



Personality Tests? A Hoax!

Can these seemingly harmless, quick, and fun tests truly tell what kind of person you are? Personality tests have been all the rage, especially with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) being the front runner with more than 2.1 million people taking it per year. You may think that these are just for entertainment, but almost 90 of the big Fortune 500 companies use them. The MBTI was originally developed in the 1940s by Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother Katharine Cook Briggs, inspired by the theories of Carl Jung. It peaked in the 1990s and early 2000s. It works by sorting people into one of 16 personality types, based on preferences in four categories: extraversion vs. introversion, sensing vs. intuition, thinking vs. feeling, and judging vs. perceiving. Essentially, you answer a series of questions and are given a four-letter type like “INTJ” or “ESFP.” However, with the immense popularity of these, they are surprisingly not very reliable.

With the increasing accessibility of personality tests online, it's easier than ever to retake them multiple times. Ideally, a good personality test should provide consistent results regardless of how many times it's taken, assuming the individual's personality remains stable over time. However, this expectation doesn't always align with reality. According to social science researcher Professor David J. Pittenger, the reliability of the MBTI is questionable. He states that “across a 5-week retest period, 50% of the participants received a different classification on one or more of the MBTI scales.” This statistic highlights a significant issue with the test. It has tendency to produce inconsistent outcomes, even over short periods. This variability raises concerns about the test’s validity and its usefulness in making meaningful assessments about personality. If a test cannot reliably categorize an individual’s traits over time, its useful application becomes very limited.

Many researchers question whether MBTI results are scientifically accurate. According to psychology professor Adam Grant, “The Myers-Briggs is about as useful in making career decisions as a horoscope.” Similarly, research from the National Academy of Sciences concluded, “There is no evidence that personality tests can consistently predict job performance.” These critiques show that while the MBTI is popular, it may not be as accurate or reliable as people often assume.

Despite the criticisms, tests like the MBTI can still offer value. To show the popularity of the test, I surveyed a random sample of 23 students at IA on their knowledge of the MBTI. Sixty-one percent said they were aware of Myers-Briggs and even knew their result. Thirty-nine percent said they were not aware of it, and does not know their result. Tests like these can be helpful because they allow people to reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, and how they work

with others. For example, a teacher might use MBTI results in a group project to balance out different personality types, such as pairing a more outgoing student with someone who is more analytical.

Even if personality tests may not be the most scientifically accurate, they are entertaining for some and can spark self reflection. They do not define who we are, but they give us a fun way to explore our personalities and compare ourselves with others. At the end of the day, it's less about strict labels and more about the conversations and insights these tests can inspire.

Sources

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