

ARCHETYPE AND IMAGERY IN THE ENNEAGRAM

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Abstract

This article reports on a research study that investigated the Enneagram through the lens of depth psychology. A review of the literature on archetypes, which are universal, autonomous patterns in the psyche, suggests that the nine Enneagram types can be viewed archetypally. Imagery and symbol are essential aspects of archetypes. This study sought to discover the images, symbols and metaphors that are most representative of Enneagram types Three, Six and Nine. To accomplish this, 23 subjects who self-identified as one of these three types were interviewed in focus groups. The researcher then conducted a content analysis on the narrative and expressive artwork that emerged in order to discover themes for each type. This article reviews a sampling of the significant findings and discusses implications for future research.

As the branch of psychology studying the vast realms of the unconscious and symbolic aspects of the psyche, depth psychology has had few relatives in the family tree. However, in this research study, I introduce depth psychology to a potential long-lost cousin: the Enneagram. As both a depth psychologist and an Enneagram teacher, my work is about bridging the two fields. In this article I share a small part of a broader research study on the symbolic, archetypal aspects of the nine types. After an extensive review of the depth psychology literature on archetype, as well as literature on the Enneagram, I developed a working premise that the nine types are archetypal in nature. Here I share a brief literature review to establish this premise.

Literature Review in Brief

Enneagram

The Enneagram was a central aspect of the work of G.I. Gurdjieff, who called the Enneagram “a universal symbol” and “the philosopher’s stone of the alchemists” (Maitri, 2000, pp. 4-5). Symbolically the circle represents wholeness, unity and essence. The nine points on the rim of the circle represent nine distinct patterns that emerge from this central essence. Psychologically, the symbol represents a map of human personality and describes a structural model of fundamental psychological patterns (Naranjo, 1990). This structure rests on the distinction between ego and essence. The ego is subjective, infused with our own personal history, while our essential nature is connected to essence, which is objective and transpersonal (Ichazo, 1982; Palmer 1988).

Enneagram author Helen Palmer describes Enneagram type as a perceptual lens which narrows and grows more rigid over time, and which serves to defend and protect the individual's sense of self and well being (Palmer, 1988). The Enneagram type then becomes a valid but limiting worldview. Our worldview is the container for everything that happens in our world. Until we recognize that worldview, we are asleep. It causes us to repeat a set of thoughts, feelings, and actions generated by core beliefs about ourselves and the world. These repetitions form a habitual stance, which operates largely outside of conscious awareness.

In a few instances, the Enneagram is described as archetypal. "Being an archetypal symbol, it [the Enneagram] can be used to describe physical processes and principles, psychological ones, as well as spiritual ones" (Maitri, 2000, p. 5). A.H. Almaas is more explicit: "The Holy Idea can be seen as the archetype at the center of each type" (2002, p. 8).

Archetype

The field of depth psychology understands archetypes as universal patterns and predispositions that structure and shape our experience as human beings (Jung, 1959). Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung posited that a collective *a priori* realm exists underneath the personal psyche (Jung, 1989). Jung called this the objective psyche. It is autonomous and transpersonal. Most importantly, it is composed of archetypes, which he described as "largely autonomous psychic systems which on that account are only very conditionally under the control of the conscious mind and for the most part escape it altogether" (Jung, 1966a, p. 98).

Even though we are mostly unaware of archetypes operating, they initiate and mediate the most crucial aspects of our lives from birth to death, including experiences such as initiation, marriage, illness, healing, parenting, loss and rebirth. Archetypes appear in the myths and fairy tales of virtually all cultures (von Franz, 1996), and their purpose is to provide a ready-made template that acts as both container and channel for the individual to perceive, respond to, and experience the typical events and relationships that occur throughout the lifespan.

Archetypes are patterns of experience. They are not simply static nouns. For example, the Mother archetype includes both the noun and the image of Mother, as well as the verb and pattern of mothering. While the essence of an archetype is an internally coherent pattern, the expression in imagery and behavior is diverse, depending on the culture and person expressing the pattern.

Archetypes are also containers of meaning. Philosopher and historian Richard Tarnas writes that archetypes serve as structures of meaning by shaping our beliefs and informing our psyche so much that they influence the very means by which we perceive something as fact. As Tarnas states, archetypes "invisibly constellate our vision. They filter and reveal our data, structure our imagination, permeate our ways of knowing and acting" (2006, p. 12). In other words, the

various archetypes are lenses through which we see, interpret and experience life. They literally shape our experience of reality.

The archetype is essentially composed of the following five aspects: thought, emotion, behavior, image and physiology (von Franz, 1996). Image is an important aspect of the archetype. Jung writes, “We may say that the image represents the meaning of the instinct” (Jung, 1960, p. 201). Through imagery we are able to see the archetype made manifest.

To close this review on archetype, Jung called the Self the archetype of archetypes, viewing it as the most basic of archetypal structures (Stevens, 2003). He defined the Self as the archetype of wholeness which encompasses the totality of conscious and unconscious processes which complement each other (Edinger, 1972). The Self and the ego stand in distinction with one another, in that the ego extends only as far as the conscious mind, while the Self encompasses the whole personal psyche, including both conscious and unconscious elements. It is out of the Self that the conscious, differentiated sense of the personal “I” emerges.

Bridging the two fields

Even this brief review of the literature reveals that both archetypes and Enneagram types act as perceptual lenses which filter and structure our experience. They both appear as predispositions that at first function autonomously, acting as strategies to help us cope with the most fundamental experiences throughout the lifespan. They both operate to a large extent outside of our conscious awareness. Both terms describe coherent psychological structures that are universal across cultures, but which manifest in diverse ways according to the unique person manifesting that pattern. Both concepts include the important relationship of Self and ego, or essence and ego. Finally, the composition of an archetypal pattern to be made up of a central archetypal core around which image, behavior and emotion constellate. This is in keeping with Enneagram theory, which holds that every human being is recognized by a Chief Feature—the core of one’s Enneagram pattern—which can come to dominate one’s thought process, emotional life and behavior, especially when one is psychologically asleep to this pattern.

However, while depth psychology focuses on imagery and symbol as the most expedient route toward understanding archetypal patterns, imagery and symbol in the Enneagram literature is scarce. The work of Mary Bast and Clarence Thomson on metaphor and symbol is a notable exception (Bast & Thomson, 2003).

Research Goals

My purpose in conducting this research is to offer a re-visioning of the Enneagram as an archetypal model and to discover the imagery, symbols and metaphors that are most representative of the nine Enneagram types. This article focuses only on types Three, Six and Nine in order to cover more depth than breadth.

Methodology

I interviewed 23 individuals who self-identified as types Three, Six or Nine. In small focus groups, I facilitated discussions to explore how each participant experienced his or her core Enneagram type, asking them to use metaphor and imagery to describe their literal experiences. I investigated both the ego aspects of the type (mental fixation and emotional passion) as well as the essence aspects (holy idea and spiritual virtue). After the narrative, each participant drew or sculpted an image that had emerged for him or her during the discussion.

I then conducted a content analysis on the data to discover common themes and to gain more insight into the material. I took a phenomenological approach to interpreting the data, as I was interested in the participants' subjective experiences of the Enneagram types. I analyzed themes, looking for meaningful relationships that occurred within an Enneagram type structure.

Limitations of this study include the small sample size and the accuracy of self-identification of type. Although this article reviews only the data from 23 subjects for three Enneagram types conducted in 2009, research is ongoing for all nine types and the sample size has significantly increased.

Findings and Discussion

Overview

Three dominant themes emerged for type Three's metaphors and images of deceit and vanity: bringing order to chaos, an on-off switch, and social lies. Four dominant themes emerged for type Six's metaphors and images of fear and doubt: falling, fog and dark clouds, battle, and a buzz. Five dominant themes emerged for type Nine's metaphors and images of sloth and self-forgetting: resistance to overflowing energy, withdrawal of the essential self, insulation, invisibility, and tension of opposites.

The themes arising for the essence aspects of each type are fewer and have more in common. For type Three, the themes are: flow, physical calm, and aspects of the sky. For type Six: jumping, dissolving, solidity in the body, and flow. For type Nine: body-based solidity, getting bigger and flow. Significantly, the two themes common to all three types are an experience of being centered in the body and an experience of being in flow. At the end of this article I will talk more about the significance of these two essence themes.

What follows are a few examples for the themes noted above, accompanied with images by the participants. All names have been changed.

Type Three

Four of the six Threes volunteered the metaphor of an on-off switch as a term to describe their behavioral mode. The on-switch was described by the focus group participants as “perpetual motion” and accompanied by a sense of urgency, tension, impatience, panic, and inadequacy. This perpetual motion was expressed as “being jangled,” “having a jagged edge,” or “metallic, like steel.” Tessa used the image of a clock to describe the on-switch. Or better yet, she said, the on-switch was a daily schedule. “It’s adhered to,” she said. “You don’t vary from the schedule.” Martin emphasized that although the on-switch felt preferable to the off-switch, the on-switch did not feel good. He reported that underneath the motion of being “on” was a constant, low-level state of exhaustion, inadequacy and fear.

However, positive images were also mentioned when describing the on-switch. These included dancing, slalom skiing, and “hitting your marks.” Doris described Threes as all-terrain vehicles or tanks. “We’re unstoppable,” she said. Most of the Threes were not able to find as great a variety of descriptors or images for the off-switch. They simply used the terms “exhausted,” “tired” or “numb.” Rebecca said the word “off” was not even in her dictionary. She described her off and on switch, respectively, like this: “All I can see is this auger, one of those underground augers, that just makes those caves, just going, going, going. And if I wasn’t an auger then I was absolutely a tornado. Those were the two levels.”

Lily provided the imagery of a wizard to describe the Three’s passion of deceit, and her description reveals that underneath it lies the fear of inadequacy and incompetence. Here is an excerpt of our conversation:

Lily: So the deceit in my life is about how capable I really am, and that I’m not capable, but I have been the wizard and have shown the world how truly capable I am ... There’s always a little undercurrent of fear that I might get tripped up.

Researcher: By what?

Lily: Maybe the plan wasn’t as good as I thought and I’ll be revealed. Oh, there’s another wizard thing, that I’ll be revealed as not being this competent person.

Researcher: And you’ll be revealed instead as what?

Lily: A flop. Disgraced. Ashamed.

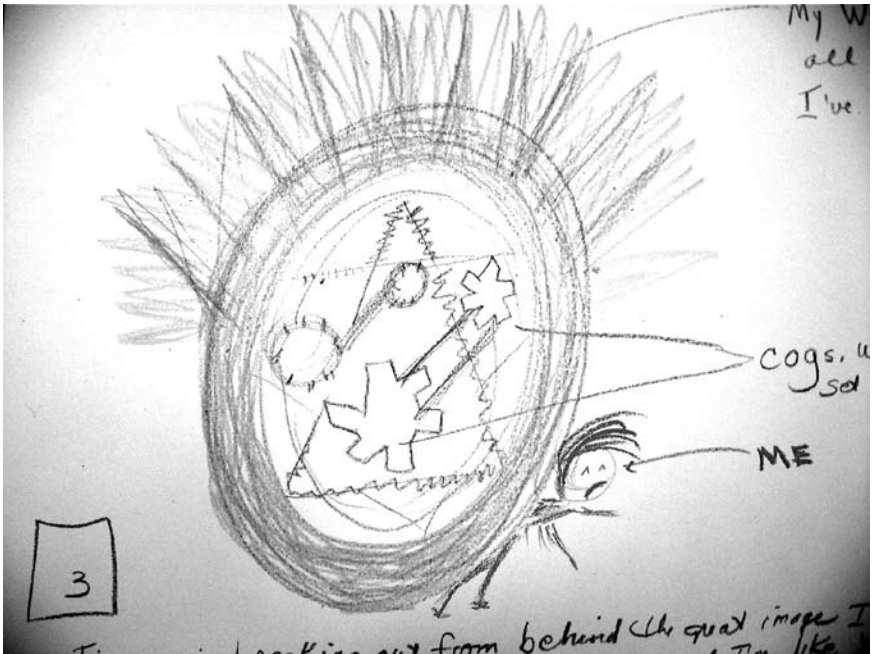


Figure 1. Lily's type Three drawing, "My Wizard of Oz."

Figure 1 shows a person carrying the weight of an enormous machine, which Lily labeled as: "cogs, wheels, machinery I've set in place... in perpetual motion." Lily titled this drawing: "My Wizard of Oz: all a 'front,' a 'deceit' I've layered over myself." She described it by saying: "I'm peering/peeking out from behind the great image I've created—i.e. The Wizard of Oz. The Wizard looks really awesome—and I'm like the 'Cowardly Lion' behind it, hoping I won't be 'found out.' Looking at what I've drawn, I also see the BURDEN... the weight of the image I've created."

Five of the six type Threes described their experiences of moving away from vanity and deceit into the territory of honesty and hope as variations on flow, including floating and melting. "Going with the flow," "Floating on the energy that's out there," and "Being tossed around" were some of the phrases that emerged in this category. Sam called this feeling the "wave of release." When he enters that sense of hope, Sam described feeling like he doesn't need to be in control of anything or motivate any action. Figure 2 shows Sam's drawing, "The Wave of Release!"

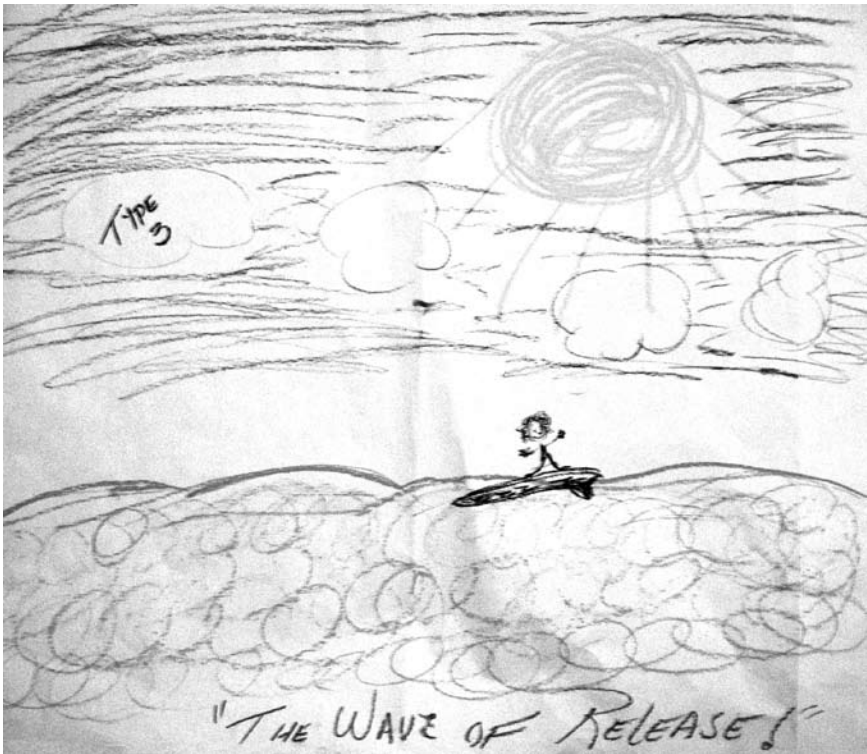


Figure 2. Sam's type Three drawing, "The Wave of Release!"

Sam described it as, "I feel like I'm on a wave, and when everything's right I'm riding that wave. Like you're surfing and you hit that perfect wave and it just goes on forever, right at the peak of the wave and it takes no energy to do anything, it's just go with the flow."

Rebecca's description of this transformation from vanity to hope is also in keeping with the theme of flowing. She used the image of a floating tumbleweed to illustrate this experience: "I've gone from being an auger to a tornado to a tumbleweed in life. To me, this is my mature Three. It's like, I'm still in motion, in action, but nothing like what I used to be. This is a more relaxed—I'm more willing to go here or there."

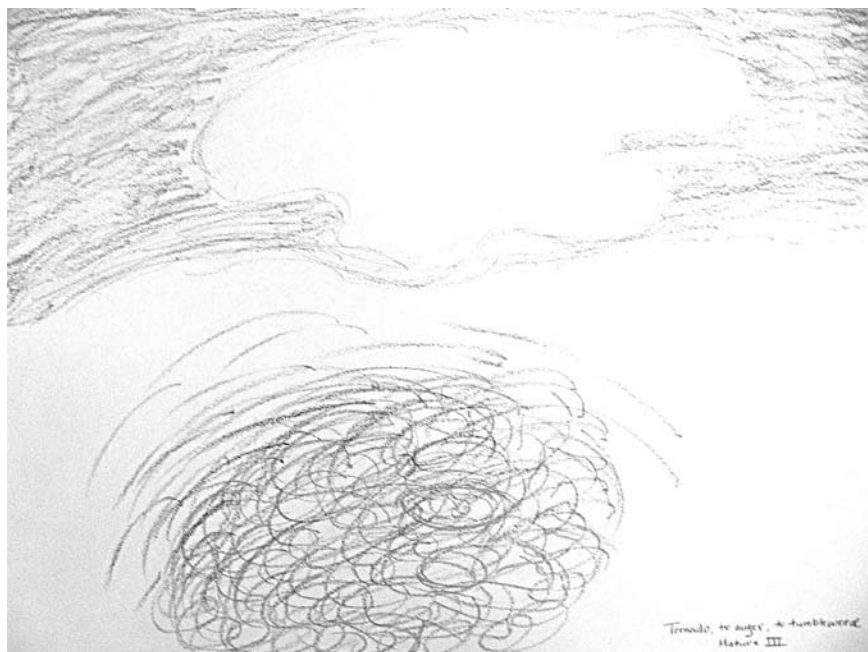


Figure 3. Rebecca's type Three drawing, "Tornado, to auger, to tumbleweed. Mature III."

All of the Threes reported that moving into the virtue and holy idea of their type brought on a physical feeling of calm, of slowing down or relaxing. For example, Tessa noted a feeling of stillness. She said that honesty with herself and with others "slows [the clock] down, or at least mutes the ticking." Doris shared that by being as honest as she can be results in "a calmer vibration in the jangling... the jangling is fear. The internal noise goes down." Sam also expressed that the melting experience brings on "a physical feeling of calm, energy is down" and described it as "a sense of hope." What is interesting to note here is that in the previous section the participants described the ego aspect of their type as perpetual motion and an inner turmoil. Recall Rebecca's metaphor of a tornado and Lily's exhausted efforts to keep the world spinning. But these participants also report that this frantic, constant motion transforms into a different kind of motion—the motion of flowing and melting—when they access the essence pole. It seems that in this latter state, Threes no longer act or feel like they are carrying the world on their shoulders; instead they are letting themselves be carried by the world.

Type Six

The sensation of falling emerged as a major theme for type Sixes when they described fear and doubt. Sixes in each of the four focus groups reported this metaphor of falling, with variations on the theme. Tanisha said, “The doubt is a downward spiral,” and Alex mentioned that, “Being unsupported is like free fall.” Vivian added that she used to have a lot of dreams “where I would be falling, falling, falling.”

Two Sixes shared the imagery of falling into a pit, describing it in vivid terms.

Diane described her experience this way:

Diane: It feels like there’s a pit that’s very dark and cold that I descend into and I panic, and I try to crawl my way out as fast as I can. It comes from seemingly nowhere... sometimes I’ll feel threatened and I’ll go there, but sometimes it doesn’t seem to have any kind of precipitating incident, or thought, or feeling or anything, it’s just like—it’s like I’m walking down this road and I fall in this pit, and then I crawl my way out, and then I’m walking down the road and I fall in the pit!

Researcher: What’s in the pit?

Diane: Well, the pit is just dark and very, very cold, icy cold and very dark. And it’s very constrained in there, it’s not like there’s a lot of maneuvering room, I feel very contracted. It’s very scary And the other piece of it, talk about doubt, the two are just really conjoined. So what happens when I’m in that space of fear, is all doubt, self-doubt, comes into play, and it’s like whatever hopes I might have had for my life or myself or anything are just like impossible.

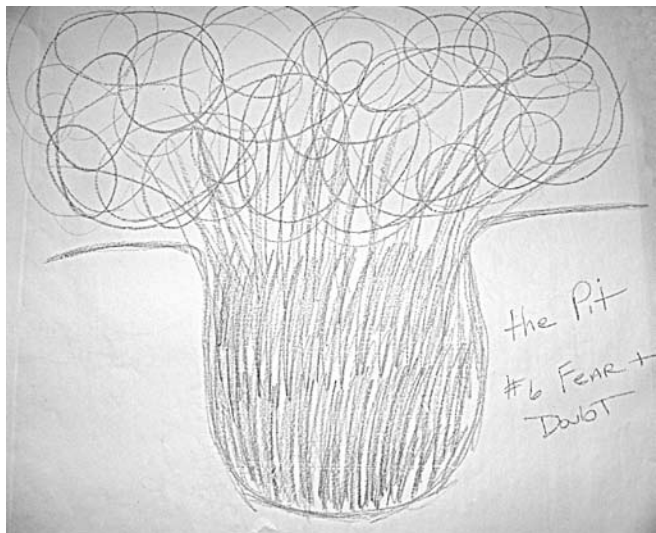


Figure 4. Diane’s type Six drawing, “The Pit.”

Rosa, who participated in a different focus group from Diane, reported that her fear and doubt create “a state of feeling like the bottom has just fallen out.” Rather than fall through and admit that, in her words, “there really was no stable bottom, none,” Rosa typically reacted by persevering through the fear and putting herself back together again. “It’s as if my body parts have been kind of severed and spread all over the place,” she added. In recent years, however, she has begun to explore what is down there. “It’s very black down there,” she said. “There’s no light, so it’s impossible to see.”

Another theme for type Six was that fear and doubt felt like a buzzing, electric-like charge. Liz said, “When I really had it [the fear] big time, I remember drawing a picture of a girl whose hair was just like standing up, and there was everything, every pore was alive, and eyes wide open, it was just alert. Just like a buzz... There’s always this buzz underneath.” Liz recreated the drawing in the focus group, shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Liz’s type Six drawing, “Anxiety and fear on steroids.”

Susan concurred with Liz’s description and added, “I can actually hear it. It sounds kind of like a low-level electric fence. That hum. If it gets a little too amped up, I can actually hear it.”

Interestingly, falling also came up as a theme for the essence aspects of type Six, courage and faith, except that it manifested as jumping and diving. Figure 6 shows Vivian’s drawing, “Enjoying free-fall.”



Figure 6. Vivian's type Six drawing, "Enjoying free fall."

Vivian explains: "I'm enjoying the free fall and wanting to live my life in a place of courage and faith." Recall Rosa, who in her fear and doubt felt that the bottom was always falling out from under her. In moments of courage, rather than trying to get out of the hole, instead she decides: "I'm going to dive into it. . . . I'm going to see what's down there." When I asked her where her fear and anxiety were when she dives into it, she replied: "I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid. It feels very real. Intense emotion when it's getting released just feels very trustworthy." I asked her what felt trustworthy. Rosa told me that because it's completely black down there, "it's impossible to see. So I have to kind of just feel my way around, and just trust my feelings and kind of. . . it gets beyond mind somehow." Rosa called her courage "this willingness to dive into the darkness." I asked her what she felt in those moments instead of fear. "Curiosity," was her response. "There's a sense of wanting to get to the bottom of it."

The decision to trust seemed to be instrumental in converting the experience of fear to an experience of courage. In the following exchange, Rob, Vivian and Alex illustrate this point.

Rob: [It's] like actually jumping, and just spinning, dropping back into this abyss and just loving it, feeling supported.

Researcher: Feeling supported even while falling?

Rob: Well, feeling safe, like there was a net down there somewhere, and even if there wasn't it didn't matter.

Researcher: Why didn't it matter?

Rob: Because—it was just a trust.

Vivian: At that point you choose to have faith.

Alex: This is the true surrender. Giving up control. Having faith.

Researcher: So the experience of falling doesn't feel like falling.

Alex: Yeah, it can be a real nice experience, to give up worrying about what's at the bottom and enjoy the falling.

Type Nine

When I asked the participants representing type Nine about sloth and self-forgetting, one common theme that arose was invisibility.

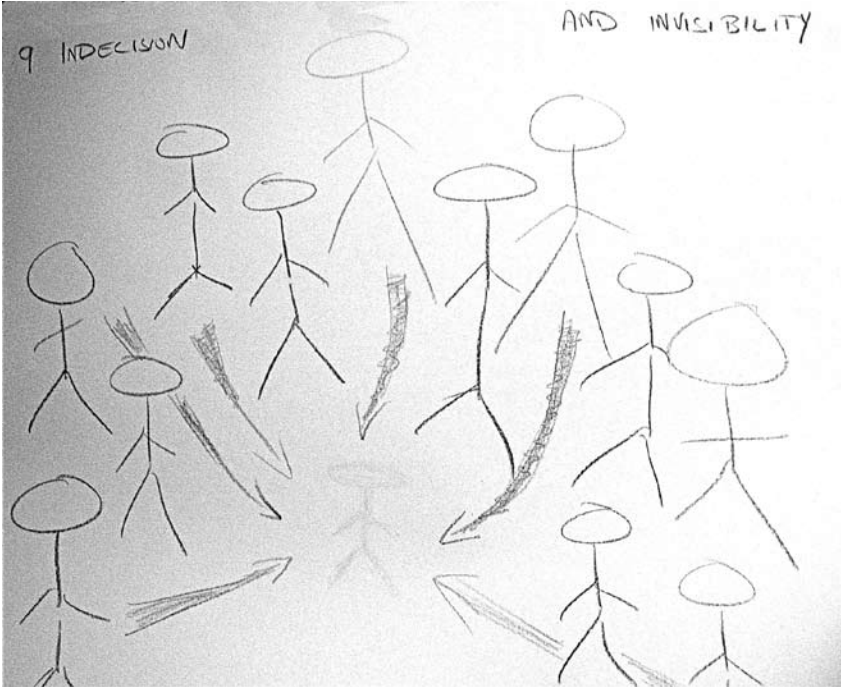


Figure 7. Anita's type Nine drawing, "Indecision and Invisibility."

Anita describes her drawing in Figure 7 this way: “That’s me in the center, I’m barely there, and I can’t even hear my own voice, and not only can I not hear my own voice, it’s like I don’t even know there’s a voice to be heard, really. And what I hear is the clamoring of other voices around me and what other people have to say and what’s important about that, and just overlooking myself. And it throws me into this sense of indecision, and it makes me feel like I’m not being seen.”

In a different focus group, Emma shared a vivid image to describe her feelings of what she called “the invisible thing:” “It’s like life is a table and everyone’s partaking of a meal, but there’s no chair for me.”

The theme of invisibility turns out to be closely linked with the theme of insulation. “The last thing I want to do with my peers is to have the spotlight on me,” Lawrence related as he talked about constantly taking the focus off of himself and deferring to others. In the following excerpt Lawrence explains his tendency to withdraw and insulate.

Lawrence: It’s as if there’s a cushion or a soft landing waiting for me to not get into conflict. When it gets into conflict I don’t know how to—sometimes I’m afraid I can’t tap into what I’m really feeling about it because I’m conflicted between what I want to do for me and something for somebody else.

Researcher: What about the opposite—when you are in conflict, when you don’t defer?

Lawrence: It’s as if I’m in a really small telephone booth, and I can’t move. I’m just like stuck and if I go this way, it’s bad, if I go that way it’s bad, and I’m just bumping into all these walls.

Researcher: Have you ever found a middle ground between the landing in the soft cushion and the telephone booth?

Lawrence: Yeah, the middle ground is totally going inside of my head and like not even knowing there’s anybody around me [laughter] so I guess that’s like being insular, it’s like separating myself from reality. It’s a withdrawal.



Figure 8. Lawrence’s type Nine drawing, “My phone booth.”

James illustrates the Nine theme of a resistance to overflowing energy by describing how sloth transforms into anger. He said while there is some truth to the stereotype that type Nine is steady and steadfast, there is also an undercurrent of energy that can erupt. He used the metaphor of a volcano to describe this. “The deeper truth is that beneath that [unfocused energy] there’s this boiling happening. And that boiling in a way is sloth, because it can erupt. And the eruption, while it feels kind of good, is also very scary because of the potential impact, and as somebody who tries not to make waves, the idea of my energy and the waves that it could create, the tsunami below is very frightening. It’s the damage that it can do.”

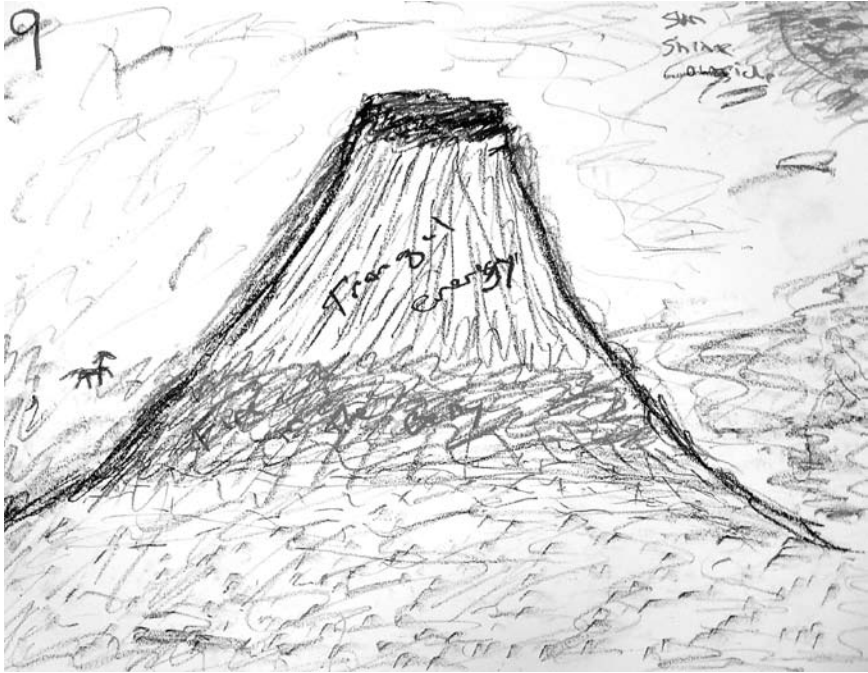


Figure 9. James' type Nine drawing. "Tranquil energy."

The themes of isolation, insulation and resistance gave way to themes of flow for type Nines when describing the essence aspects of love and right action.



Figure 10. Cassandra's type Nine drawing, "Right Action, Holy Love."

In the drawing Cassandra is surrounded by a brick wall that acts as a shield that protects some aspect of herself. However, "When I do the right action, it's like the bricks fly away," she said. "[The brick wall] is gone. It's actually not there. It's not invisible to me—it's not even there anymore."

Common Themes

Whereas the themes for the ego aspects of types Three, Six and Nine were more diverse in nature, two primary themes emerged for the essence aspects of these three types: centering in the body, and being in flow.

For example, all of the Threes reported a physical feeling of calm, of stillness, or of energy slowing down. Sixes also used body-based imagery, providing terms like "grounded," "visceral," "physical movement," and "solidity to the self." Nines used terms like, "solid," "grounded," and "feeling bigger."

Individuals from all three type groups actually used the term "flow." No other term was used as frequently across all types. Variations on the word flow also occurred, including releasing, dissipating, dissolving, evaporating, surrendering,

melting, floating, being tossed around, and letting go. The Three rides the wave of release. The Six enjoys the free fall. The Nine stops resisting and allows the doing to unfold.

Based on these findings—that all three types in their essence aspect felt more centered in their bodies and experienced a state of flow—I suggest that when individuals move from the ego aspect to the essence aspect of their type, the resulting experience is a remarkably similar state of being no matter what the type. Although the Enneagram describes different virtues and holy ideas for each type, these terms may actually be describing essentially the same experience, which is an experience of what Jung called the archetype of the Self, which is the archetype of wholeness. However, each type takes a different route to arrive at this experience. For Three it is honesty, for Six it is courage and for Nine it is right action.

In Enneagram literature the terms denoting the essence aspect—the virtues and the holy ideas—as well as the ego aspect—the fixations and the passions—are placed at each of the nine points on the circumference of the circle. However, given the discussion of my findings regarding the similarity of experience of the essence aspect versus the diversity of experience of the ego aspect, it might be more experientially accurate to place the essence terms inside the circle. See Figure 11.

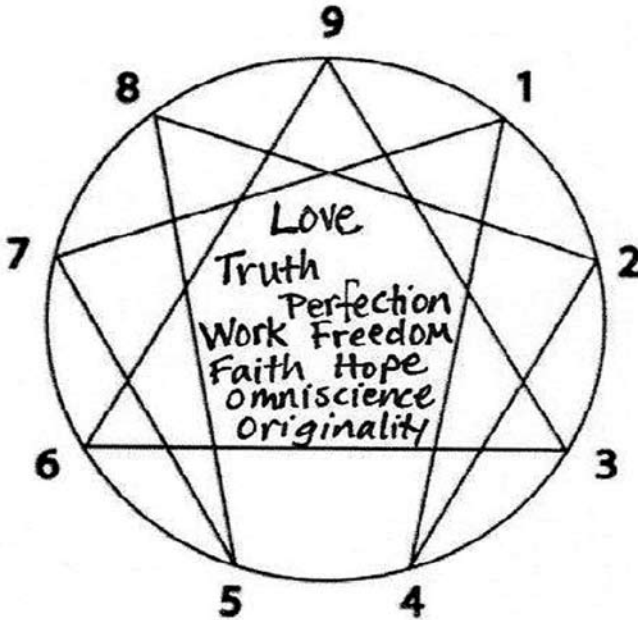


Figure 11. The holy ideas placed inside the circle.

Although the nine holy ideas are each distinct aspects of wholeness, the ego's experience of each of the nine leads to a very similar state. Using the findings of this research, it is a state of flow and of being grounded in the body. Meanwhile, the nine fixations remain located on the outer rim of the circle, which can be viewed as the realm of the ego. Then, by removing the nine interconnecting lines within the circle and drawing a line between each fixation and its related holy idea, I arrived at the resulting picture in Figure 12.

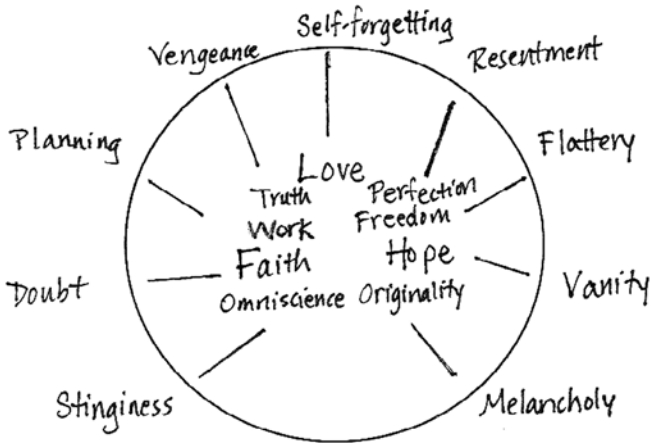


Figure 12. The axis of the fixation and the holy idea.

The holy ideas, being in the field of essence or what Jung would call the Self, represent a state of unity. The fixations, being in the field of phenomena and the realm of ego, are differentiated and become highly varied and diverse. Even though Jung apparently never crossed paths with the Enneagram teaching, he could have been talking about the diagram when he wrote the following: "The specific virtues and vices of humanity are contained in the collective psyche like everything else... The moral pair of opposites contained in the collective psyche... have become perceptible" (Jung, 1966b, pp. 149-150). The adapted Enneagram diagram in Figure 12 makes this pair of opposites perceptible. Fundamentally this suggests that the Enneagram represents nine differentiated states of consciousness, which are the nine ego personality types, as well as a unified state of consciousness, where the essence aspects of all nine types unite in the center of the symbol.

Implications

I have conducted further research on the remaining six Enneagram types since 2009, and am continually adding data to the content analysis to discover whether the original findings and conclusions can be verified as the sample size grows larger. For now, there are several implications of this research.

First, depth psychology shows us that archetypal patterns function not only at the level of the individual, but can also be seen to operate at the cultural level, in family systems, and in organizational structures (Singer & Kimbles, 2004). Therefore, it is through the archetypal lens that we can understand and interpret Enneagram types operating in cultures, nations and groups. This is in keeping with Gurdjieff's conception of the Enneagram as a system that described living processes, as opposed to an interpretation of the Enneagram as strictly an individual personality typology.

These findings suggest a further research question: Are the nine archetypal Enneagram patterns connected to our survival as a species? Whether or not archetypal patterns exist *a priori* as Jung suggested, or co-evolved with our species over time, they are now blueprints in the human psyche that structure and shape our experiences. Analyst Anthony Stevens asserts that archetypes exist in the human psyche because they hold survival value for the species (Stevens, 1993). As archetypal patterns, the nine Enneagram types may be encoded in our psychological template in a way that serves us collectively and individually. They may exist as nine evolutionary strategies that humans depend on to navigate through life. Depth psychologist Lionel Corbett refers to this same idea with the term "archetypal endowment" which he defines as "precisely that aspect of the divine with which we are entrusted" (Corbett, 1996, p. 50). I propose that the Enneagram types serve as archetypal endowments. All nine of these fundamental patterns exist as potentials in the human psyche. One of these nine patterns acts as our particular archetypal endowment and fundamentally influences how we perceive the material world and how we experience the spiritual dimension.

Furthermore, re-visioning the Enneagram as an archetypal system de-personalizes the types and recognizes them as dynamic patterns of existence that exist autonomously in the psyche. This helps individuals to move forward with dis-identification from type. This term implies that type is other than our identity. It implies that one has an identity outside of type. When an Enneagram type is unconscious, it can cause the person to act out true to the pure type, behaving and speaking stereotypically according to that specific structure. Dis-identification helps us to not be inflated by the type, nor ruled by the type as it runs on automatic patterning. Instead, it helps us to recognize the type in which we are unconsciously participating, wake up to its influence on us, and come into conscious dialogue with this archetypal endowment that is both gift and holy neurosis.

This expanded view of the Enneagram connects it with tangible, accessible depth psychological methods that could be truly useful to people on their path of individuation, which is a term Jung used to describe the life-long process of individuals becoming psychologically whole (Jung, 1989). By inviting my focus group participants to move from word to image and from literal telling to metaphorical telling, I invited them to shift their attention. Specifically, I invited them to engage with their Enneagram type structure in a way that turned their Enneagram type into an “other,” which they could imagine, draw and sculpt. When we do this, unconscious material begins to surface spontaneously. We can then observe in a tangible way what was previously hidden or ignored by our conscious frame of attention. Most importantly, the content is meaningful. It provides insight into our psychological and spiritual lives and opens the door from observation to active dialogue, into what Jung called active imagination, whereby one consciously enters a dialogue with unconscious images.

Engaging in active imagination assumes that the material has an autonomous quality to it. Using the expressive arts activates the Inner Observer, which can notice the content rather than react to it, and assist our conscious ego in dialoguing with it rather than judging it. Furthermore, as autonomous archetypal patterns, the Enneagram types can actually respond in the active imagination process through symbols, words or figures that provide us with valuable information and even healing.

Conclusion

The results from this study offer us an archetypal perspective on the Enneagram. This understanding casts the Enneagram as a universal structure of meaning that shapes our experience of reality, with nine archetypal patterns of human egoic consciousness interacting with the transcendent Self. It invites us to consider that although the nine holy ideas are each distinct aspects of wholeness, the ego’s experience of each of the nine leads to a very similar state—using the findings of this research, it is a state of flow and of being grounded in the body.

This study also introduces the depth methods of expressive arts and active imagination to the Enneagram community, methods that can bring unconscious, archetypal material to conscious awareness through art and imagery. Active imagination in particular then allows us to dialogue and work with these inner images, which is an effective tool for the Inner Observer after the task of observation has been addressed.

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