathering of data, building carefully on what is known in a step-by-step process that avoids leaving gaps. Intuitive engagement, by contrast, tends to give more weight to imaginative or speculative possibilities and is more likely to look for unusual or ground-breaking ideas. To some extent, these approaches may be diametrically opposed, but there are some ways of engaging texts that seem common to most scholars, notably the detailed examination of the text (perhaps a more sensing-type of approach) and linking to wider trends in Scripture (perhaps a more intuitive-type approach).

When it comes to evaluating texts or interpretations of texts, feeling engagement draws on the interpreter’s values, with a strong awareness of the ethical implications of different interpretations. Thinking engagement is more concerned with issues of truth, and the careful application of objective criteria. Again, there are some evaluative practices that seem common to many scholars, such as the need to understand the values that underpin texts (perhaps a more feeling-type approach) and the need to identify weaknesses in hypotheses (perhaps a more thinking-type approach).

The two psychological processes of perceiving and judging are generally held to be related to the ways that information is collected and evaluated (Francis & Village, 2008). Preferences in each process are theoretically independent, but in any given population there may be links between the preferred perceiving function and the preferred judging function. In this sample the majority of respondents were either STs (36%) or NTs (35%), and this may partly explain the correlations between the different styles of handling texts (see Table 3). However, this was not the only explanation and the strongest positive correlations between text-handling styles were between (a) perceiving with a sensing style and judging with a thinking style, and (b) between perceiving with an intuitive style and judging with a feeling style. This may be no accident: the kind of evidence gathered by using the sensing function may lend itself to the kind of objective, evidence-based decision making that is the hallmark of the thinking function. For example, the evidence to support textual variants, based on methodical and detailed data collection, may be best evaluated by logical and objective analysis based on wider principles. In contrast, the sort of imaginative evidence gathered using the intuitive function may lend itself to the kind of subjective, value-based decision making that is the hallmark of the feeling function. For example, the evidence that a biblical narrative can be used to shape present-day ethical decisions, based on the ability to move between different textual ‘worlds’, may best be evaluated by the subjective values of interpreters that are sensitive to the impact of such interpretations on reading communities. In psychological type terms, there may be a general division among biblical scholars between the ‘ST-type’ of approach and the ‘NF-type’ of approach which seems to be reflected in the distinctions between those methods that arose from ‘modernist’ approaches (such as historical, literary-critical and traditional theological study) and those that arose from ‘postmodernist’ approaches (such as reader-centred and ideological study).

Despite the ubiquity of some ways of handling texts, there are profound differences among interpreters, and this study has shown that some of these can be explained by differences in more general psychological dispositions. This is in line with studies among clergy and lay people that have shown that interpretative styles are related to the core psychological type functions (Francis et al., 2009; Village, 2009, 2010, 2012a; Village & Francis, 2005). The difference with this study is that it has used new scales that relate to the general way that texts are handled by scholars, rather than the specific interpretations of particular passages. Clearly the two are related, especially for scholars where the final interpretations of a text are likely to be the product of explicit methodological awareness and the application of techniques shared by a guild of interpreters operating in a shared discourse.

Biblical studies have seen a flowering of discourses and stormy debates about what constitutes ‘correct’ method. In particular, the postmodern turn has forced scholars to both recognize and accept the ‘situated-ness’ of all interpretations. Although this is often seen as being about social location (Segovia & Tolbert, 1995a, 1995b) or individual history (Kitzberger, 1999), it is also about the ‘psychological location’ of interpreters. The way that interpreters go about their task will affect how they perceive and judge texts, and this will dispose them to favour some methods over others. Scholarly ‘interpretive communities’ (Fish, 1980, 1989) may not form by chance, but may attract people with particular dispositions and interpretive skills that are related to their psychological profile. The members of the SBL form themselves into ‘like-minded’ groups that are termed ‘programme units’ in the annual conference. These units may not be held together solely by a common interest in subject matter or a common methodological approach: they may also reflect the coming together of scholars who share similar ways of psychological functioning that dispose them to handle texts in particular ways, making some forms of discourse seem more ‘natural’ than others. Being able to overtly identify and understand these psychological differences may help scholars with very different approaches to better relate to one another and recognize that biblical scholarship, no less than any other form of engagement with the Bible, is the product of the interaction of readers and texts.

***Limitations and future work***

This study was based on a relatively small sample of scholars who were mostly from the USA, and it would be good to investigate the relationship of psychological type to scholarly style among a wider range of scholars from different countries and cultures. The self-report instruments used to measure type and interpretative style seemed to have reasonable internal consistency reliabilities for these sorts of psychometric measures, but further refinements would help. Although validity was assessed in the initial construction of the scales, more work is needed to confirm that the scales do indeed tap into the function preferences they are designed to assess. This might be done by more 'blind' matching by type experts, or by more detailed qualitative studies on a smaller sample of biblical scholars.

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Table 1. Scales related to perceiving styles for handling texts

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *When I study texts I tend to:* |  |  |  |  |
|  | Responses | | |  |
| Sensing style (alpha = .73) | %D | %? | %A | IRC |
| Use well-tried and familiar methods | 11 | 15 | 74 | .29 |
| Follow a routine step-by-step procedure | 47 | 20 | 33 | .36 |
| Establish the facts rather than speculate on possibilities | 25 | 25 | 49 | .61 |
| Build carefully on what is already known | 13 | 19 | 68 | .42 |
| Be meticulous in gathering data | 6 | 13 | 81 | .40 |
| Avoid speculation | 47 | 23 | 30 | .49 |
| Build knowledge carefully without leaving gaps | 19 | 28 | 53 | .56 |
|  | Responses | | |  |
| Intuitive style (alpha = .77) | %D | %? | %A | IRC |
| Find unlikely links between texts | 19 | 26 | 55 | .44 |
| Use my imagination | 10 | 15 | 75 | .54 |
| Speculate on what might be so | 16 | 22 | 61 | .43 |
| Try something new | 8 | 20 | 72 | .63 |
| Draw on ideas from lots of different places | 7 | 11 | 82 | .42 |
| Look for the ground-breaking idea | 23 | 22 | 54 | .48 |
| Explore unusual or fringe ideas | 23 | 25 | 52 | .52 |

Note: N = 338. %D= percentage disagreeing, %? = percentage not certain, %A = percentage agreeing, IRC = Item-rest-of-scale correlation coefficient. Table 2. Scales related to judging styles for handling texts

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *When I decide about texts I tend to:* |  |  |  |  |
|  | Responses | | |  |
| Thinking style (alpha .70) | %D | %? | %A | IRC |
| Identify weaknesses in hypotheses | 3 | 5 | 92 | .35 |
| Critique illogical or unfounded ideas | 4 | 7 | 89 | .39 |
| Not be swayed by what others think of my work | 17 | 29 | 54 | .38 |
| Expose truth, even if it is uncomfortable for some | 1 | 10 | 89 | .53 |
| Challenge or confront in the service of truth | 7 | 19 | 74 | .42 |
| Prevent my values or beliefs clouding my objectivity | 22 | 23 | 55 | .40 |
| Apply objective criteria impartially | 17 | 28 | 55 | .47 |
|  | Responses | | |  |
| Feeling style (alpha = .75) | %D | %? | %A | IRC |
| Interpret according to my values | 34 | 19 | 47 | .55 |
| Decide on the basis of what feels best to me | 61 | 22 | 17 | .31 |
| Avoid harmful interpretations, even if they are true | 77 | 13 | 10 | .41 |
| Be aware of how my work might affect other people | 18 | 14 | 68 | .54 |
| Interpret texts in ways that are helpful to others | 15 | 21 | 64 | .51 |
| Allow my heart to guide my thinking | 53 | 30 | 17 | .55 |
| Be sensitive to the emotional content of texts | 11 | 20 | 69 | .40 |

Note. For explanation, see Table 1.

Table 3. Correlation matrix for text handling styles

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Style for handling texts | Thinking | Feeling | Intuitive |
| Sensing | .34\*\*\* | -.08 | -.35\*\*\* |
| Intuitive | .01 | .24\*\*\* |  |
| Feeling | -.21\*\* |  |  |

Note. N = 338. \*\* *p* < .01, \*\*\* *p* < .001.

Table 4. Frequency of discipline or methodological approach by psychological function preferences

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Perceiving  process | |  | Judging  process | |  |
|  |  | S | N |  | T | F |  |
| 1. **Discipline** | | 160 | 178 |  | 253 | 85 |  |
|  | Biblical | 97% | 96% |  | 98% | 93% | \* |
|  | Hermeneutical | 88% | 84% |  | 85% | 88% |  |
|  | Theological | 58% | 62% |  | 60% | 59% |  |
|  | Philosophical | 34% | 42% |  | 36% | 43% |  |
|  | Historical | 69% | 66% |  | 66% | 70% |  |
|  | Social | 73% | 78% |  | 74% | 80% |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. **Method** | | S | N |  | T | F |  |
|  | Historical | 84% | 87% |  | 85% | 86% |  |
|  | Literary | 78% | 90% | \*\* | 82% | 90% | \* |
|  | Reader | 48% | 70% | \*\*\* | 54% | 71% | \*\* |
|  | Ideological | 41% | 61% | \*\*\* | 47% | 62% | \*\* |
|  | Theological | 59% | 65% |  | 63% | 61% |  |
|  | Philosophical | 24% | 43% | \*\*\* | 33% | 36% |  |

Note. Table shows the percentage those with a preferred function in the perceiving or judging psychological type process that indicated they worked in a particular discipline or used a particular method. Differences between S/N and T/F preferences tested on counts using chi-squared with 1 *df*. \* *p* < .05, \*\* *p* < .01, \*\*\* *p* < .001.

Table 5. Linear multiple regression of text handing styles

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Text handling styles | | | | |
|  |  | Perceiving | |  | Judging | |
|  |  | Sensing | Intuitive |  | Thinking | Feeling |
| Predictor |  | β | β |  | β | β |
| Sex |  | .08 | -.10\* |  | .05 | .01 |
| Religiosity |  | .16\*\* | -.10\* |  | .06 | .35\*\*\* |
| Type scores: | Sensing | .39\*\*\* | - |  | .04 | - |
|  | Intuition | - | .43\*\*\* |  | - | .13\* |
|  | Thinking | .09 | - |  | .27\*\*\* | - |
|  | Feeling | - | .06 |  | - | .24\*\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *R2* | .19 | .21 |  | .08 | .22 |

Note. \* *p* < .05, \*\* *p* < .01, \*\*\* *p* < .001. β = standardized regression coefficient.Appendix 1

Categories for biblical disciplines and methods used in the questionnaire

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Disciplines** | | | |  |
| 1. Biblical or textual studies | | | | 96.4% |
|  | Biblical/textual general | | | 46.4% |
|  | Hebrew Scriptures | | | 54.7% |
|  | New Testament | | | 50.9% |
|  | Non-canonical texts | | | 24.0% |
|  | Non-biblical ANE literature | | | 16.0% |
|  | Linguistics/translations | | | 18.3% |
|  | Other | | | 5.6% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 2. Hermeneutics or interpretation | | | | 85.5% |
|  | Hermeneutics/interpretation general | | | 50.6% |
|  | Theological interpretation | | | 27.5% |
|  | Exegetical study | | | 59.5% |
|  | Interpretation in faith communities | | | 32.8% |
|  | Preaching/homiletics | | | 17.8% |
|  | Other | | | 4.4% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 3. Theological studies | | | | 60.1% |
|  | Theological general | | | 16.9% |
|  | Biblical theology | | | 47.3% |
|  | Systematic theology | | | 6.5% |
|  | Practical/applied theology | | | 11.2% |
|  | Historical theology | | | 15.7% |
|  | Other | | | 3.3% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 4. Philosophical or ethical studies | | | | 38.2% |
|  | Philosophical/ethical general | | | 12.4% |
|  | Historical philosophy | | | 8.9% |
|  | Contemporary philosophy | | | 5.0% |
|  | Ethical and moral philosophy | | | 11.2% |
|  | Ethics of interpretation | | | 14.5% |
|  | Other | | | 3.8% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 5. Historical or archaeological studies | | | | 67.5% |
|  | Historical/archaeological general | | | 20.7% |
|  | History of biblical world | | | 43.2% |
|  | History: ANE | | | 24.6% |
|  | History: Greco-Roman | | | 31.4% |
|  | Archaeology: ANE | | | 16.3% |
|  | Archaeology: Greco-Roman | | | 10.1% |
|  | Other | | | 4.7% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 6. Social or cultural studies | | | | 75.4% |
|  | Social/cultural general | | | 19.5% |
|  | Bible and ancient culture | | | 51.8% |
|  | Bible and modern culture | | | 27.2% |
|  | Bible in faith communities | | | 20.7% |
|  | Social world of ancient communities | | | 37.9% |
|  | Contemporary faith communities | | | 10.1% |
|  | Other | | | 2.4% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 7. Other | |  | | 24.0% |
|  |  | | |  |
|  |  | | |  |
| **Methods** | | | |  |
| 1. Textual criticism | | | | 83.7% |
|  | Textual criticism general | | | 47.0% |
|  | Exegetical study | | | 63.9% |
|  | Linguistics | | | 26.9% |
|  | Semiotics | | | 8.0% |
|  | Other | | | 3.0% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 2. Historical criticism | | | | 85.5% |
|  | Historical criticism general | | | 62.1% |
|  | Source criticism | | | 21.0% |
|  | Form criticism | | | 21.9% |
|  | Redaction criticism | | | 30.8% |
|  | Social scientific criticism | | | 35.8% |
|  | Other | | | 6.8% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 3. Literary criticism | | | | 84.0% |
|  | Literary criticism general | | | 57.4% |
|  | Narrative criticism | | | 46.4% |
|  | Structural criticism | | | 13.6% |
|  | Rhetorical criticism | | | 35.8% |
|  | Psychological criticism | | | 6.5% |
|  | Other | | | 4.1% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 4. Reader-centred criticism | | | | 59.2% |
|  | Reader-centred criticism general | | | 23.1% |
|  | Reception history | | | 28.1% |
|  | Reader-response | | | 18.9% |
|  | Ordinary readers | | | 10.7% |
|  | Autobiographical | | | 2.7% |
|  | Psychological | | | 5.9% |
|  | Other | | | 1.5% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 5. Ideological criticism | | | | 51.5% |
|  | Ideological criticism general | | | 22.2% |
|  | Cultural studies | | | 27.2% |
|  | Liberation | | | 10.1% |
|  | Feminist/womanist | | | 21.0% |
|  | Ethnic | | | 4.7% |
|  | Post-colonial | | | 11.5% |
|  | LGB/queer studies | | | 6.2% |
|  | Other | | | 3.6% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 6. Theological criticism | | | | 62.1% |
|  | Theological general | | | 21.9% |
|  | Theological interpretation | | | 29.9% |
|  | Biblical theology | | | 44.7% |
|  | Canonical criticism | | | 24.3% |
|  | Practical theology | | | 10.1% |
|  | Other | | | 1.5% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 7. Philosophical criticism | | | | 34.3% |
|  | Philosophical general | | | 13.0% |
|  | Existential | | | 5.3% |
|  | Postmodern | | | 17.2% |
|  | Deconstruction | | | 7.4% |
|  | Post-structuralist | | | 5.3% |
|  | Other | | | 4.1% |
|  |  | | |  |
| 8. Other | | |  | 11.2% |

Note. Scholars often work in multiple disciplines and use a variety of textual methods. Each respondent could tick any of the (unnumbered) sub-categories. For main (numbered) headings the table shows the percentage (n = 338) that selected at least one sub-category in that group.

1. Email: [A.Village@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:A.Village@yorksj.ac.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Those dimensions measured by the type scales but not used in this analysis were orientation (extraversion, E, versus introversion, I) and attitude toward the outer world (judging, J, versus perceiving, P). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)