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Evaluating Joseph Campbell's Underexplored Ideas In the Light of Modern Psychology

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Abstract

Joseph Campbell was a scholar of mythology and comparative religion who attained great popularity by promoting the value of mythology in people's lives. Interestingly, he attained this status even though there was little scientific evidence for his ideas. In recent years, researchers have begun to evaluate Campbell's ideas in rigorous, empirical ways, with most of this research being focused on the implications of the hero's journey. There are still a number of Campbell's psychology-related ideas, however, that have not been evaluated scientifically. These are the ideas we evaluated in this paper. Because we focused on the underexplored ideas, we could find no research directly assessing them. So, we evaluated them indirectly, using research that seemed relevant but that was conducted for independent reasons. This evaluation led us to conclude that Campbell was right in many of his psychology-related ideas, and that researchers could benefit if they took these ideas seriously and incorporated them into their research and theorizing

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View Joseph Campbell Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. Aiming to destabilise the logic and World-view implicit in the linear teleological narrative structure of the hero's quest (as theorised by Joseph Campbell), these texts exemplify that in literature, as in any journey, it is the journey itself, rather than its aim or end (telos), that is most important. The paper begins by identifying Campbell's major topics (the monomyth structure underlying world mythology, the importance of the hero's journey, the existence of a higher power or energy, the lack of myth in the modern world, and the notion that religion possesses given qualities). Next, the paper outlines the important scholars of religion (William James, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Peter Berger, W.C. Smith, Wayne Proudfoot, and J.Z. Smith) from whom Campbell borrows various ideas. These seven scholars are then sorted into three categories – the purely qualitative religious scholars, the pur