

The Enneagram Personality System:  
Nine Patterns of Cognitive-Emotional Structure and Information Processing

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive model of human information processing which has yet to receive significant attention in the scientific literature. Widely known as the Enneagram, its description of nine personality types and their corresponding clusters of attention, internal mental processes, and behavior can be viewed in contemporary terms as patterns of need, motivation, emotional reactivity, and information processing that underlie personality across the lifespan. In this paper we first provide a brief overview of the Enneagram system and the attention processes that underlie personality. Next, we present the Enneagram system in a modern nomenclature inclusive of: 1) Early Organizing Patterns (core motivations, emotional reactivity, and primary orientation bias); 2) Adaptive Processing Strategy (mental, emotional, and somatic information processing); and 3) Observable Personality. A brief summary of each of the nine personality patterns based on a multitude of adult narratives drawn from several cultures is presented. We discuss how the system is both a typology (nine patterns of processing) and a system that accounts for individual differences (each pattern has many facets resulting in substantial variation within each type). We conclude that the Enneagram provides valuable insight into four areas of psychology: (1) it appears to be a lifespan model of personality, (2) it offers insight into measurement that combines qualitative type and quantitative individual differences, (3) it describes nine clusters of attention, emotional reactivity, and cognitive preoccupation underlying personality, and (4) it provides type-specific paths for behavior change and psychological growth. Our view is that these insights can enrich, accelerate, and provide new directions in developmental, neurobiological, behavioral, clinical, organizational, and personality research and practice.

**Keywords:** Personality, temperament, personality model, cognitive-emotional structure, emotional reactivity, emotion regulation, motivation, needs, attention, information processing, lifespan development, developmental neuroscience, developmental neurobiology, personal growth, clinical and counseling psychology, organizational psychology.

## **The Enneagram Personality System:**

### **Nine Patterns of Cognitive-Emotional Structure and Processing**

Personality traits are thought to play a major role in models of psychological function, including social status, quality of social relationships, health and psychopathology (Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner, 2005). Personality is understood to be “the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment” and is manifested through “the person’s characteristic patterns of behavior, thoughts and feelings” (Allport, 1937; 1961).

In spite of the widespread and long-standing acceptance of this definition of personality in general, our understanding of the structure and etiology of personality remains far from complete, and there is surprisingly little understanding of the psychological and biological mechanisms underlying personality traits. Much of the research in this area has been descriptive of personality traits, with a variety of perspectives that remain fragmented and lack integration of various psychological and biological systems (Mayer 2005).

Identifying a taxonomy of traits that develop across the lifespan has been another central challenge in personality research. By and large, different personality structures in childhood and adulthood have been the focus of research, with the most popular models being based on six to nine traits in children (Lemery, Goldsmith, Klinnert, & Mrazek, 1999; Rothbart & Bates, 1998; Thomas, Chess, Birch, & Hertzig, 1963) and three to five traits in adults (Eysenck, 1952; John & Srivastava, 1999). Although some research has suggested links between child, adolescent and adult traits (Graziano 2003; Kubzansky, Martin, & Buka, 2009; Shiner & Caspi, 2003), most research involves different personality structures during different developmental periods.

The Enneagram personality system is a dynamic model of human personality that identifies nine basic human personality clusters and their relationships to one another. While it has received little attention from the mainstream of contemporary psychological research or

practice, it is widely used in a variety of personal development and organizational (primarily workplace) settings involving the normal range of adults. We believe that the system merits attention because: (1) it appears to be a comprehensive model of human personality across the lifespan, (2) it offers insight into measurement of both type and individual differences, (3) it describes processes of attention and emotional and cognitive preoccupation underlying personality, and (4) it provides type-specific paths for behavior change and psychological growth. We have two major goals in this paper: (1) to describe or “translate” traditional Enneagram nomenclature into contemporary psychological constructs and (2) to spark interest among psychologists in further study of the system’s nine patterns of processing.

### **A Brief Synopsis of the Enneagram System**

#### *About the Enneagram*

The word “Enneagram” comes from the Greek and refers to a map with nine points. On one level, the Enneagram system is a dynamic model of human personality that identifies nine basic human personality clusters, and their relationships to each other. On another level, it describes in considerable detail the processes underlying the traits, observable behaviors, and mental and emotional preoccupations that constitute personality. In each individual one of these nine patterns is believed to emerge in very early childhood and develop throughout childhood and adolescence, under the influence of both constitutional and environmental influences, as an adaptive “strategy” for ensuring satisfactory survival. In the process, an inner narrative or worldview is established with organizing themes that are carried more or less intact through life. For the most part this inner narrative operates habitually, but is a powerful motivating force behind the organization of attention, appraisal, emotional reactivity, cognitive narratives, interpersonal relationships and behavior. Individuals from many different cultures, socioeconomic status, and social settings identify strongly with one of its nine personality types (Daniels, DN & Price, 2009; Palmer, 1988, Palmer, 1995; Palmer & Brown, 1998; Riso &

Hudson, 1996; Riso & Hudson, 1999). The nine Enneagram personality types are summarized in Table 1 as composites of typical inner narratives and descriptions of the type-specific mental and emotional attention and processing patterns.

The origins of the Enneagram system are not known with certainty. It is generally believed to have developed in contemplative, meditative, and reflective spiritual practices. These meditative settings provided a framework for identifying and working with patterns of obstruction to personal awareness and spiritual growth. (Ichazo, 1988; Moore, 2004; Naranjo, 1994; Ouspenski, 1949; Palmer, 1988; Riso & Hudson, 1996; Riso & Hudson, 1999; Wiltse, 2001; Wiltse & Palmer, 2009). Individuals described to their "teacher" their inner thoughts and mental processes in detail during or after meditation or contemplation. In studying these internal phenomenon teachers discerned nine clusters of mental construct. The observation that inner attention clusters into nine was probably identified in different cultures and different times as Enneagram historians have tied it to ancient China, Pythagorean mathematics, and Sufism.

The Enneagram was, however, introduced to counseling, transpersonal, and popular psychology in the 1970's (see Beesing, Nogosek, & O'Leary, 1984; Naranjo, 1990, 1994; Palmer, 1988). Since then it has been extensively studied and developed by counselors, physicians, priests and ministers, and organizational psychologists in personal growth workshops, teacher and clinician training seminars, and a large variety of workplace and management training sessions but largely outside of the mainstream of contemporary psychological and psychiatric research and practice. Current understanding of the system, as summarized here and in numerous texts and published trade and professional books on the subject, is based on information gathered in such settings from thousands of individuals who seek to relieve their psychological pain or who participate in Enneagram seminars in the workplace (Daniels & Price, 2009; Palmer, 1988) (Lapid-Bogda, 2008, 2009).

*Use Today*

Lack of attention from the “mainstream” of mental health research and practice notwithstanding, the Enneagram system is the subject of enormous professional and popular interest, as suggested by: (1) the widespread use of the system by individuals for personal and spiritual growth, by psychotherapists and counselors as a framework for therapy, and by consultants in professional and organizational change and development; (2) the numerous books that have been written describing it and its application in personal and organizational settings; (3) the dozens of assessment instruments that have been developed; (4) the tens of thousands of people who have enrolled in Enneagram workshops and seminars and use the system for understanding themselves and others; and (5) the hundreds of Enneagram teachers who are being trained and certified every year throughout the world.

### *Important Features*

In the context of this paper, several key, interrelated features of the Enneagram system deserve emphasis. First, each of the nine personality types has a strong proclivity for attention to be drawn to specific aspects of the events in everyday life, particularly in the realm of interpersonal interaction. Examples across the nine types include focusing attention on: (1) right versus wrong, errors, and mistakes, (2) other people’s needs and desires, (3) tasks, goals, and achievement, (4) that which is missing and longed for, (5) potential intrusion and demands of others, (6) potential hazards and worst case scenarios and how to deal with them, (7) positive or pleasurable options and opportunities; (8) injustices and the need for control or assertiveness, and (9) maintaining harmony with one’s physical and social environment.

Second, unlike other systems of personality, which are based on behavior or other external traits (e.g., the Big Five--John & Srivastava 1999; McAdams, 1992), the Enneagram system is based on the patterns of cognitive and emotional preoccupation and biased attention that underlie observable behaviors and traits. These patterns are very well described in the Enneagram literature, and are supported by an enormous quantity of assimilated reports of inner

observation and empirical inquiry (Daniels, DN & Price, 2009; Palmer, 1988, Palmer, 1995; Palmer & Brown, 1998; Riso & Hudson, 1996; Riso & Hudson, 1999).

Third, the specific patterns of each type appear to emerge quite early in life, to evolve during childhood and adolescence in response to both temperamental proclivity and life experience (particularly with respect to the ways and extent to which early needs were met). Furthermore, adult narratives of childhood experience strongly suggest that the patterns are relatively stable across the lifespan.

Fourth, a central organizing principle of the system is the association of each of the nine personality types with a particular pattern of emotional tone and reactivity involving either fear, distress, or anger. Specifically, there are three distinct patterns of emotional tone and reactivity for each of these three emotions – internalized fear/distress/anger or externalized fear/distress/anger, or types that both internalize and externalize fear/distress/anger. For example, Type Eight tends to externalize and freely express anger, sometimes in excess; Type One tends to internalize anger and become highly critical of self and/or others; and Type Nine tends to minimize expression of anger (although it may be expressed passive-aggressively).

Fifth, each of these three triads of emotional tone and reactivity is also associated with an inner narrative, which operates beneath conscious awareness and involves seeking of (1) security, safety, certainty, assurance, preparedness, and predictability; (2) love, connection, recognition, approval, bonding, and affection; or (3) worthiness, control, congruence, comfort, belonging, and harmony.

### **Nine Patterns of Cognitive-Emotional Structure and Information Processing**

In this section we describe traditional Enneagram constructs into contemporary psychological nomenclature, and briefly relate them to contemporary psychological constructs. We also present a very brief synopsis of the nine clusters. Much additional detail about the

clusters and their interconnection are described elsewhere (e.g., Palmer, 1988, Riso and Hudson, 1999).

The Enneagram describes the ways in which: (1) information and experience are selectively taken in according to implicit and generally habitual beliefs about the world and one's relationship to it; (2) information and experience are organized, appraised, and integrated in both cognitive and emotional domains, (3) integrated information is expressed in the cognitive and emotional preoccupations (both conscious and non-conscious) and behavioral output that make up personality; and (4) all of these - attention, cognitive and emotional information processing, and personality expression - recursively interact to reinforce each other. It is consistent with modern views of information processing acknowledging that input, integration, and output filters occur at mental, emotional, and somatic levels (Damasio, 1994; Damasio, 1999; Izard, Stark, Trentacosta & Schulz, 2008; Mesulam, 1998; Pankas, 1998; Siegel, 1999). Table 2 provides an overview of the model, including brief descriptions of the key features important to the nine processing patterns that define the Enneagram personality types. Some of these key features are explained in more detail in the following sections. Tables 3, 4, and 5 then provide summary descriptions of the three fear/anxiety types, the three distress/sadness types, and the three anger/resentment types, respectively, in terms of specific forms of these key features for each type.

### *Early Organizing Patterns*

The Enneagram system identifies at least three major facets of inner processing which appear to interact in a recursive manner to reinforce each other and shape subsequent processing: (a) core motivations, (b) emotional reactivity, and (c) primary orientation bias.

*Core Motivations.* The Enneagram describes three domains of fundamental motivation which cluster broadly around needs for: (1) safety, certainty, preparedness, and opportunity; (2) recognition, approval, pair/group bonding, and affection; and (3) respect, power and control,

congruence, comfort, and harmony. Interestingly, these “core motivations” correlate more or less directly with fundamental infant needs beyond physical nurturance identified by Brazelton and Greenspan (2000). They noted that infants need to feel (1) secure/assured, (2) loved/connected, and (3) valued/comforted and they are highly motivated to pursue satisfaction of these universal needs. As the infant grows, individuates, and develops cognitive capacities, satisfaction of these social and basic biological needs motivates behavior.

*Emotional Reactivity.* As already noted, the Enneagram literature describes three clusters of emotional tone and reactivity. Aversive emotional reactivity characterized by fear/anxiety, separation/distress, and anger/rage inevitably arise in the milieu of a dependent relationship with caregivers who sometimes fail to fully satisfy needs and desires, and with increasing autonomy associated with growth and maturation. The Enneagram suggests that one of these three systems becomes more salient than the other two in the early life of the infant, influenced by both temperament and the particular life experience of the young child. These three clusters of emotional reactivity are consistent with: 1) Buss & Plomin’s work on infant temperament (1975; 1984), which characterizes three emotionality dimensions within the EAS personality measure in young children: Emotionality-Fear, Emotionality-Distress, and Emotionality-Anger; 2) Pankseep’s (1998) work on fear, distress, and anger as fundamental emotions functional shortly after birth and long before the emergence of significant cognitive function and 3) developmental theory which suggests that personality type emerges in very early life from a combination of “nature and nurture” (Fox et al. 2005; Fox, Hane, & Pine, 2007; Rutter, 2007).

*Primary Orientation Bias.* The Enneagram system also describes patterns of orientation bias. These have two aspects: content and direction (which are detailed in Tables 3, 4, and 5). The content aspect relates to the ways in which attention is drawn toward particular information or aspects of experience, and to be less drawn to other information or experiences. The directional aspect appears to be related to regulation of aversive emotions. Thus, attention is

preferentially directed either internally (e.g., self-regulation), externally (e.g., young children who need environmental cues to sooth themselves), or both simultaneously. The three variations of biased direction—internal, external, and combined—within each of the three content orientations (based on salient needs sets) reveal nine patterns underlying the nine Enneagram types (see Figure 1).

*Adaptive Processing Strategy.* An adaptive processing strategy, consistent with attachment research (Sroufe, Carlson, Collins, Egeland, 2005), integrates and organizes life experience in ways that maximize attention to the pursuit of most salient needs, while minimizing as much as possible aversive emotional reactivity. It operates primarily at a non-conscious level and manifests in interwoven type-specific patterns of mental information processing, emotion regulation and processing, and somatic processing (Siegel, 2001a; 2001b). (In classic Enneagram literature these phenomena are referred to as habitual patterns of fixation.)

*Mental Information Processing.* Each of the nine Enneagram types has a life-long pattern of cognitive “content themes” that, in adults, fall into one of three broad categories: (1) preoccupation with analyzing, figuring out, and strategizing to avoid worst case outcomes or create best case outcomes; (2) preoccupation with image in the eyes of others, self-presentation, and approval to gain connection; and (3) preoccupation with fitting in, position, seeking comfort, a “right environment”, and harmony in order to assure value or worth.

*Emotion Regulation and Processing.* Each of the nine Enneagram types experiences the full range of human emotions, but leans toward one of three patterns of emotional tone and expression: (1) fear (often anticipatory anxiety manifesting as vigilance for danger); (2) distress (manifesting as sadness or concern over the loss of connection); or (3) anger (manifesting as a focus on limitation or control).

*Somatic Processing and Instinctual Drives.* Body based attention is expressed through kinesthetic and physical sensations including proprioception, touch, sense of position, and

weight. In addition, Enneagram literature also describes three interpersonal “instinctual” drives that are largely somatic, but also involve limbic and cortical systems: (1) the drive to get basic needs met first (*self-preservation*), (2) the drive to pair bond including mates and friends (*one-to-one relationships*), and (3) the drive to participate and get along in groups (*social*). Although everyone manifests all three of these instinctual drives to some degree, an individual usually expresses one of the three instinctual drives more than the other two. Although somatic processing and the instinctual drives are of considerable interest, these two parts of the model are beyond the scope of this introductory paper and are not included in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

*Defense Mechanism.* Each of the Enneagram types also utilizes, preferentially but not exclusively, a defense mechanism that serves to impede the entry of painful or intolerable thoughts and feelings from entering the field of awareness and thus helps to enhance ongoing function (Valiant, 1992). One mechanism becomes more dominant serving to interweave the mental and emotional processing that sustains the types’ basic adaptive processing strategy. The result is a positive feedback loop strengthening the types’ processing patterns, because the defense serves as a protective mechanism that is embedded in the personality type.

*Observable Personality Pattern.*

*Manifest traits, potential strengths, and potential weaknesses.* These are the classic, observable traits and characteristics of personality similar to what has been described by Allport, (1934; 1961). These patterns appear to emerge more and more clearly through adolescence similar to what we know about other personality systems (Caspi, et al. 2005). From what is observable to the outside, the traits between the nine types can look very similar. The internal mental and emotional processes differentiate the types suggesting that it is really a system of human attention and emotional reactivity.

## **Nine Patterns of Processing: Personality Across the Lifespan**

*A Lifespan Model*

The Enneagram system suggests that the childhood origin of the patterns lies in adaptive strategies to ensure satisfactory survival and well-being. Such adaptive strategies are of key importance in both traditional (Allport, 1937) and more contemporary models of personality and temperament (Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans 2000). Consistent with models of early personality development (Brazelton, 1983; Carey & McDevitt, 1995; Carey & Jablo, 1997; Sears & Sears, 1993), nine temperament patterns may form in utero. It is hypothesized that the nine temperament scales in infants described by Thomas & Chess (1977) coincide well with a dominant aspect of each of the nine Enneagram types (Daniels, DN, 2001) summarized in Table 6. The system is also compatible with The Big Five characteristics found in adults – extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, – and can potentially enhance understanding of why these five traits are found so consistently across cultures (Heine & Buchtel, 2009) and on the other end of the spectrum with the DSM Personality Disorders (see Table 7). Because the Enneagram is a personality model describing “what is more privately held” and The Big Five describes “what can be observed in a stranger” (McAdams, 1992, the Enneagram should be viewed as complimentary in understanding personality development.

The processing pattern underlying the Enneagram personality type in an individual is believed to be generally well established by adolescence, which is entirely consistent with the data from longitudinal studies of children demonstrating stability of personality traits from adolescence through adulthood (McCrae & Costa, 1994; Plomin, Fulker, Corley, & DeFries, 1997; see also Roberts & DeVecchio, 2000 for a review).

#### *Developmental Trajectory From Infancy to Adulthood*

In the Enneagram literature a general view is that the fetus and young infant have very wide perceptual capability with few filters. Eventually the infants’ perceptual bias, which does provide some value, is progressively reinforced through life experience, particularly as the child becomes increasingly independent. Furthermore, although a strategy develops to adapt to the

initial perceptual bias, it appears that the pattern of processing is carried through life. By adulthood, this biased pattern of processing is usually well established, quite habitual or repetitive, and potentially limiting, compared to the very early perceptual potential individuals had at birth.

Interestingly, the Enneagram-based developmental path for an adult involves psychological growth to re-gain the wider perceptual filter that was available earlier in life. This wider more encompassing filter allows for more flexibility, openness to experience, adaptability, coherence, energy, and stability. This notion of growth and change in the Enneagram is also supported by research on contemporary personality instruments showing considerable intra-individual differences in personality traits over time. Although adult personality traits do show considerable stability throughout adulthood, as evident in significant within-person correlations across ages in longitudinal studies, temporal changes are also clearly evident since age-to-age correlations are far less than unity (Caspi, et al. 2005; McCrae & Costa, 1994). Thus, the notions of both long-term stability and potential for growth and change are well characterized in both the Enneagram and other personality systems.

### *Behavioral Genetics*

That early individual experiences are of critical importance in shaping the pattern of processing is highly consistent with behavioral genetic research on personality. Although significant genetic variance has been shown for most contemporary personality traits, both in children (Lemery, et al. 1999) and adults (Bergeman, et al. 1993), environmental influences are almost entirely of the non-shared variety (Loehlin, 1992; Plomin & Daniels, 1987). That is, personality development is widely viewed in behavioral genetic research to be largely a function of both genetic predispositions and the unique experiences of an individual, rather than shared family environmental effects (Baker & Daniels, 1990; Daniels, 1986).

## Discussion

### *Why study the Enneagram?*

One major goal of this paper is to encourage future scrutiny of the system (which is just as much, if not more a typology of nine mental and emotional constructs as much as it is of personality) by researchers and clinicians. We believe such interest is warranted for a number of important reasons.

(1) The Enneagram provides a lifespan model of temperament and personality. First and foremost it is our personal and professional clinical experience that convinces us that the Nine Patterns of Processing Model provides a powerful map for the ways in which motivation, need, emotion, attention and information processing, drive, temperament, and personality are strongly knitted together in a manner that provides a taxonomy of traits (types and individual differences) across the lifespan. We know of no other framework that tightly and accurately links early organizing patterns to underlying cognitive and emotional processing and to observable traits across the lifespan.

(2) The Enneagram offers insight into measurement of type and individual differences. The Enneagram reveals nine distinct patterns or clusters of processing, and also accounts for individual difference between individuals (i.e., possibly nine bell-shaped curves). While most measurement systems are based on individual differences for dimensions/traits or are typologies, the Enneagram system is both. An individual or individuals within a sample would be typed for one of nine processing patterns first. Then, for instance, individual differences in neuroticism (functioning within the type) and extraversion (instinctual drives or sub-types) would follow. Existing research on temperament and personality, have not found early developing personality (or temperament) characteristics to be strongly predictive of adult outcomes (Caspi, et al. 2005). This lack of long-term reliability of personality characteristics, and consistently low trait-behavior associations may be due, in part to a general focus on a set of quantitative dimensions,

each considered as separate albeit related aspects of personality. The Enneagram model suggests that to measure long term stability, type must be assessed first, followed by measurement of individual differences.

(3) The Enneagram offers understanding into the mechanisms of cognitive-emotional structures and information processing underlying personality. Unlike other systems of personality assessment which are based on behavior or other externally monitored traits, the Enneagram is based on the mechanisms underlying personality traits. Observable behaviors can appear identical across different types, but the motivation for them can be very different, depending on the underlying processing patterns. For example, several types can look achievement-oriented or agreeable from the outside, but attention, appraisal bias, and motivation adds a new level to existing techniques and schemes of personality assessment. Although speculative, it is interesting to note possible connections between these mechanisms and developmental neurobiology including: (1) three sets of emotional reactivity and needs corresponding to the basic aversive emotions of fear/terror, distress/panic, and anger/rage shared by all mammals (Killen, 2009, Panksepp, 1998), (2) internally and externally self-regulated pathways (Porges, 2001), (3) an interactive and recursive system involving mental attention and schemas, emotional reactivity, emotion regulation, and motivation, operating at different levels of awareness (Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, and Gross, 2007; Izard, 2009; Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, 2008) and (4) nine distinct but complete processing patterns from input/appraisal to organization/integration to output/behavior (Siegel, 2007).

(4) The Enneagram offers a demonstrative path of behavior change and psychological growth. The Enneagram's basis in core motivation points toward an understandable and reliable path for development and growth. Many people with extensive experience in psychotherapy report that the elucidation of the habitual motivation behind attention, thought processes, emotions, and behavior creates a new and remarkably clear map that improves both intrapersonal

awareness and interpersonal functioning. Constructive and destructive patterns of behavior reveal themselves more easily when one is cognizant of the biases inherent in one's pattern of processing. Therapists who use the system report that clients who become aware of their core motivation and habitual thinking and reactive emotional habits can make behavior change quite rapidly. In "Enneagram" therapy the most important step to building conscious awareness and non-judgmental acceptance and hence in managing personality is developing an internal "self-observer" in order to grasp where attention, energy, and consequently behavior go and the core motivation driving the behavior (Daniels & Price, 2009).

#### *Limitations in Current Knowledge of the Enneagram System*

There is as yet little published scientific information about this system of personality classification, leaving valid and important questions about the general validity and utility of the system. One question relates to the potential for selection bias – that current understanding of the system may be incomplete or skewed by the populations that have been attracted to it. Of course this concern can only be fully addressed by more systematic, population-based studies. It is worth noting the extensive organizational psychology work over the last ten years, involving tens of thousands of workers, managers, and executives who are more clearly representative of the general population. The value of the system in these settings, and the ability of individuals to identify independently their type, partially addresses selection bias concerns (Lapid, 2007, 2009).

A second limitation is that knowledge of the system is based largely on information derived from self-report narratives by relatively high-functioning and introspective adults who, for the most part, are highly motivated toward personal growth. The illumination of inner processes at the healthy end of the mental health spectrum is, we believe, actually one of its most important and valuable features. Furthermore, work with the Enneagram and DSM personality disorders shows a clear mapping of the nine types to the lower functioning end of the spectrum and well as developmental levels within type (Riso & Hudson, 1999). Ongoing

research in the field of emotion regulation and developmental mechanisms suggests that understanding normative/healthy processes can provide insights into development gone awry in mental illness (DeCarmen-Wiggins, 2008). It is certainly plausible that the Enneagram will offer information into both ends of the mental health spectrum.

A third concern stems from the challenge of discerning an individual's type, given that type is determined primarily by patterns that are usually beneath the surface of observable behaviors and require internal awareness of one's cognitive and emotional schemas. Currently available approaches for Enneagram type assessment include: (1) a structured interview by a trained examiner that elicits internal experiences of motivation, of attentional bias, emotional reactivity, and patterns of thought is considered to be the most effective method for measuring the types and (2) several published self-assessment instruments, many based on strong psychometric design (see Daniels & Price, 2009; Newgent, 2001; Wagner, 1999), but not yet externally validated. Efficient, reliable, and valid measurement of type is certainly a lynchpin to scientific investigation, but there is nothing inherently insurmountable. Valid instruments for many other inner states exist, and ongoing research into the measurement of mindfulness (describing one's inner cognitive and emotional schemas) is promising and at least one study reveals that self-report mindfulness instruments are psychometrically strong (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer & Toney, 2006).

### *A Call for Scientific Inquiry*

In this paper, we have attempted to present the Enneagram in a modern psychological vocabulary. The Enneagram system of nine personality types and corresponding processing patterns presented here is based on mental, emotional, and somatic attention as expressed in the specific interwoven flow of information and behavior for each type. This system has largely escaped attention by the mainstream of mental health professionals and researchers.

Consequently, the vast quantity of writing about it is based on shared and assimilated clinical

observation and narrative experience. It is essential to note, however, that there is striking agreement among a wide array of independent groups of Enneagram experts regarding its main features and their application in personal, psychological, organizational, and spiritual growth. There is also an extremely high degree of internal validity in that the vast majority of individuals who study and apply it to themselves come to identify very strongly with one of the nine personality patterns. Furthermore, people the world over regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic status, nationality, gender, and level of functioning reveal essentially identical reports of the nine patterns. It is our strong belief that the Enneagram should not be discounted because of when or how it was discovered and developed. If discovered today, a scientist might propose nine human evolutionary adaptations or hypothesize nine basic neural pathways.

Our hope is that this presentation to a mainstream scientific audience in Psychology will spark interest in study, research, and practice of this important and powerful system of human personality, behavior, and personal growth.

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**Table 1**  
**Self-Report Narratives of the Nine Types**

<p><b><u>Type 1</u></b>  I have high internal standards for correctness, and I expect myself to live up to those standards. It's easy for me to see what's wrong with things as they are, and to see how they could be improved. I may come across to some people as overly critical or demanding perfection, but it's hard for me to ignore or accept things that are not done the right way. I pride myself on the fact that if I'm responsible for doing something, you can be sure I'll do it right. I sometimes have feelings of resentment when people don't try to do things properly or when people act irresponsibly or unfairly, although I usually try not to show it to them openly. For me, it is usually work before pleasure, and I suppress my desires as necessary to get the work done.</p>
<p><b><u>Type 2</u></b>  I am sensitive to other people's feelings. I can see what they need, even when I don't know them. Sometimes it's frustrating to be so aware of people's needs, especially their pain or unhappiness, because I'm not able to do as much for them as I'd like to. It's easy for me to give of myself. I sometimes wish I were better at saying "no," because I end up putting more energy into caring for others than into taking care of myself. It hurts my feelings if people think I'm trying to manipulate or control them, when all I'm trying to do is understand and help them. I like to be seen as a warmhearted and good person, but when I'm not taken into account or appreciated I can become very emotional or even demanding. Good relationships mean a great deal to me and I'm willing to work hard to make them happen.</p>
<p><b><u>Type 3</u></b>  Being the best at what I do is a strong motivator for me, and I have received a lot of recognition over the years for my accomplishments. I get a lot done and am successful in almost everything I take on. I identify strongly with what I do, because to a large degree I think your value is based on what you accomplish and the recognition you get for it. I always have more to do than will fit into the time available, so I often set aside feelings and self-reflection in order to get things done. Because there's always something to do, I find it hard to just sit and do nothing. I get impatient with people who don't use my time well. Sometimes I would rather just take over a project someone is completing too slowly. I like to feel and appear "on top" of any situation. While I like to compete, I am also a good team player.</p>
<p><b><u>Type 4</u></b>  I am a sensitive person with intense feelings. I often feel misunderstood and lonely, because I feel different from everyone else. My behavior can appear like drama to others, and I have been criticized for being overly sensitive and over-amplifying my feelings. What is really going on inside is my longing for both emotional connection and a deeply felt experience of relationship. I have difficulty fully appreciating present relationships because of my tendency to want what I can't have and to disdain what I do have. The search for emotional connection has been with me all my life and the absence of emotional connection has led to melancholy and depression. I sometimes wonder why other people seem to have more than I do – better relationships and happier lives. I have a refined sense of aesthetics and I experience a rich world of emotions and meaning.</p>
<p><b><u>Type 5</u></b>  I would characterize myself as a quiet, analytical person who needs more time alone than most people do. I usually prefer to observe what is going on than to be involved in the middle of it. I don't like people to place too many demands on me or to expect me to know and report what I am feeling. I'm able to get in touch with my feelings better when alone than with others, and often enjoy experiences I've had more when reliving them than when actually going through them. I'm almost never bored when alone, because I have an active mental life. It is important for me to protect my time and energy, and hence, to live a simple, uncomplicated life and to be as self-sufficient as possible.</p>

**Type 6**

I have a vivid imagination, especially when it comes to what might be threatening to safety and security. I can usually spot what could be dangerous or harmful and may experience as much fear as if it were really happening or just question or challenge the situation and not experience fear. My imagination also leads to my ingenuity and a good, if somewhat offbeat, sense of humor. I would like for life to be more certain, but, in general, I seem to doubt or question the people and things around me. I can usually see the shortcomings in the view someone is putting forward. I suppose that, as a consequence, some people may consider me to be very astute. I tend to be suspicious of authority and am not particularly comfortable been seen as the authority. Because I can see what is wrong with the generally held view of things, I tend to identify with underdog causes. Once I have committed myself to a person or cause, I am very loyal to it.

**Type 7**

I am an optimistic person who enjoys coming up with new and interesting things to do. I have a very active mind that quickly moves back and forth between different ideas. I like to get a global picture of how all these ideas fit together, and I get excited when I can connect concepts that initially don't appear to be related. I like to work on things that interest me, and I have a lot of energy to devote to them. I have a hard time sticking with unrewarding and repetitive tasks. I like to be in on the beginning of a project, during the planning phase, when there may be many interesting options to consider. When I have exhausted my interest in something, it is difficult for me to stay with it, because I want to move on to the next thing that has captured my interest. If something gets me down, I prefer to shift my attention to more pleasant ideas. I believe people are entitled to an enjoyable life.

**Type 8**

I approach things in an all-or-none way, especially issues that matter to me. I place a lot of value on being strong, honest, and dependable. What you see is what you get. I don't trust others until they have proven themselves to be reliable. I like people to be direct with me, and I know when someone is being devious, lying, or trying to manipulate me. I have a hard time tolerating weakness in people, unless I understand the reason for their weakness or I see that they're trying to do something about it. I also have a hard time following orders or direction if I do not respect or agree with the person in authority. I am much better at taking charge myself. I find it difficult not to display my feelings when I am angry. I am always ready to stick up for friends or loved ones, especially if I think they are being treated unjustly. I may not win every battle with others, but they'll know I've been there.

**Type 9**

I seem to be able to see all points of view pretty easily. I may even appear indecisive at times because I can see advantages and disadvantages on all sides. The ability to see all sides makes me good at helping people resolve their differences. This same ability can sometimes lead me to be more aware of other people's positions, agendas, and personal priorities than of my own. It is not unusual for me to become distracted and then to get off task on the important things I'm trying to do. When that happens, my attention is often diverted to unimportant trivial tasks. I have a hard time knowing what is really important to me, and I avoid conflict by going along with what others want. People tend to consider me to be easygoing, pleasing and agreeable. It takes a lot to get me to the point of showing my anger directly at someone. I like life to be comfortable, harmonious, and accepting.

Note: Nine paragraphs excerpted from Daniels, DN &, Price, 2009

**Table 2**  
**Overview of the General Model of Processing Patterns**

**Early Organizing Pattern**

<b>Core Motivation</b>	One of three universal psychological need sets is perceived to be threatened leading to potential lack/deficiency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Security</u>, safety, certainty, opportunity, preparedness, and predictability</li> <li>• <u>Love</u>, connection, recognition, approval, bonding, and affection</li> <li>• <u>Worth</u>, belonging, congruence, comfort, harmony, and respect</li> </ul> All three sets of needs are essential, but one set becomes more salient, depending on genetic, other constitutional factors, early experiences and their interaction.
<b>Emotional Reactivity</b>	A particular pattern of emotional tone and reactivity involving either <u>fear</u> , <u>distress</u> , or <u>anger</u> .
<b>Primary Orientation Bias</b>	The ways in which the individual's perceptual filters narrow to focus upon the salient need set. Each of the three need sets is sought internally (dominance on self-regulation), externally (dominance on environmental regulation), or both, resulting in nine types.

**Adaptive Processing Strategy**

<b>Mental Information Processing</b>	Mental attention and the flow of cognitive information and energy get channeled into habitual, limited, and recurring patterns of thoughts and ideas, stories we tell ourselves to make sense of and cope with life, beliefs, mental preoccupations, and mental focus.
<b>Emotion Regulation and Processing</b>	Emotional attention or activation and the flow of emotional information and energy get channeled into habitual, limited, and recurring patterns of emotional expression, waxing and waning of feelings, and feeling preoccupations.
<b>Somatic Processing</b>	Body based attention and the flow of somatic information and energy get expressed through kinesthetic and physical sensations into habitual, limited, and recurring patterns of bodily expression.
<b>Instinctual Drives</b>	Mental, emotional, and somatic processing get filtered through three instinctual drives (self-preservation, one-to-one, or social) one of which is often more prominent. <b>Self-preservation:</b> concerned with physical well-being (health, nutrition, stress, warmth), financial security (costs, resources, investments, time management), and mental health (safety, self development, self-protection, individual well-being, self-assuredness, self-wholeness). [Would score higher on Introversion.] <b>One-to-one:</b> concerned with sexual and one-to-one relationships, closeness, intimacy, bonding and attachment, sexual intimacy, loyal partnerships, and ensuring a lasting significant relationship. [Would score moderately on Extraversion-Introversion.] <b>Social:</b> concerned with the structure of the group and how the members relate to each other within it, cooperation and communication within the group, hierarchy and status, social acceptance and recognition, fellowship, and procedures in a community. [Would score higher on Extraversion.]
<b>Defense Mechanism</b>	The function/reaction most used to protect one from thoughts and feelings that cannot be tolerated. It is the result of attention, appraisal, and drive, but also serves as a reinforcing feedback loop to the habits of mental and emotional processing.

**Expressed Personality**

<b>Manifest Traits</b>	Characteristics known to self and/or others.
<b>Potential Strengths</b>	Personality traits considered to be assets. Individuals within the type can be high or low on each trait.
<b>Potential Weaknesses</b>	Personality traits considered to be liabilities or vulnerabilities. Individual within type can be high or low on each trait.

**Table 3**  
**Fear/Anxiety Types**

	<b>TYPE 5</b>	<b>TYPE 6</b>	<b>TYPE 7</b>
<b>EARLY ORGANIZING PATTERN</b>			
<b>Core Motivation</b>	The need for security, certainty, safety, preparedness, and predictability		
<b>Emotional Reactivity</b>	Fear is most salient		
<b>Primary Orientation Bias</b>			
• Content	Preparing; “freeze” ( assures safety)	Anxiety; fearfulness (assures safety)	Self-assurance; “flee” (assures safety)
• Direction of attention	Outward to observing, understanding, preparing	Toward identifying external sources of fear or uncertainty and internal doubting	Inward to pleasantries, positives, and other non-fearful options
<b>ADAPTIVE PROCESSING STRATEGY</b>			
<b>Mental Information Processing</b> Thoughts are oriented toward...	Gaining self-sufficiency; concern with having enough time, energy, information; figuring things out before taking action	Imagining potential hazards, what might go wrong; questioning and seeking certainty, obeying or questioning authority	Planning; identifying and pursuing positive, pleasurable experiences; keeping options open; rationalizing away negatives
<b>Emotion Regulation and Processing</b> Fear is...	Contained and concealed	Experienced and expressed	Reframed into self-confidence
<b>Dominant Defense Mechanism</b>	Isolation	Projection	Rationalization
<b>EXPRESSED PERSONALITY</b>			
<b>Manifest Traits</b>	Analytical; observant; thirst for knowledge and understanding; self-sufficiency; parsimoniousness, withholding of self	Vigilance; doubting or questioning mind; “troubleshooting”; either facing (counter-phobic) or avoiding (phobic) possible threats, dangers; ambivalence with authority	Self-assurance; self-confidence; optimism; resourcefulness; full of ideas and possibilities; energetic; fun loving
<b>Potential Strengths</b> Can be...	Scholarly, intellectual, thoughtful, resourceful; calm in crisis; keeper of confidences; appreciative of simplicity, dependable	Insightful; thoughtful; questioning, skeptical; loyal and trustworthy (if that is earned); witty; excellent troubleshooter	Playful; inventive, imaginative; inspiring; optimistic; loving of life; seeing possibilities; helpful
<b>Potential Weaknesses</b> Can be...	Withholding, detached, overly private, have difficulty getting close to others, values knowledge over people	Overly doubtful, accusatory; distrustful of others, especially authority; procrastinating, sabotaging	Uncommitted or unreliable; opportunistic; narcissistic; pain- or conflict avoidant; monkey-minded

**Table 4**  
**Distress/Sadness Types**

	<b>TYPE 2</b>	<b>TYPE 3</b>	<b>TYPE 4</b>
<b>EARLY ORGANIZING PATTERN</b>			
<b>Core Motivation</b>	The need for love, connection, recognition, bonding		
<b>Emotional Reactivity</b>	Distress is most salient		
<b>Primary Orientation Bias</b>			
• Content	Offering care and attention to others (brings connection)	Accomplishment, achievement (brings connection)	Attracting sympathy or by “standing out” (brings connection)
• Direction of attention	Outward to important others	Toward a reflected image of success and inner identification	Inward to feelings of distress
<b>ADAPTIVE PROCESSING STRATEGY</b>			
<b>Mental Information Processing</b> Thoughts are oriented toward...	Serving, pleasing, and flattering others; anticipating and addressing others’ needs; finding ways to be useful or indispensable	Tasks, goals, achieving, doing, efficiency; avoiding failure and incompetence	Idealism; what is missing or lacking in what is present; how to be and feel unique; standing out from the crowd
<b>Emotion Regulation and Processing</b> Distress is...	Reframed into action to gain connection, recognition, bonding	Minimized or concealed – both inner experience and outward expression	Distress is freely experienced and expressed
<b>Dominant Defense Mechanism</b>	Repression	Identification	Introjection
<b>EXPRESSED PERSONALITY</b>			
<b>Manifest Traits</b>	Highly aware of and attentive to others’ needs; serving important others; self-sacrificing; seeks to be “power behind the throne”	Strong drive toward doing and achieving; vanity in appearance, qualities, talents, and achievements; eagerness to “get done” and “move on”	Sensitive; emotionally intense and expressive (both dark and bright sides); longing for better; striving for uniqueness; desire to be special; envious
<b>Potential Strengths</b> Can be...	Helpful; generous; sensitive to others’ feelings; appreciative; supportive; energetic; willful	Personable; enthusiastic; natural leaders; self-assured; practical; highly competent; efficient; inspiring; poised	Accepting of full range of feelings in self and others; artistically creative; romantic; appreciative of the unique and singular; passionate; idealistic
<b>Potential Weaknesses</b> Can be...	Overly prideful; intrusive, manipulative; demanding; histrionic; resentful; inattentive to self and own needs	Inattentive to feelings in self and others; impatient; overly aggressive or competitive; sometimes deceptive	Melodramatic; melancholic; moody; self-absorbed; envious; often disappointed; elitist

**Table 5**  
**Anger/Resentment Types**

	<b>TYPE 8</b>	<b>TYPE 9</b>	<b>TYPE 1</b>
<b>EARLY ORGANIZING PATTERN</b>			
<b>Core Motivation</b>	The need for self-worth, respect, comfort, harmony		
<b>Emotional Reactivity</b>	Anger is most salient		
<b>Primary Orientation Bias</b>			
• Content	Assuring power and control; conceal vulnerability (brings comfort)	Avoiding conflict and discomfort (brings comfort)	Judging good/bad; right/wrong (brings comfort)
• Direction	Outward to controlling the environment	Toward others and the environment	Inward to high internal standards
<b>ADAPTIVE PROCESSING STRATEGY</b>			
<b>Mental Information Processing</b> Thoughts are oriented toward...	Protection of self and vulnerable others; directly expressing own truth and pursuing own wants and needs; overcoming obstacles; ensuring just and fair power, control	Keeping peace and harmony; understanding others' wants/needs and perspectives; yielding, deferring to wants/needs of others; keeping life comfortable and familiar	Judging and criticizing self (especially) and others; inner demand for correctness and improving things; suppression of pleasurable but "bad" desires, feelings
<b>Emotion Regulation and Processing</b> Anger is...	Freely experienced and expressed	Reframed into deference, going along	Suppressed and/or concealed
<b>Dominant Defense Mechanism</b>	Denial	Narcotization	Reaction Formation
<b>EXPRESSED PERSONALITY</b>			
<b>Manifest Traits</b>	Big, "powerful", and often "colorful" persona; lust for life; determined; take-charge style; intense; straight-forward	Unassuming, deferential; pleasant and agreeable; adaptable; receptive; supportive of others; going along and getting along attitude	High standards of right vs. wrong; disciplined; responsible; idealistic; perfectionistic
<b>Potential Strengths</b> Can be...	Protective of others; just, truthful, and fair; generous, courageous; natural leaders	Empathic and caring; supportive; steadfast; understanding; seeing all points of view; mediating	Industrious; self-reliant; maintain high moral and ethical standards, highly disciplined responsible
<b>Potential Weaknesses</b> Can be...	Overly impactful; intimidating; impulsive; insensitive to others' feelings; insufficiently attentive to own vulnerability	Conflict avoidant; ambivalent; stubborn or passive-aggressive; lost in inessentials and details; difficulty with personal boundaries	Rigid; righteous; judgmental and critical; controlling; resentful, unforgiving; guilt provoking, demanding

**TABLE 6**  
**Relationship Between the Enneagram Personality Types and Temperament Styles**

<i>Type</i>	<i>Temperament Styles in Parenting Literature</i>	<i>Thomas and Chess Infant Temperament Scales</i>	<i>Hypothesized Adult Parallels in Enneagram</i>
1	Self-regulating	Rhythmicity/regularity: predictability of any function over time.	<b>Ones</b> attend to correcting error, making life regular and predictable.
2	Socially contactful	Approach/withdrawal: positive responses to new stimuli (for Thomas and Chess, withdrawal or negative responses represented the other end of the continuum).	<b>Twos</b> reach out to fulfill needs, responding by approaching others in positive ways.
3	Active	Activity level: the motor activity component in a child's behavior as in reach, crawling and walking.	<b>Threes</b> focus on task or goals with high activity and go-ahead energy.
4	Sensitivity to social environment	Labile quality of mood: the amount of emotional behavior whether positive or negative.	<b>Fours</b> long for heartfelt connection with intense feeling and fluctuating moods.
5	Held back socially	Low threshold of responsiveness: the intensity level of stimulation necessary to evoke a discernible response (in other words, the sensitivity level).	<b>Fives</b> , being highly sensitive to stimuli, detach to observe.
6	Fearful	Attention span/persistence: sticking with attending, even in the face of obstacles (roughly, vigilance).	<b>Sixes</b> are alert and vigilant to potential harm or danger, vigilance requiring persistence in attending over time.
7	Playful	Distractibility: responsiveness to extraneous environmental stimuli altering the direction of on-going behavior.	<b>Sevens</b> attend to multiple, positive options and possibilities showing adaptability or ease in shifting to desired directions.
8	Difficult, demanding	Intensity of response: the energy level of response irrespective of its quality or direction.	<b>Eights</b> attend to power and control and come from a high instinctual energy or intensity.
9	Compliant, easy	Adaptability: the ease with which responses are modified in desired directions.	<b>Nines'</b> attention is pulled by many environmental claims such as opinions of others, showing an ease of distractibility by environmental stimuli.

**TABLE 7**  
**Relationship Between the Enneagram Personality Types and The Big Five Personality Traits, and DSM-IV Personality Disorder Types**

<i>The Big Five</i>	<i>Hypothesized Relationship to Enneagram</i>
Extraversion	The dimension of Extraversion-Introversion cuts across all the nine types and is influenced by sub-type: Social subtypes would score higher on extraversion, Self-preservation subtypes would score higher on introversion. One-on-one subtypes would score moderately.
Neuroticism	(1) The dimension of Neuroticism cuts across all the types in that individuals who are higher functioning within their type would score lower on neuroticism. (2) Types <b>4, 6, and 8</b> would score higher on items of depression, anxiety, and anger respectively.
Agreeableness	Types <b>2, 7, and 9</b> would tend to score higher on agreeableness items, however, their motivations for helpfulness, empathy, and cooperation are very different – giving to be esteemed by others (Type 2), agreeing to keep things positive (Type 7), and giving to maintain social harmony (Type 9).
Conscientiousness	Types <b>1, 3, and 5</b> would tend to score higher on conscientiousness items, however their motivations for self-discipline, order, commitment, and accomplishment are very different – perfectionism (Type 1), esteem in the eyes of others (Type 3), and predictability (Type 5).
Openness	The dimension of Openness cuts across all the types in that individuals who are higher functioning within their type would score higher on openness – curiosity, awareness, openness to new ideas and perspectives.
<i>DSM-IV</i>	<i>Hypothesized Relationship to Enneagram</i>
Obsessive Compulsive	Type 1
Histrionic	Type 2
DSM-IV Workaholism not identified as Disorder	Type 3 (Only type not identified in DSM, Workaholism culturally not viewed as disorder.)
Depressive	Type 4
Schizoid	Type 5
Paranoid	Type 6
Narcissistic	Type 7
Sociopathic	Type 8
Passive Aggressive	Type 9
Borderline	Cuts across all nine types.

**Figure 1: Developmental Model of Nine**

