The Beatles' Public Personas as Representatives of Age-Old (and brand New) Four-Part Typologies of Personality

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Abstract: *This case study aligns the public personas of the four Beatles with categories in several four-part typologies representing (a) the four humors, (b) the four directions of the medicine wheel, (c) four personality types described by Eysenck, and (d) four types involving the Big Five personality factors. Figures and a table highlight the "type" of each Beatle's persona: Lennon's persona is Choleric, McCartney's is Sanguine, Starr's is Phlegmatic, and Harrison's is Melancholic.*

Keywords: *typology, personality, Beatles.*

Many approaches to psychological and health variables employ a space with two axes that divide a flat plane into four categories. In the example in Figure 1, the space (circle) is divided by a North-South or vertical axis and a West-East or Horizontal axis. Four "types" or distinct regions are demarcated by the intersecting lines. In shape, each of these types resembles a slice of pizza or pie. Systems employing four-part typologies can be traced to the work of Hippocrates (c. 400 BCE) and Galen (c. 170 BCE; for the humors; Eysenck, 1964). They appear in representations of medicine wheels[1] (Schroeter, Kakekagumick, Cromarty, Linkewich, O'Driscoll, & Kelly, 2017), in Eysenck's original theory of personality (the one based on two dimensions; Eysenck, 1964) and in classifications of personality types derived from the Big Five personality traits (Gerlach, Farb, Revelle, and Amaral, 2018). In this article, I attempt to align the four Beatle musicians (Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and John Lennon; Sheffield, 2018) with four types defined in terms of personality, the humors, and the medicine wheel. By doing this, I am suggesting that their audience interprets the public personas of these famous musicians as prototypical exemplars of the slices of a four-part typology.
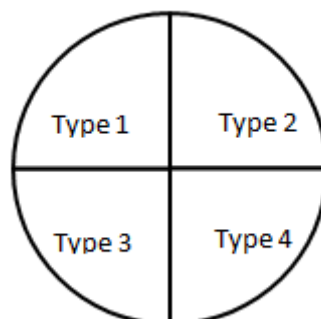

Figure1. *A circular space divided into four sections (types) by two axes.*

In Figure 2, the Beatles are aligned with each of the theories mentioned in the opening paragraph. Each type or slice of the pie lists, in order, the name of the representative Beatle, the appropriate humor, following Eysenck's model, the relevant type based on research by Gerlach, Farb, Revelle,

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[1]https://www.aaanativearts.com/anishnaabek-ojibwe-interpretation-of-the-medicine-wheel

and Amaral (2018), and the applicable compass direction in the Ojibwe Anishinaabek medicine wheel (footnote 1). A fuller description of the implications of these four types is offered in Table 1. All I have done in this table is use words already employed in each approach and aligned them with those from other approaches and with the "suitable" Beatle.
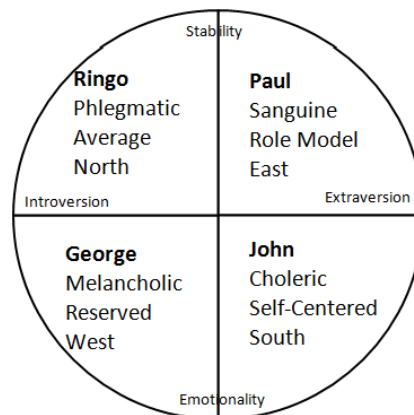

Figure2. *The Beatles in a four-part typology based on theories of the humors and personality and on the Ojibwe medicine wheel: axes of Stability-Emotionality and Introversion-Extroversiondiscriminate the four types.*

The first section of Table 1 uses categories and traits established by Eysenck, who drew the four humors into his personality model. The two scales of Introversion-Extroversion and Stability-Emotionality are the ones dividing the space into the four types. The personality traits were selected as examples from among those mentioned by Eysenck (1964). The second section takes information from the Ojibwe Anishinaabek medicine wheel (Schroeter et al., 2017): this information refers to the compass direction, color, age, and season appropriate to each of the four types. The final section of Table 1 first classifies each Beatle in terms of a type (Average, Role Model, Reserved, and Self-Centered) and then notes the most extreme Big Five personality traits associated with the type (taken from Figure 2 in the article by Gerlach et al., 2018).

Table1. *Characteristics associated with each Beatle persona in a four-part typology.*

Characteristic	Ringo	Paul	George	John
Eysenck's Work& the Humors				
Personality	Reliable	Easygoing	Quiet	Restless
Traits	Peaceful Calm Careful	Responsive Carefree Lively	Pessimistic Sober Moody	Active Impulsive Excitable
Humor	Phlegmatic	Sanguine	Melancholic	Choleric
Introversion	Introvert	Extrovert	Introvert	Extrovert
Emotionality	Stable	Stable	Emotional	Emotional
OjibweAnishinaabek Medicine Wheel				
Direction	North	East	West	South
Color	White	Yellow	Black	Red
"Age"	Elder	Child	Adult	Youth
Season	Winter	Spring	Autumn	Summer
Personality Types and Extreme Traits				
	Average	**Role Model**	**Reserved**	**Self-centered**
	Introverted	Stable	Emotional	Extroverted
		Open		Disagreeable
		Agreeable		Not Conscientious
		Conscientious		

To a casual observer, the fit of the four Beatles into the four types may seem quite appropriate. There are, however, three problems with rushing to conclusions. The first is that we do not have reliable information as to what each Beatle is/was actually like (Peter Jackson's *Get Back* (2021) not withstanding[2]). The second problem was noted by Eysenck himself: although we do love our

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[2]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beatles:_Get_Back

typologies, trait expressions in nature tend to occur along continuums. We may refer to "brown" hair, but there are many different shades of brown within that category. Beatles Paul and John, who have been labeled as different types, might actually be less extreme in their traits and more similar to one another than a typology would suggest. For example, consider Figure 3 where Paul and John, each represented by an X, are in their appropriate slice of pie but still quite close to one another. On continuums, closeness is a sign of similarity, so in Figure 3 the difference between the two Beatles is a matter of degree, and not a very large degree at that.
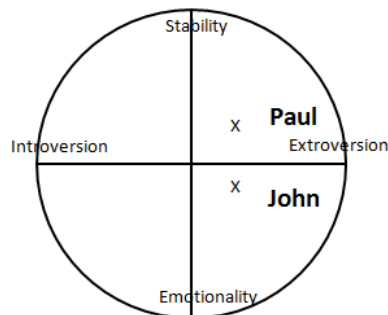

Figure3. *The problem with typologies: two people who are relatively close together when assessed on the basis of continuums are classified as different types.*

Another problem mentioned by Eysenck applies to all kinds of personality description. Figure 2 and Table 1 are descriptive endeavors. I do not know what causes the differences I have talked about. The causes could lie in nature, in nurture, or, most likely, in a combination of the two. A good typology (and a good continuum) would eventually need to address the cause of personality differences as well as describing them. Finally, it is probable that the typologies that I have aligned here are merely an indication of how we (people in general) like to see things or understand them: so typologies may owe more to our descriptive preferences than to the character of the Beatles. They may be an artifact of human thinking. The fact that four-fold typologies have been around for hundreds, if not thousands, of years suggests that this may be the case.

I will close by proposing an additional four-part typology for discussion. This is the typology of taste, and its Beatle prototypes would be Salty (Ringo), Sweet (Paul), Sour (John), and Bitter (George). There is no literature to back up this proposed typology, but it certainly seems to match the Beatle personas outlined in Table 1.

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Cynthia Whissell, is Professor Emerita at Laurentian University, where she has taught for more than 50 years. Her teaching and research focus on the areas of emotion and language. She has developed the Dictionary of Affect in Language to quantify the emotional connotations of words, and has applied it to many different materials."