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REVIEW ARTICLE

The Enneagram: A systematic review of the literature and directions for future research

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Abstract

The Enneagram is a typology that many clients use to understand their personality and interpersonal patterns, despite some concerns about its validity. Thus, the purpose of this review is to provide a comprehensive and clinician-friendly review of the extant empirical work on the Enneagram. After reviewing 104 independent samples, we found mixed evidence of reliability and validity. In terms of strengths, some factor analytic work has shown partial alignment with prior theorizing, and subscales show theory-consistent relationships with other constructs such as the Big 5. Also, several studies found the Enneagram was helpful for personal/spiritual growth. However, factor analytic work has typically found fewer than nine factors, and no work has used clustering techniques to derive the nine types. Also, there is little research supporting secondary aspects of Enneagram theory, such as wings and intertype movement. We conclude by highlighting directions for future research and implications for clinical practice.

KEYWORDS

assessment, enneagram, personality, spirituality

1 | INTRODUCTION

The modern Enneagram is a personality typology model comprised of nine interconnected archetypes of human character structure. We can adduce indirect evidence for its growing popularity because of the many popular books published on the Enneagram. These books span a variety of publishers and have focused on a range of topics, including personal growth (Cron & Stabile, 2016; Heuertz, 2020; Riso & Hudson, 1999), spiritual development

(Heuertz, 2017; Rohr & Ebert, 2001), relationships (Stabile, 2018), and work (Chestnut, 2017; Goldberg, 1999; Lapid-Bogda, 2004, 2010).

The earliest theorizing on the Enneagram predates modern psychology, but a variety of helping professionals have revisited the Enneagram tradition and found resonance with psychotherapy theories, particularly with modern psychodynamic approaches. For example, clinical literature describes the use of the Enneagram to (a) promote the therapeutic alliance; (b) identify relational themes; (c) identify client strengths (Tapp & Engebretson, 2010); (d) improve communication among couples and families (Matise, 2018); (e) provide a map of the therapeutic process; (f) help normalize clients' emotional pain; and (g) encourage clients to take ownership over their healing process (Choucroun, 2012).

Despite the fact that many clinicians and clients are using the Enneagram, it is yet another example of a science–practice gap. Psychologists within the academy have given little attention to the Enneagram. Many psychologists view the Enneagram with suspicion, given that it predates modern psychology and has yet to accumulate a body of work within psychology that establishes its scientific credibility (see Sutton, 2012, for a discussion of these issues). In the present article, we seek to balance two important values. First, we strive to adhere to the rigorous standards of scientific evidence. We do not want to propagate invalid theories that might undermine the credibility of the profession or even cause harm (Lilienfeld, 2007; Sanderson, 2004). On the other hand, just because a theory did not emerge within Western psychology does not necessarily mean it cannot contribute to current psychotherapy theory and practice.

In order for Western psychotherapy to continue to evolve, it is essential that it remain in discourse with other helping traditions that predate modern psychotherapy. The balance of scientific values with openness to other cultural traditions will help the profession serve an increasingly diverse public. Thus, the purpose of the present paper is to review the extant empirical research on the Enneagram, summarize the state of the current literature, and provide a research agenda for future work in this area. To provide context for the research, we first provide a brief sketch of the origins of the Enneagram, an overview of the typology, and a brief review of the basic tenets of Enneagram theory. We attempt to couch these approaches in more widely understood psychological terms.

2 | ENNEAGRAM ORIGINS

The Enneagram has ancient roots. Some experts trace its origins to the Babylonian or Middle Eastern oral tradition (2500 BCE). The Sufis continued to elaborate on the oral tradition (Stalfa, 1994). In 1916, the Russian philosopher George Gurdjieff likely discovered the Enneagram during his travels to Afghanistan or Turkey (Petsche, 2016; Riso & Hudson, 1999). In the 1950s, Oscar Ichazo, founder of the Arica Wisdom School in Chile, began to integrate insights from the Enneagram into modern psychology. As part of a broader program on human transformation, he introduced various versions of what is now called the "Enneagram of personality," including theories of what healthy and dysfunctional mental and emotional processes look like for each type, and a theory of what the lines between the numbers indicate (Chestnut, 2013; Heuertz, 2017).

Contemporary interest in the Enneagram within psychology has occurred within the past 50 years. In 1969–1970, Ichazo taught his Enneagram system to Chilean psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo. Naranjo spent the next several years translating the Enneagram types into Western psychological language and integrating this teaching with modern psychological systems, including modern diagnostic criteria and psychodynamic theories of character structure (Maitri, 2000; Naranjo, 1994; Riso & Hudson, 1999). Naranjo then began teaching his version of the Enneagram of personality to small groups of students. This oral tradition of passing on the teachings of the Enneagram continued until several students of the Enneagram began to publish popular works in the 1980s (e.g., Beesing et al., 1984; Palmer, 1988; Riso, 1987). Others continued this study of integrating the ancient typology with modern psychological theory, including psychotherapist Beatrice Chestnut (Chestnut, 2013), psychiatrist David Daniels (Daniels & Dion, 2018; Daniels et al., 2018), Don Riso and Russ Hudson (Riso & Hudson, 1999) and psychologist Jerome Wagner (Wagner, 1981, 2008).

3 | OVERVIEW OF THE ENNEAGRAM TYPOLOGY

Each of the nine Enneagram types can be captured by imperative statements describing a core internal need and a core fear, which are influenced by dynamic aspects (discussed below) that add nuance to each person. In its most basic form, each type can be summarized by the terms "*strength*" and "*passion*." Rohr (1990) describes *strength* as the best and most true self—akin to one's authentic or self-actualized sense of self. Conversely, he describes *passion* as the "wrong way out;" that is, passions describe defense mechanisms built up to engage efficiently with the surrounding world while protecting oneself from emotional pain. In psychological terms, we might frame these two features as *healthy authenticity* and *unhealthy defensiveness*. The core of the Enneagram is not focused on behavior modification; rather, it emphasizes understanding and recognizing internal motivations, often operating on an unconscious level, as a means of growing in compassionate acceptance of the various parts of the self (Heuertz, 2020; Rohr, 1990). The types are organized numerically but not in terms of preference. The Enneagram does not have "better" or "worse" types—like other models of personality, it is descriptive rather than evaluative. The types are summarized in Table 1.

4 | ENNEAGRAM THEORY

There is no one unifying theory for the Enneagram; rather, a variety of individuals and groups have developed separate but related theories related to the Enneagram (e.g., Palmer, 1988; Riso & Hudson, 1999; Rohr & Ebert, 2001). In what follows, we briefly describe three key aspects of Enneagram theory: (a) personality development; (b) Enneagram structure; and (c) focus on personal/spiritual growth. Although there has been a proliferation of Enneagram teachings and writings over the years, we focus on the aspects of Enneagram theory around which there is consensus among authors, and also point out key areas of disagreement.

4.1 | Personality development

In the past few decades, Enneagram teachers have drawn on themes that parallel the psychodynamic tradition and attachment theory. Enneagram teachers emphasize the role of early relational experiences and how children learn ways to meet their needs and protect against emotional pain (Riso & Hudson, 1999). The primary strategy children use to do this is by developing a "False Self" that allows the "True Self" to adapt and cope (Chestnut, 2013). Both attachment theory and the Enneagram theorize that early childhood relational experiences provide an initial template for relational and coping patterns, providing a conceptual bridge between the theories. Work integrating the two theoretical systems has been further developed in recent years, suggesting that the nine Enneagram types can be grouped into particular insecure attachment tendencies (Arthur, 2008). In addition, the notion that individuals develop a *False Self*, or "conditioned personality structure" (Heuertz, 2020), draws directly on Winnicott's (1960) psychoanalytic concept of the False Self, which protects the *True Self* (or authentic identity) from parental impingement and neglect. As noted above, these various coping strategies can be grouped into nine basic personality types according to Enneagram theory (Chestnut, 2013).

Each type has a habitual "focus of attention," which describes its most dominant patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving, as well as a central motivating "passion"—the type's primary emotional–motivational issue (Chestnut, 2013; Naranjo, 1994). Passions are habitual patterns of coping with emotional suffering. They are emotionally motivated, typically unconscious, based on an internalized view of what one needs to survive and the best way to obtain it. The passions are rooted in implicit beliefs and views of the (false) self, which create a particular negative cycle or trap around which each type is organized. Although the Enneagram uses different language, the focus of attention is conceptually similar to maladaptive schemas in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

TABLE 1 Enneagram type descriptions

Enneagram type	Characteristics	Core desire	Core fear	Passion
Type 1: The Reformer	Principled, purposeful, self-controlled, perfectionistic	Need to be perfect	Being bad, imbalanced, defective, corrupt	Anger
Type 2: The Helper	Demonstrative, generous, people-pleasing, possessive	Need to be needed	Being unloved	Pride
Type 3: The Achiever	Adaptive, excelling, driven, image-conscious	Need to succeed	Being worthless, without inherent value	Deceit
Type 4: The Individualist	Excessive, dramatic, self-absorbed, temperamental	Need to be special	Having no identity or significance	Envy
Type 5: The Investigator	Perceptive, innovative, secretive, isolated	Need to understand	Being helpless, incompetent, and incapable	Avarice
Type 6: The Loyalist	Engaging, responsible, anxious, suspicious	Need to be sure	Being without support and guidance	Fear
Type 7: The Enthusiast	Spontaneous, versatile, distractible, scattered	Need to avoid pain	Being trapped in pain and deprivation	Gluttony
Type 8: The Challenger	Self-confident, decisive, willful, confrontational	Need to be against	Being harmed, controlled, and violated	Lust
Type 9: The Peacemaker	Receptive, reassuring, agreeable, complacent	Need to avoid	Being lost, separated, and fragmented	Sloth

(CBT) models (Beck, 2011). In addition, the passions, being rooted in implicit beliefs about the self, are similar to internal working models in attachment theory. For example, individuals with preoccupied attachment tendencies focus their attention on potential abandonment. In CBT terms, this is their maladaptive schema or automatic thoughts. Their "passion," to use Enneagram language, involves seeking emotional comfort, often in a demanding, clingy manner. In attachment terms, their attachment system easily becomes hyperactivated because they expect abandonment at an implicit level, and so they seek closeness to avoid this.

Each type has a particular way in which it pursues a core desire, so as to protect an individual from the expected pain of a core fear (even if it may not come to fruition), which simultaneously and necessarily hinders the person from obtaining the very thing being pursued. For example, it is theorized that those dominant in *Type Two* strive to feel loved by morphing their personality into what they perceive others need them to be. In the process, they end up disowning their own needs and lose contact with their True Self, thereby hindering their ability to be present and receive the love they seek. This negative cycle, which is a core tenet of Enneagram teaching, is conceptually quite similar to generally accepted theory within psychodynamic traditions, especially brief psychodynamic models such as Time-Limited Dynamic Therapy (Levenson, 2017). A clear understanding of Enneagram personality development, then, suggests that it is more of a psychodynamically informed theory of character structure and growth than a static personality trait theory or typology.

4.2 | Enneagram structure

The Enneagram types are best explained within the context of the larger shape, a nine-pointed figure inscribed in a circle (see Figure 1). The Enneagram types are organized numerically from type one to type nine. While the Enneagram shape can be confusing, it provides crucial insight for understanding the dynamic components of the Enneagram. In other words, the way the numbers are organized, as well as the connected lines between each number, are meaningful. For example, the organization of the numbers/types within the symbol reveals types that are meaningfully grouped into triads. In addition, the numbers adjacent to one's Enneagram type (i.e., wings) and subtypes can have an influence on one's personality. Finally, during times of stress and security, individuals can exhibit characteristics of other numbers connected to one's Enneagram type by the lines (i.e., intertype movement).

4.2.1 | Triads

The nine types can be divided into three attentional strategies for processing information: *The Heart*, which prioritizes emotional information, *The Head*, which prioritizes cognitive information processing, and *The Gut*, which prioritizes instinctive information processing (Palmer, 1988). (We should note that although the description we present here is the most common view of the triads, this is an area in which there is disagreement among

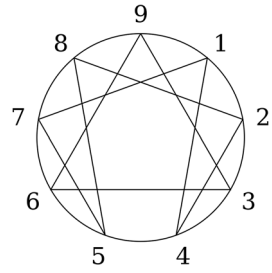

FIGURE 1 The Enneagram

Enneagram teachers, with some grouping the triads in different ways.) Three consecutive Enneagram types form a triad representing each of these attentional strategies. The Heart Triad is composed of Types Two, Three, and Four. These types are likely to process information from a primarily emotion-centered state of being and are often motivated by an internal evaluation of social relationships (Rohr, 1990). This triad is also associated with an active approach to life as a task to complete (Zuercher, 1992).

The Head Triad includes Types Five, Six, and Seven, and generally uses mentally focused processing as the primary means for understanding the world. The Head triad is often characterized by moving away from the environment to process before acting (Rohr, 1990). The Head triad is characterized by viewing life as a problem to be solved, with experience being the data with which to derive this solution (Zuercher, 1992).

The final triad, the Body Triad, is more likely to rely on body-based sensation as a means for knowledge, and includes Types Eight, Nine, and One. The Body triad is often associated with instinctive response (Rohr, 1990). This response often stems from the belief that life is a battle, and their weaknesses must be tested (Zuercher, 1992).

4.2.2 | Wings

The Enneagram types may share certain characteristics with the two neighboring types. For Type 6, for example, this can mean taking on characteristics of Type 5 and Type 7 (Riso & Hudson, 1999). These characteristics can be evenly pulled both wings or can be more accurately expressed by a dominant wing. In the language of the Enneagram, a Type 6 with a 7 wing would be denoted as "6w7."

4.2.3 | Subtypes

In the literature of the Enneagram, every individual can be divided based on three innate drives: one-to-one or sexual (i.e., relationship with a significant other), social (i.e., belonging to the group), and self-preservation (i.e., safety; Choucroun, 2012). While each of these strategies exists to a certain extent in all people, the Enneagram posits that everyone gravitates toward the survival drive that has been least fulfilled. Those with the one-to-one subtype gravitate toward intimate one-on-one relationships in their lives (Choucroun, 2012). People who express social subtype are likely more preoccupied with belonging to a social group. Finally, those within the self-preservation subtype tend to be focused on cultivating and maintaining physical comfort and security (Choucroun, 2012).

4.2.4 | Integration and disintegration: Intertype movement

Enneagram theory posits that although individuals do not change their primary Enneagram type, they can take on characteristics of another Enneagram type during times of stress (i.e., disintegration) or security (i.e., integration; Matise, 2018). This process is called intertype movement. Stress may lead to a habituated response to life based on behavior patterns that have worked in a variety of situations. The Enneagram provides a means for observing thought patterns that have become ingrained and unconscious. Moving toward security, then, is moving toward a new and conscious way of engaging with the world (Rohr, 1990). Integration occurs when individuals balance their dominant style with a style that provides an overall more equalized approach to the environment. Disintegration occurs when individuals focus narrowly on their passion, leading to a rigid way of thinking that may be rooted in childhood thought patterns (Matise, 2018).

This movement pattern is determined by the shape of the Enneagram. Integration and disintegration occur along the arrows inscribed within the figure, which connect each number to two other numbers. Individuals are thought to exhibit characteristics of one of the connected numbers during times of stress, and of the other connected number during times of security (Chestnut, 2013). The direction of intertype movement in stress is as

follows: 1-4-2-8-5-7-1 and 3-9-6-3. The direction of intertype movement in security is the opposite direction: 1-7-5-8-2-4-1 and 3-6-9-3. We should note that this is another area in which there is not a consensus among Enneagram teachers: some posit that disintegration involves engaging the maladaptive coping responses characteristic of a particular archetype, and integration involves embracing the healthy strengths of a different type. However, others believe that a person can exhibit both the healthy and unhealthy aspects of the connected type during intertype movement.

4.3 | Focus on personal/spiritual growth

The Enneagram is unique among models of personality in that it provides a clear connection between one's personality and personal/spiritual growth (Riso & Hudson, 1999). In other words, for most Enneagram teachers, the ultimate point is not that individuals merely discover their type (although that may be helpful in better understanding oneself and others). Rather, the main point of identifying one's type is to increase compassionate self-awareness (Heuertz, 2020), which facilitates the possibility of moving from rigidly repeating dysfunctional behaviors of one's dominant type to a more integrated and flexible way of functioning and relating to others. This more flexible way of functioning results from becoming increasingly free from the compulsive passions, which allows one to more fully inhabit the True Self, or authentic identity, which is also shaped by one's type. This increased compassionate self-awareness ultimately promotes acceptance, or belonging, of all parts of the self. As such, the general theory of personal growth ties in with contemporary psychological theory and research on self-compassion (Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2007) and mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003), as well as psychodynamic theories such as Time-Limited Dynamic Therapy (Levenson, 2017) and cognitive and behavioral approaches such as CBT (Beck, 2011) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 2011). In line with the Enneagram focus on personal and spiritual growth, many of these psychological theories involve understanding and accepting one's current way of thinking, feeling, and viewing the world, yet also remaining open to the possibility of engaging in a more flexible or workable manner.

5 | PURPOSE OF CURRENT REVIEW

As we briefly reviewed, there is a rather robust theory and cultural narrative surrounding the Enneagram. However, there have only been two prior published reviews of the literature on the Enneagram. Bland (2010) published a review of the empirical and transformative literature on the Enneagram. However, this review was relatively brief and limited in scope, and only a handful of studies were reviewed in detail. Around the same time, Sutton (2012) published a review of the literature on the Enneagram and discussed several areas of the research, including Enneagram questionnaires, the relationship between Enneagram questionnaires and self-identified type, research using people who knew their type, stress and security points, and applications of the Enneagram in work settings. Although this review of the literature was more detailed, it was not comprehensive in its scope.

Thus, the purpose of the current review was to organize and summarize the extant research on the Enneagram system of personality in a comprehensive way. We hope to take stock of what has been found so far and set a clear research agenda for future research on the Enneagram. In organizing our review of research, we set out to answer five main research questions. First, we wanted to review the methodology of the existing studies. This is especially important when evaluating the quality of research in a field. Second, we were curious about the measurement of the Enneagram: what is the evidence for the reliability and validity of Enneagram measures? Third, we assessed the extent to which the Enneagram types were correlated with other psychological measures of personality and development. Fourth, we explored the evidence for specific aspects of Enneagram theory, such as wings and intertype movements. Finally, we evaluated the evidence that the Enneagram could be helpful for personal/spiritual growth.

6 | METHOD

We reviewed studies on the Enneagram using two primary inclusion criteria. (Because of our desire to conduct a comprehensive review, we kept the inclusion criteria broad.) First, all studies were empirical and had to actually collect data on the Enneagram—theoretical papers and case studies were excluded from the present review. We included both quantitative and qualitative studies. Because part of the purpose of this article was to provide a roadmap for future research, we thought it was important to include qualitative as well as quantitative studies. Second, all studies needed to be written in English.

We used several strategies to conduct our literature search. First, we searched several databases, including PsycINFO, Proquest for dissertations and theses, and Google Scholar using "Enneagram" as the keyword. Second, we reviewed the reference sections of each of the studies to identify relevant studies. Third, we searched the online databases of all available articles for *The Enneagram Journal*. Fourth, we explored previous reviews of the literature (e.g., Bland, 2010; Sutton, 2012) to identify any relevant studies. Finally, when possible, we contacted the primary authors of the identified studies to inquire about possible unpublished studies we may have missed. Overall, we found a total of 104 independent studies that met inclusion criteria and examined the Enneagram. A detailed summary of studies in the present review can be found in the online supplemental material.

7 | RESULTS

We have organized our review of findings into several key areas, including (a) methodology of the studies; (b) measurement; (c) personality and development; (d) secondary aspects of Enneagram theory; and (e) personal/spiritual growth.

7.1 | Methodology

Of the 104 independent samples in the present review, about half (i.e., 49) were published. Regarding the unpublished studies, the majority ($n = 41$) were doctoral dissertations; the others were master's theses ($n = 6$), presentations ($n = 6$), and unpublished manuscripts ($n = 2$). Among the published studies, the degree of scrutiny and peer review was variable. On the positive side, the majority of the published studies were peer-reviewed ($n = 40$). However, 16 of the peer-reviewed studies appeared in open access journals, which often have less rigorous standards for peer review (Bohannon, 2013). Also, 11 of the peer-reviewed studies appeared in *The Enneagram Journal*, which is a specialty journal focused exclusively on Enneagram research. Relatively few of the studies ($n = 9$) appeared in mainstream journals in psychology or a related field. (The relative dearth of studies in mainstream, peer-reviewed psychology journals is a notable limitation and may explain why some clinicians may not have heard of or may hold unfavorable impressions of the Enneagram.) Regarding the methodology of the studies, most studies (i.e., 72) were quantitative; 19 were qualitative, and 13 used mixed-method designs. Most studies (i.e., 70) used cross-sectional designs; 26 used longitudinal designs, 2 used experimental designs, and 6 used quasi-experimental designs.

7.2 | Measurement

When studying a construct using empirical research, one of the first tasks is to decide how to measure it. This is an important first step—without reliable and valid measures, it is unwise to trust the findings of studies. Thus, measurement is foundational to scientific knowledge. Studies primarily used one of three strategies to measure the Enneagram: (a) self-report measures; (b) self-reported type; and (c) typing interview.

7.2.1 | Self-Report

First, several studies used self-report measures to assess participants' Enneagram type. Although there were several different self-report measures used across studies, three particular measures were most widely used and are reviewed below regarding their factor structure, reliability, and validity.

RHETI

The original Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (RHETI; Riso & Hudson, 1999) is an ipsative (i.e., forced-choice) personality test with 144 paired statements. Participants are given a total score for each subscale, and the highest score is considered their primary type. There has been almost no research on the factor structure of the original RHETI. Newgent (2001) conducted factor analyses on each subscale individually and found that each subscale showed a two-factor solution. Scott (2011) developed a non-ipsative (i.e., Likert-scale) version of the RHETI. After an iterative process of item refinement based on empirical considerations (e.g., removing items due to redundancy, cross-loadings), and examining various factor solutions, she initially determined that an eight-factor solution was the best solution. However, during the item refinement process, all type-nine items had been eliminated. When these were added back into the factor analysis at this stage, they all loaded onto one factor, and a nine-factor solution achieved near simple structure and corroborated the nine theoretically derived Enneagram types. This nine-factor structure was replicated on the second half of her data set.

Regarding the reliability of the original RHETI, results have been mixed. Although the αs for most subscales have been acceptable, some research has found low αs for some subscales (e.g., .35–.84 in Dameyer, 2001; .35–.78 in Giordano, 2008; .56–.82 in Newgent et al., 2004). Part of the difficulty with internal consistency may be related to the ipsative (i.e., forced-choice) nature of this version of the scale. Two studies that tested a non-ipsative version of the RHETI found adequate levels of internal consistency (above .70 for all subscales; Giordano, 2008; Scott, 2011). Two studies evaluated the test–retest reliability of the original RHETI and found test–retest correlations ranging from .72 to .94 across subscales (Dameyer, 2001; Warling, 1995).

There has been some evidence for the validity of the RHETI. For example, Siudzinski (1995) found that when given a detailed description of the Enneagram types, 87% of individuals' self-reported types were consistent with their Enneagram type as scored by the RHETI. Also, 42% of participants were classified into the same type by the RHETI and the Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales (WEPSS; Dameyer, 2001). Furthermore, 76% of expert predictions for correlations between the RHETI subscales and an adjective checklist measure were significant (Dameyer, 2001). Finally, several studies have found a theoretically predicted pattern of correlations between the RHETI and the Big 5 model of personality (e.g., Giordano, 2008; Newgent et al., 2000, 2004). There is also some evidence that individuals may have difficulty identifying a single type on the RHETI that best describes their personality. For example, Giordano (2008) found that only 48% of participants were differentiated on the RHETI, defined as having their highest score at least three points higher than their second-highest score.

WEPSS

The second most widely used measure is the Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales (WEPSS; Wagner, 1999). An early version of the WEPSS had 135 items, but the current version has 200 items that comprise nine scales of 22 items each (2 items are unscored). Items reflect personal characteristics and are rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = *almost never fits me* to 5 = *almost always fits me*. Research on the factor structure of the WEPSS has been inconsistent. Although some research has found that nine factors best represented the data, the factor structure did not show a simple structure, with items from some subscales loading on multiple factors (Wagner, 1999). Other research has found that fewer factors best described the data (e.g., five factors in Sharp, 1994). Wagner (1999) also reported a factor analysis of total scale scores that found that the subscales loaded on four higher-order factors that aligned with personality factors from the Big 5.

Regarding reliability, the early version of the WEPSS reported low internal consistencies for some subscales (e.g., .37–.82 in Wagner, 1981), although studies using the later version of the WEPSS have reported adequate internal consistencies (e.g., .78–.88 in Wagner, 1999; .85–.93 in Thrasher, 1994). Test–retest reliabilities have been adequate across subscales (6 weeks: .62–.91, 8 months: .55–.86; Wagner, 1999).

There has been some initial evidence pertaining to the validity of the WEPSS. For example, there were strong levels of agreement between scores on the WEPSS and self-reported type (e.g., mean $\kappa = .63$ [substantial agreement] in Thrasher, 1994; κs ranged from .74 to .88 [substantial agreement] in Wagner, 1999). As mentioned earlier, 42% of participants were classified into the same type by the WEPSS and RHETI (Dameyer, 2001). Correlations between the WEPSS and a measure of attentional styles based on Enneagram type ranged from .41 to .74 across subscales (Brent, 1994). Significant correlations have been found between the WEPSS and other models of personality, including the Big 5 (Stevens, 2011), Myers-Briggs (e.g., Havens, 1995; O'Leary, 1994; Thrasher, 1994; Wagner, 1994; Wagner & Walker, 1983), and Millon (Wagner, 2012).

EET

Although it was not as widely used as the other two self-report measures, several studies used the Essential Enneagram Test (EET; Daniels & Price, 2000). When taking this measure, participants read nine paragraphs—each paragraph describes one of the types of the Enneagram—and participants are asked to choose the type that best represents their personality. Because this is not a traditional self-report measure, there is no evidence for the factor structure or internal consistency of the scale. Regarding reliability, the average test–retest κ (4 weeks) across subscales was .59 (moderate agreement; Daniels & Price, 2000). Regarding validity, participants' choice of the paragraph was a good predictor of their eventual Enneagram type (through interview or course), with an average κ across subscales of .53 (moderate agreement; Daniels & Price, 2000).

7.2.2 | Self-reported type

For the self-reported type method, studies recruited participants who were familiar with the Enneagram and knew their type (either through attending a workshop or through their own reading/study). Then, researchers tested for group differences on some other variable based on self-reported Enneagram type. For example, Bartram and Brown (2005) recruited 241 adults who knew their Enneagram type, and assessed for significant relationships between each Enneagram type and the Big 5 model of personality. There was some evidence for the validity of the self-reported typing method. For example, there was significant agreement between self-reported type and the WEPSS ($\kappa = .63$ [substantial agreement] in Thrasher, 1994; κs ranged from .28 to .40 [fair agreement] in Wagner, 1981). Also, there were significant correlations between self-reported type and the Big 5 (Bartram & Brown, 2005; Sutton, 2007).

7.2.3 | Typing interview

For the typing interview method, researchers led participants through a typing interview to determine their Enneagram type. For example, Schneider and Schaeffer (1997) recruited 33 recovering sex addicts and interviewed each participant to determine their Enneagram type. In terms of evidence of reliability, this approach has not achieved industry standards. For example, a study specifically focused on interrater reliability of typing judges was low ($\kappa = .20$; slight agreement), although the agreement between experienced judges ($\kappa = .25$; fair agreement) was higher than the agreement between less experienced judges ($\kappa = .17$; slight agreement; Gamard, 1986). The test–retest κ (2.5 years) was .48 (moderate agreement; Gamard, 1986). In terms of construct validity evidence, there were significant correlations between one's Enneagram type through interview and a self-report measure (Daniels & Price, 2000; Randall, 1979).

7.2.4 | Summary of Enneagram measurement

In summary, researchers have assessed Enneagram type using three primary methods: (1) self-report measures, (2) self-reported type, and (3) typing interview. The majority of the research used self-report instruments. The two most widely used measures were the RHETI and the WEPSS. For both instruments, evidence for a nine-factor structure has been mixed. For the RHETI, evidence for reliability and validity has been mixed—although the non-ipsative version of the scale has shown stronger psychometric properties than the ipsative version. The evidence for the reliability and validity for the current version of the WEPSS has been more consistent. Although fewer studies used the self-reported type, these studies also found evidence for validity. Only a few studies examined the use of typing interviews; for the most part, the reliability and validity evidence for these assessments have been weak.

7.3 | Personality and development

Several studies have explored the relationships between the Enneagram and other models of personality and development, including the Big 5 (e.g., Bartram & Brown, 2005), Myers-Briggs (e.g., Wagner & Walker, 1983), Millon (Wagner, 2012), Cattell (Warling, 1995), MMPI (e.g., Palmer, 1988), DSM-IV personality disorders (Yilmaz, Gencer, et al., 2016), and attachment theory (Arthur, 2008). Most of the research related to personality has been conducted on the Big 5 and Myers-Briggs, and we review those studies in more detail (see online supplemental material for more information on the relationship between the Enneagram and other models of personality). Given the importance of attachment theory as a central contemporary psychological theory with which to link the Enneagram, we also review a recent study examining the Enneagram and attachment styles.

Nine studies (i.e., Bartram & Brown, 2005; Delobbe et al., n.d.; Giordano, 2008; Newgent et al., 2000, 2004; Stevens, 2011; Sutton, 2007; Yilmaz, Unal, et al., 2016; Yilmaz et al., 2015) explored the relationships between the Enneagram and the Big 5, and several consistent patterns emerged (i.e., occurred in over 50% of studies) that are consistent with Enneagram theory. Type 1 was positively related to conscientiousness in 9/9 studies. Type 2 was positively related to agreeableness in 7/9 studies and positively related to extraversion in 9/9 studies. Type 3 was negatively related to agreeableness in 5/9 studies, positively related to conscientiousness in 5/9 studies, and positively related to extraversion in 6/9 studies. Type 4 was negatively related to conscientiousness in 6/9 studies, positively related to neuroticism in 8/9 studies, and positively related to openness in 6/9 studies. Type 5 was negatively related to extraversion in 9/9 studies. Type 6 was negatively related to extraversion in 6/9 studies, positively related to neuroticism in 8/9 studies, and negatively related to openness in 5/9 studies. Type 7 was negatively related to conscientiousness in 6/9 studies, positively related to extraversion in 9/9 studies, and positively related to openness in 9/9 studies. Type 8 was negatively related to agreeableness in 9/9 studies, positively related to extraversion in 8/9 studies, and negatively related to neuroticism in 6/9 studies. Type 9 was positively related to agreeableness in 9/9 studies.

In general, these results are consistent with theoretical expectations, and we find a degree of overlap (i.e., each Big 5 factor correlates with between three and six Enneagram types) that is consistent with the conceptual frameworks. For example, Type One, which focuses on doing good, was positively associated with conscientiousness in all nine studies. In addition, Type Two, with its focus on meeting others' needs and being sociable, was positively related to agreeableness and extraversion in most of the studies. Thus, the overall pattern of these results provides some tentative support of the theoretical framework of the Enneagram.

Seven studies explored the relationships between the Enneagram and the Myers-Briggs (i.e., Delobbe et al., n.d.; Flautt, 1998; O'Leary, 1994; Palmer, 1988; Thrasher, 1994; Wagner, 1994; Wagner & Walker, 1983) and several consistent patterns emerged (i.e., occurred in over 50% of studies). Type 1 was related to introversion in 4/7 studies and judgment in 5/7 studies. Type 2 was related to feeling in 5/7 studies. Type 3 was related to

extraversion in 5/7 studies. Type 4 was related to intuition in 5/7 studies, feeling in 6/7 studies, and perception in 4/7 studies. Type 5 was related to introversion in 6/7 studies and thinking in 7/7 studies. Type 6 was related to introversion in 4/7 studies. Type 7 was related to extraversion in 6/7 studies, intuition in 5/7 studies, and perception in 4/7 studies. Type 8 was related to extraversion in 5/7 studies and thinking in 4/7 studies. No consistent findings emerged for Enneagram Type 9.

This pattern of results is also consistent with theoretical expectations. For example, Type One, which is focused on clear expectations for right and wrong, was positively related to judgment. Type Five, which focuses on observing and investigating in a somewhat detached manner, was positively related to introversion and thinking. These overall results again provide some general support for the Enneagram framework.

With regard to developmental theories, a recent study explored associations between the Enneagram and attachment styles. Arthur (2008) proposed an integrated typology, in which the nine Enneagram types can be viewed as subtypes of the four attachment styles. The study drew heavily on the attentional focus of each Enneagram type to hypothesize the attachment style/tendency of which it is a subtype. All of the types are matched with one attachment style except for Type 9, which was conceptually split into its two wings, with a separate attachment style for the Type 9w1 and Type 9w8.

The results indicated that the different attentional foci in each Enneagram type significantly predicted the hypothesized attachment style of which it is viewed as a subtype. Attachment relationships play a significant role in all aspects of life and can be the source of the greatest joy and the greatest sorrow. This relationship between the Enneagram and attachment theory provides more nuance for a theory that plays a pivotal role in psychology today (Arthur & Allen, 2010).

7.4 | Secondary aspects of Enneagram theory

There have been a few studies that have tested hypotheses about secondary aspects of Enneagram theory. For example, Edwards (1991) tested the concept of wings by giving participants descriptions of each Enneagram type and asking them to place the descriptions next to one another based on how similar they perceived the descriptions to be. The hypothesis was that adjacent numbers would be placed next to one another more often than chance. Contrary to the hypothesis, adjacent numbers on the Enneagram were placed next to each other no greater than chance.

Two studies tested the theory of intertype movement (Thrasher, 1994; Twomey, 1995). Both studies used similar methods. Participants were given a measure of anxiety in addition to an Enneagram measure. The hypothesis was that participants high in anxiety would have high scores on the Enneagram type that their primary type moves to in times of stress. The results from both studies did not support this hypothesis.

7.5 | Personal/spiritual growth

Several studies evaluated whether the Enneagram could be helpful for improving mental health and personal/spiritual growth. Qualitative studies revealed several benefits of Enneagram work, including personal centeredness and authentic living (Clayton, 2014), self-knowledge (Cluley, 2005), self-awareness, (Perryman et al., 2018; Sutcliffe, 2002), and spiritual growth (Doss, 1995; Sutcliffe, 2002; Wiltse, 2000). The results from quantitative studies have been mixed. Some studies reported positive effects on variables such as self-consciousness, communication competence, interpersonal relationships (Lee, 2015), anxiety, and self-esteem (Rasta et al., 2012), but other studies reported no significant effects of Enneagram interventions on variables such as ego development (Daniels et al., 2018), psychological well-being, and unconditional self-acceptance (Godin, 2010).

A few studies also explored the effectiveness of Enneagram interventions in the workplace. Overall, the results from these intervention studies were mixed. Enneagram interventions resulted in positive changes in some

variables, such as leadership versatility (Ho, 2018), self-consciousness (Lapid-Bogda, 2006), communication (Lapid-Bogda, 2006), interpersonal relationships (Kuit, 2018; Lapid-Bogda, 2006), team effectiveness (Ormond, 2007), productivity (Weeks & Burke, 2009), and staff turnover (Weeks & Burke, 2009). However, there were no significant changes on other variables, such as insight (Ho, 2018), self-awareness (Sutton, 2007), team development, (Ormond, 2007), emotional intelligence (Ormond, 2007), perceived stress (Ormond, 2007), and positive states of mind (Ormond, 2007). There were mixed findings on other variables such as self-reflection (Ho, 2018; Richmer, 2011; Sutton et al., 2015)—some studies reported significant effects and others did not.

8 | DISCUSSION

The research literature and validation of the Enneagram is in an early stage. We identified a growing body of empirical work; however, only about half of the studies were published. Although most of the published studies (over 80%) were peer-reviewed, the quality of the peer review was variable, with about 40% of peer-reviewed studies in open access journals, 27% in specialty journals, and 22% in mainstream journals in psychology or related fields. Given the variable quality of outlets, it might be easy for readers to miss some of the promising findings that are beginning to accumulate. Furthermore, for clinicians who may encounter the Enneagram in their work, we also want to highlight some areas of caution. Toward that end, we organize our reflections on the results into four areas: (a) factor structure of Enneagram measures; (b) reliability and validity; (c) secondary aspects of Enneagram theory; and (d) utility of the Enneagram as a growth/therapeutic tool.

8.1 | Factor structure of Enneagram measures

Studies often used exploratory factor analysis as a way of obtaining subscales that might align with the nine Enneagram types. Some researchers had more success in finding a nine-factor structure (Scott, 2011; Wagner, 1999) than others (e.g., Becker, 1992; Sharp, 1994). In evaluating factor analytic results, it is important to note that it is a data reduction technique designed to identify the fewest factors that explain the most variance, that is, the most parsimonious solution. Thus, as a method, exploratory factor analysis may not be well-suited as a way of attempting to explore the accuracy of Enneagram theory. Because the approach prioritizes data reduction and parsimony, it may be quite rare to consistently find nine separate subscales. Future research could explore different statistical techniques to operationalize the nine types, such as clustering techniques (e.g., latent profile analysis).

8.2 | Reliability and validity

It is critical to examine whether the measures of the Enneagram are actually valid measures that can produce consistent, reliable scores. Overall, the two most widely used measures of the Enneagram (i.e., RHETI and WEPSS) have demonstrated mixed evidence for reliability and validity. There was adequate to good internal consistencies and adequate test–retest reliabilities for both scales. In addition, both measures have also demonstrated some evidence of validity, including theoretical predictions of attentional styles and theoretically consistent patterns of correlations with the Big 5 and the Myers-Briggs.

The Enneagram, being a categorical model, offers a somewhat different picture of personality than the Big 5, which is a dimensional model. Whereas the Big 5 attempts to describe individuals according to their scores on a variety of traits such as extraversion and neuroticism, the Enneagram attempts to differentiate individuals by type, with each type having a variety of characteristics. There is some connection between these models (e.g., individuals

who identify as Type 2 tend to be high in agreeableness and conscientiousness), but the models ultimately describe personality in different ways. Another key difference is that the Enneagram is perhaps more useful for personal/spiritual growth because it enables people to explore their core tendencies (which are described by their type), "catch themselves" when they are behaving rigidly according to their type, and choose to engage the world in a more adaptive and flexible manner.

In addition to associations with the Big 5, one study found theoretically predicted associations with attachment styles (Arthur, 2008). This suggests the possibility of linking the Enneagram typology to attachment theory, with Enneagram types being conceptualized as subtypes of the various attachment styles. This may be a fruitful direction for research because of the conceptual overlap between the two theories. This would enable scholars to connect conceptual elements of attachment styles to Enneagram types, thus linking them to a robust contemporary theory, and it provides a framework to flesh out the broad attachment styles, making them more clinically useful. For example, in this integrated framework, Types 2 and 4 are conceptualized as subtypes of the Preoccupied attachment tendency. This makes theoretical sense and provides useful detail to attachment theory. Types 2 and 4 both show tendencies of hyperactivating their attachment system when distressed, but they manifest this in different ways and exhibit somewhat different strategies for regulating their affect.

One important limitation of Enneagram measures is that there is little reported evidence that scores on these measures show a high degree of differentiation between types. For example, Giordano (2008) found that less than half of participants were differentiated on the RHETI, defined as having their highest score at least three points higher than their second-highest score. In most studies, participants are assigned a type based on their highest subscale score. This raises the question as to what it means when participants score highly on more than one type. Further research is needed to address this.

Finally, it is interesting to note that there has not been much research or discussion about how cultural factors impact a person's Enneagram type or score on Enneagram measures. Although there have been several studies that have explored the Enneagram with samples from non-Western countries, there has been little theory or research exploring cross-cultural differences on the Enneagram. There has also been little research exploring cultural differences or measurement invariance in the most widely used Enneagram measures. (In the majority of studies using non-Western samples, the authors have created their own Enneagram measure.) This is an exciting area for future research. It will be important to assess whether the Enneagram types are consistent across cultures, and the degree to which cultural upbringing might impact the development of one's Enneagram type.

8.3 | Secondary aspects of Enneagram theory

Generally, empirical tests of secondary aspects of Enneagram theory (e.g., wings, intertype movement) have not been supported by the research evidence. However, the work is sparse (i.e., one study on wings, two studies on intertype movement), and has a number of design flaws, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions. For example, the study on wings (i.e., Edwards, 1991) hypothesized that adjacent numbers would be viewed as more similar to one another by judges, but it is debatable whether this is an adequate test of the wing hypothesis. A more reasonable test of this hypothesis would be to explore whether participants are more likely to score more highly than other numbers on one of the numbers adjacent to their primary type. Neither of the two studies that explored intertype movement found support for their hypotheses (e.g., Thrasher, 1994; Twomey, 1995); however, both studies were cross-sectional and explored whether a measure of state anxiety would be related to higher scores on the stress type. The cross-sectional nature of these studies may make it challenging to accurately test this hypothesis. A more stringent test of this hypothesis would be to identify individual's primary type first, and then expose them to a stressful experience, and see if their scores change in light of the new situation. Overall, more research is needed to corroborate these aspects of the theory, though as the research currently stands, there is not support for these secondary aspects.

8.4 | Utility of the Enneagram as a growth/therapeutic tool

We noted previously that the Enneagram is best viewed as a theory of character structure, and it has inherent connections with psychodynamic theory and attachment theory. Moreover, the overall purpose of the Enneagram is not just the identification of one's type but compassionate self-awareness that promotes growth. Research provides initial evidence that the Enneagram can be a helpful tool for promoting personal and spiritual growth. For example, results have demonstrated positive changes in work variables (e.g., leadership versatility; Ho, 2018) and personal growth variables (e.g., self-knowledge, spiritual growth, and interpersonal relationships; Cluley, 2005; Lee, 2015; Sutcliffe, 2002). Although this study is still limited, it does suggest that the Enneagram has the potential to increase workplace effectiveness and promote personal growth. Given this purpose and the conceptual overlap with psychodynamic theories, we believe a fruitful direction for research is to develop the Enneagram as a therapeutic tool. We will focus on psychodynamic modalities, but also highlight related modalities that could benefit by incorporating the Enneagram.

Recent writings have framed the types in alignment with modern psychodynamic approaches that help people identify ineffective patterns and facilitate corrective emotional experiences to learn new ways of relating to others. The general theory has substantial parallels with contemporary psychodynamic therapy models, especially brief models such as Time-Limited Dynamic Psychotherapy (TLDP), for which there is research supporting its effectiveness (e.g., increase in attachment security, Travis et al., 2001) and for the maintenance of therapeutic gains (Junkert-Tress et al., 2001). TLDP emphasizes that everyone has a "cyclical maladaptive pattern (CMP)," or one primary problematic relationship pattern. The CMP describes patterns of feelings toward the self, expectations, and perceptions of others, and ways of relating that are dynamically interconnected and perpetuate dysfunctional relationships (Levenson, 2017). This conceptualization of personality functioning has parallels to Enneagram theory in general, and the dynamic role of the passions in particular. One way of viewing Enneagram types is that they articulate nine broad versions of a CMP. We suggest that the Enneagram types could be expressed using the components of the CMP, and its effectiveness within the TLDP approach could then be examined in a psychotherapy outcome research program.

The types provide a clear way for understanding the dynamic patterns in one's sense of self and ways of relating to others. Especially in short-term models when therapists have 10 sessions or less, it could be very helpful for both client and therapist to be able to start with a map of the client's character structure. Therapist–client collaboration in identifying the CMP and then processing it, in the context of the therapeutic relationship, is central to TLDP (Levenson, 2017). However, one of the challenges, especially for beginning therapists, is to quickly identify a CMP that resonates with the client and helps them to feel understood. Starting with the client's Enneagram type could expedite the therapeutic process. Once identified, the CMP thoroughly informs the two key goals of TLDP: creating a new relational experience and a new understanding. Knowing a client's Enneagram type could help therapists formulate a more precise articulation of the new experience and understanding needed by the client.

In addition to psychodynamic models such as TLDP, the Enneagram could also be helpful in cognitive and behavioral approaches. For example, in CBT (Beck, 2011), individuals are encouraged to explore their perspectives and schemas, including cognitive distortions, that may be connected to unhelpful feelings and behaviors. Research has found connections between Enneagram types and cognitive schemas (Wagner, 2008), so understanding one's Enneagram type could help a client understand their cognitive tendencies and possible distortions. In ACT (Hayes et al., 2011), one key goal is to reduce rigid responding and improve psychological flexibility. Identifying one's Enneagram type could enable a client to increase awareness of situations in which the client is engaging relationships and the world in a rigid manner, according to the tendencies of one's type. Learning one's Enneagram type could be a starting place to begin to work on decreasing rigid responding and increasing psychological flexibility.

As noted previously, there has been quite a bit of research (mostly qualitative) that has found the Enneagram to be helpful for personal/spiritual growth. However, more research is needed to systematically explore the potential of the Enneagram to contribute to various therapeutic modalities such as TLDP, and the mechanisms for how this actually occurs.

9 | CONCLUSIONS

Given the growing popularity of the Enneagram within some client populations, we sought to provide a comprehensive and clinician-friendly review. In our review, we tried to balance scientific values with an openness to learn from helping traditions outside of modern psychotherapy. On the research front, scholarship on the Enneagram is still mostly relegated to unpublished dissertations or journals not indexed in PsycINFO, which may explain its relatively poor reputation among some psychologists. Existing evidence for the reliability and construct validity of the Enneagram types is mixed, and future research is needed to improve the alignment of Enneagram theorizing with the measures being used to operationalize the Enneagram.

Given that research is still in a preliminary stage, we suggest that clinicians proceed with caution. Enneagram theory remains largely untested, and the returns on what little empirical work has been conducted in those areas have been mixed. However, we also believe there are promising opportunities in which theorizing on the Enneagram could potentially inform contemporary psychotherapies. Some of the areas that seem most promising include therapies that focus on attachment theory and brief psychodynamic models such as TLDP. We hope this study will stimulate psychologists to engage in further work to refine and validate the Enneagram typology to improve its effectiveness as a tool for compassionate self-acceptance and growth.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the supporting information tab for this article.

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