VALIDITY OF MBTI TYPE DESCRIPTIONS AS PERCEIVED BY RECIPIENTS UNFAMILIAR WITH TYPE

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Perhaps the most basic tool in the applied use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is the set of one page descriptions of each of the 16 types. These comprise over 40% of the material in Myers' Introduction to Type (1976)--indeed the 16 unique types are emphasized more than the consideration of the four scales separately--as well as appearing prominently in the MBTI Manual (Myers, 1962) and in Myers' only full length book on type, Gifts Differing (1980). The computer scoring system of the Center for Applications of Psychological Type includes similar type descriptions in their entirety in the part of the output intended to be given to the person who takes the Indicator.

A criticism that is sometimes made, often by people unfamiliar or only superficially familiar with the MBTI, is that the type descriptions are in effect horoscopes--vague, mostly pleasant sounding material that almost any-one might feel could apply to himself or herself, regardless of his or her actual type. This criticism was put to the test some time ago by Carskadon (1975, reprinted 1982). College student subjects were administered the MBTI (Form F) and asked to return one week later. At that time they were given a packet containing five randomly ordered one page type descriptions adapted from Introduction to Type: the description of their actual measured type; that obtained if the weakest of their four preferences was reversed; that obtained if their preferences on E-I and J-P were reversed; that obtained if their preferences on S-N and T-F were reversed; and that obtained if their preferences on all four scales were reversed. They were asked to rank order and rate for accuracy the five descriptions. Almost two-thirds of the subjects gave the highest ranking to their actual description or that with their lowest scale reversed, while only about 10% picked either the description of their complete opposite type or that of their S-N and T-F preferences reversed. Mean ranks and accuracy ratings were in the expected direction, and it was found that reversing the functions (S-N and T-F) had a significantly greater effect on perceived accuracy than reversing the attitudes (E-I and J-P). Overall

the results were highly supportive of the subjects' per-
ceived validity of their type descriptions.

Although this research was quite basic as well as
very favorable to the MBTI, to our knowledge it has never
been replicated. The purpose of the present study was to
provide some general replication of this line of research.

Method

Subjects for this study were 118 introductory psychol-
ogy students at Mississippi State University, whose parti-
cipation partially fulfilled a course requirement. Sub-
jects had not been introduced to type prior to the study.
All took Form G of the MBTI near the beginning of the
course. For 28 of the subjects who retook the Indicator
five weeks later as part of another study on reliabilities,
their most recent results were used. Eight weeks after
initially taking the MBTI, subjects were given a packet
of four randomly ordered one page type descriptions adapt-
ed from Introduction to Type (1976). One was the descrip-
tion of their actual measured type; another, the descrip-
tion of the type obtained if their preferences on the E-I
and J-P scales were reversed; another, the description of
the type obtained if their preferences on S-N and T-F were
reversed; and finally, the description of the type com-
pletely opposite to their own, with their preferences on
all four scales reversed. Subjects were asked to rank
order the four descriptions in terms of their accuracy
in describing them, and to rate the accuracy of each de-
scription individually on a four point scale (4 = very
true for me, 3 = mostly true for me, 2 = partly true for
me, and 1 = not very true at all for me). All subjects
were combined for analysis. Two subjects filled out the
rankings but omitted the ratings.

It was hypothesized that subjects would be most like-
ly to rank as their first choice the description corre-
sponding to their actual measured type, and that they
would rate this one higher in accuracy than the others.
On the basis of previous research it was also hypothe-
sized that reversing subjects' preferences on S-N and
T-F would have a greater effect on their rated accuracy
than reversing their preferences on E-I and J-P.

Results

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of subjects

Table 1

Rankings and Ratings Given by Subjects
to Each Type Description

SUBJECTS RANKING	DESCRIPTION OF			
	ACTUAL TYPE	E-I+J-P REVERSED	S-N+T-F REVERSED	ALL SCALES REVERSED
Number 1	59(50%)	31(26%)	12(10%)	16(13%)
Number 2	29(25%)	40(34%)	33(28%)	16(13%)
Number 3	18(15%)	27(23%)	32(27%)	40(34%)
Number 4	12(10%)	20(17%)	41(35%)	46(40%)
MEAN RANK	*1.86*	*2.30*	*2.86*	*2.98*
SUBJECTS RATING*				
Rating 4	31(27%)	18(15%)	10(8%)	6(5%)
Rating 3	43(37%)	36(31%)	24(21%)	25(22%)
Rating 2	33(28%)	53(46%)	52(45%)	45(39%)
Rating 1	9(8%)	9(8%)	30(26%)	40(34%)
MEAN RATE	*2.83*	*2.54*	*2.12*	*1.97*

*On rating scale, 4 = very true, 3 = mostly true,
2 = partly true, and 1 = not very true at all.*

giving each rank and each rating to each of the four descriptions. It can be seen that exactly half the subjects picked their correct type description as their first choice (ranked it number 1 in accuracy) while less than a quarter of the subjects picked one of the descriptions with S-N and T-F reversed or all scales reversed. At the other end, only 10% ranked their correct type description as #4, while 75% rated either the S-N and T-F reversed or all scales reversed description last. With respect to ratings, over five times as many subjects gave the highest possible rating to their correct type description as to the one with all scales reversed, while well over four times as many subjects gave the lowest possible rating to

the description with all scales reversed as did to the
correct description. With total mean rankings and mean
ratings, overall the correct type description was per-
ceived as most accurate, followed, in order, by that with
preferences on E-I and J-P reversed, preferences on S-N
and T-F reversed, and preferences on all scales reversed.

Chi-square analysis showed that the distribution of
ranks was clearly nonrandom $(\chi^2(3)=48.98,\ p<.001)$ and that
a far greater than expected proportion of subjects ranked
the correct description as number one compared to all
other descriptions combined $(\chi^2(1)=59.0,\ p<.001)$. Also,
a greater proportion of subjects ranked as number one the
description with the E-I and J-P scales reversed than the
description with the S-N and T-F scales reversed $(\chi^2(1)=$
12.98, p<.001). The patterns of mean ranks for the four
descriptions was exactly what would have been predicted,
and the significance of this pattern was confirmed by a
Friedman two-way analysis of variance by ranks $(\chi_r^2(3)=$
60.98, p<.001).

The pattern of the ratings given the descriptions
was in the expected direction and similar to that for
the rankings. An analysis of variance carried out on
the ratings given the four kinds of descriptions showed
a highly significant overall effect $(F(3,345)=21.45,$
p<.01). Further analysis using the Sheffe method showed
that the mean ratings of the correct descriptions strictly
were not significantly higher than those with the E-I and
J-P scales reversed, but were significantly higher than
those with the S-N and T-F scales reversed (p<.01), and
those with preferences on all scales reversed (p<.01);
the ratings of the descriptions with E-I and J-P reversed
were significantly higher than those with S-N and T-F
reversed (p<.01), and all scales reversed (p<.01); and
the ratings of the descriptions with S-N and T-F reversed
were not significantly higher than the ratings of the de-
scriptions with preferences on all four scales reversed.
Because the difference between the mean ratings of the
correct type descriptions and those with the E-I and J-P
scales reversed was only slightly short of significance
in the hypothesized direction using the Sheffe method, and
because that is considered an extremely conservative test,
after examining the results of the Sheffe comparison a t-
test was done comparing the ratings of these descriptions;
this test did show that the mean ratings given the correct
descriptions were significantly higher than those given
the descriptions with E-I and J-P reversed $(t(114)=2.43,$

p<.01 one-tailed).

Discussion

The hypotheses of the study were strongly support-
ed, and the results obtained thoroughly refuted the idea
that type descriptions other than one's own might be
equally appealing if given to persons taking the MBTI.
The results of the present study are especially encour-
aging since most of the subjects evaluated the type des-
criptions eight weeks after taking the MBTI. Previous
research (Howes & Carskadon, 1979) would suggest that a
significant proportion of the subjects would have changed
their measured types if retested after that interval, but
we would like to think that the majority of information
in any particular type description will still be valid a
couple of months later--it would scarcely be worth giving
anyone the MBTI if it weren't--and the present data can
be seen as supporting such validity. It is also interest-
ing that as in the earlier study (see Carskadon, 1982),
subjects were much more sensitive to deviations from their
measured type preferences on the S-N and T-F scales than
they were to those on the E-I and J-P scales. Subjects
such as those used in these studies may feel more confi-
dence or certainty in their preferred functions, and/or
more flexibility in their attitudes.

Issues for further research remain, however. It was
a little surprising (and a little disappointing) that only
27% of the subjects rated their correct type description
as very true for them. This relates to several questions.
The type descriptions in the Second Edition of Introduc-
tion to Type were intended, of course, to be an improve-
ment over those in the First Edition, but some users of
the MBTI have expressed the opinion that certain ele-
ments of some of the original descriptions were superior.
In our opinion, the standard type descriptions used in the
computer scoring program of the Center for Application of
Psychological Type may have some advantages over the des-
criptions as they stand in the latest Introduction to Type.
Such personal opinions could become empirical questions,
however, if studies were done in which subjects evaluated
different versions of correct type descriptions. Also,
another very important question would be to see which type
descriptions are most favorably evaluated by persons of
those types: for instance, do ESTP's find their type des-
criptions as accurate as INFP's find theirs? Do type
descriptions rated lower need revision? (It would need to

be remembered that certain types might be more critical of _any_ type description.) Type descriptions certainly should not be changed casually, but they are also not set in concrete--Isabel Myers herself was the first to look for valid improvements--and as new research and thinking come to light, further changes may be found to be appropriate.

Future research in these and other areas would undoubtedly be desirable, as would replication of the present research using different populations and investigators. It should be noted that because of several differences in methodology, results in the present study cannot be specificially compared to those of the earlier study (described in Carskadon, 1982). Both studies done here do, however, clearly, strongly, and consistently support the validity of the MBTI type descriptions as perceived by the persons to whom they are given.

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