



Psychology in Everyday Life:

Is the Popular MBTI Just an Upgraded Version of Astrology?

Recently, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) has gained significant traction online. Headlines like “*Gu Ailing’s MBTI is INTJ*” and “*Yang Mi’s MBTI is ENFP*” have trended on social media, and countless users share their personality types on networking platforms. Paid ads for MBTI personality tests frequently pop up, leading some to question, “*Is MBTI just the latest version of astrology?*” Meanwhile, many are still left wondering: *What is MBTI? How accurate is it?*

This article aims to demystify MBTI by explaining its origins, strengths, and limitations, as well as comparing it to astrology and offering insights into its practical applications.



What Is MBTI?

The MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), also known as the "16 Personality Types," is a personality classification model developed by American mother-daughter duo Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers. It is based on Swiss psychologist Carl Jung's theory of personality types, expanded into four key dimensions:

1. Source of Energy (Attention Focus):

- **E** (Extroversion): Energy is drawn from external interactions.
- **I** (Introversion): Energy is drawn from internal reflection.

2. Information Processing (Cognitive Style):

- **S** (Sensing): Focuses on tangible facts and details.
- **N** (Intuition): Focuses on patterns and abstract concepts.

3. Decision-Making Approach (Judgment Style):

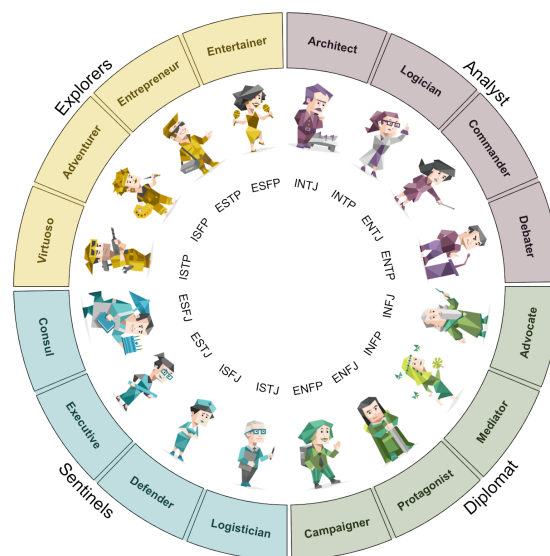
- **T** (Thinking): Prioritizes logic and objective analysis.
- **F** (Feeling): Prioritizes values and personal considerations.

4. Lifestyle Preference (Interaction with the External World):

- **J** (Judging): Prefers structure and organization.
- **P** (Perceiving): Prefers flexibility and adaptability.

By combining these dimensions, MBTI categorizes individuals into 16 distinct personality types, such as INTJ, ENFP, ISTP, and others.

In the following sections, we will explore the advantages and drawbacks of MBTI, its differences from astrology, and how it can be effectively utilized.



The Advantages and Limitations of MBTI

Advantages

1. Understanding Yourself:

MBTI can help individuals better understand their personality traits and the reasoning behind their behaviors. For instance, someone who feels uneasy and reserved in social settings may label themselves as socially anxious. However, MBTI might reveal that they are simply introverted (I, Introvert) and recharge best through solitude.

2. Understanding Others:

MBTI fosters empathy by helping people appreciate others' perspectives. For example, a friend who struggles to offer emotional support or notice subtle mood changes may naturally approach problems with logic and objectivity (T, Thinking). While they may find emotional support challenging, their rational perspective might allow them to pinpoint issues clearly and propose practical solutions.

3. Social Connectivity:

MBTI's popularity has turned it into a social tool. Memes poking fun at various personality types have spread widely, fostering humor and relatability. Additionally, MBTI enthusiasts form subcultural communities to discuss personality topics, share daily experiences, and build connections, creating a sense of belonging even among strangers.

Limitations

1. Lack of Academic Foundation:

MBTI's creators, Katharine Briggs and Isabel Myers, lacked formal academic training in psychology. Inspired by Carl Jung's *Psychological Type*, they developed MBTI during World War II and began promoting it among businesses in the 1950s. While their story of grassroots innovation is inspiring, the absence of a rigorous academic foundation subjected MBTI to skepticism from its inception.

2. Questionable Reliability:

A scientifically robust personality test requires high reliability—consistent results over time. For example, test-retest reliability measures whether an individual receives similar results across multiple assessments. MBTI has faced criticism in this area; studies indicate that as many as 50% of people receive different personality types when retested after just five weeks.

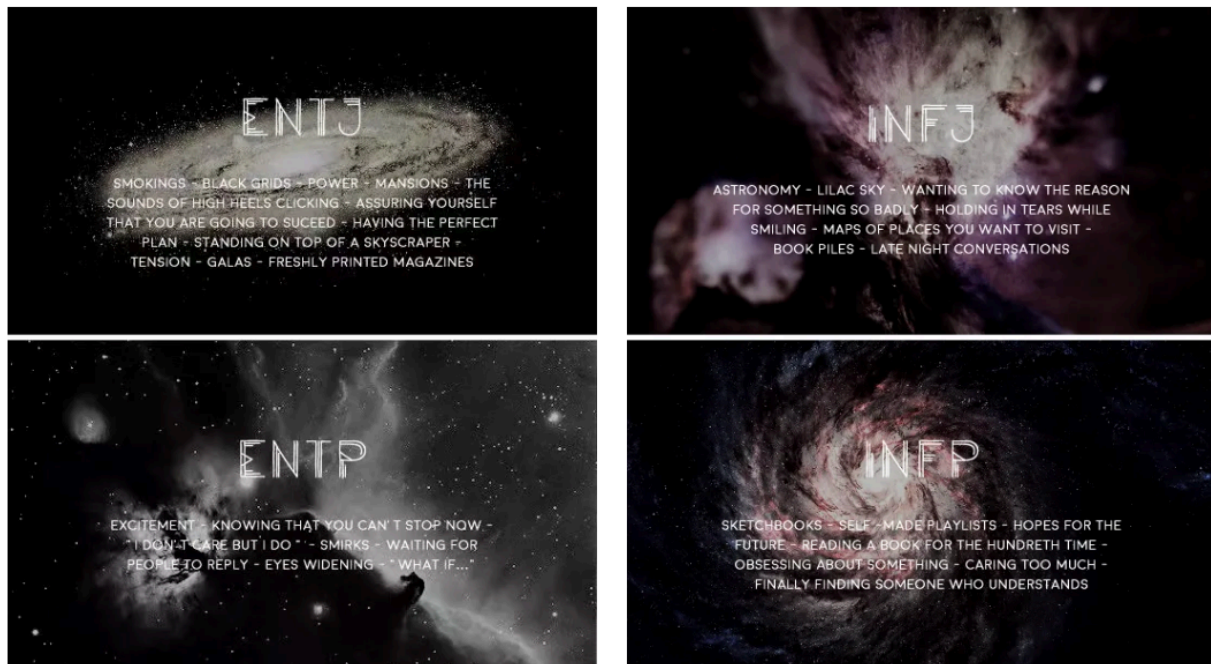
3. Self-Reporting Bias:

Like many self-reported questionnaires, MBTI is prone to bias. Test-takers may select answers based on their idealized self-image rather than their actual traits, leading to skewed results. This issue further undermines the test's accuracy.

Due to these flaws, some personality psychologists consider MBTI a form of "pseudopsychology." More scientifically accepted models in personality psychology include the

Big Five Personality Traits (The Big Five) and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), both of which are supported by extensive empirical research.

While MBTI offers value as a tool for self-reflection and social engagement, its limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation, especially when seeking deeper psychological insights.



Is MBTI the New or Advanced Version of Astrology?

MBTI has often been criticized for its "vague" and "generalized" descriptions. Many personality traits can fit multiple MBTI types, and its characterizations are overwhelmingly positive—terms like "arrogant," "lazy," or "overly flirtatious" are absent. This not only satisfies participants but also makes them susceptible to the **Barnum effect**: a tendency to perceive general, non-specific descriptions as uniquely applicable to oneself.

The classic example of the Barnum effect comes from a study by psychologist Bertram Forer. He administered a personality test to his students and then provided each with a "personal analysis" based on the results. Students were asked to rate the accuracy of their analyses on a scale from 0 to 5, with an average rating of 4.26. In reality, all students received identical analyses composed of phrases randomly selected from astrology books. This susceptibility to generalized feedback is a trait MBTI shares with astrology.

Key Differences Between MBTI and Astrology

1. Process of Determination:

Astrology signs traits based on a person's birth date and time, offering conclusions directly from celestial charts. MBTI, however, derives its results from answering dozens or even hundreds of questions, giving it an appearance of precision and personal involvement. This process creates a sense of control for participants, enhancing its perceived accuracy.

2. Scientific Appearance:

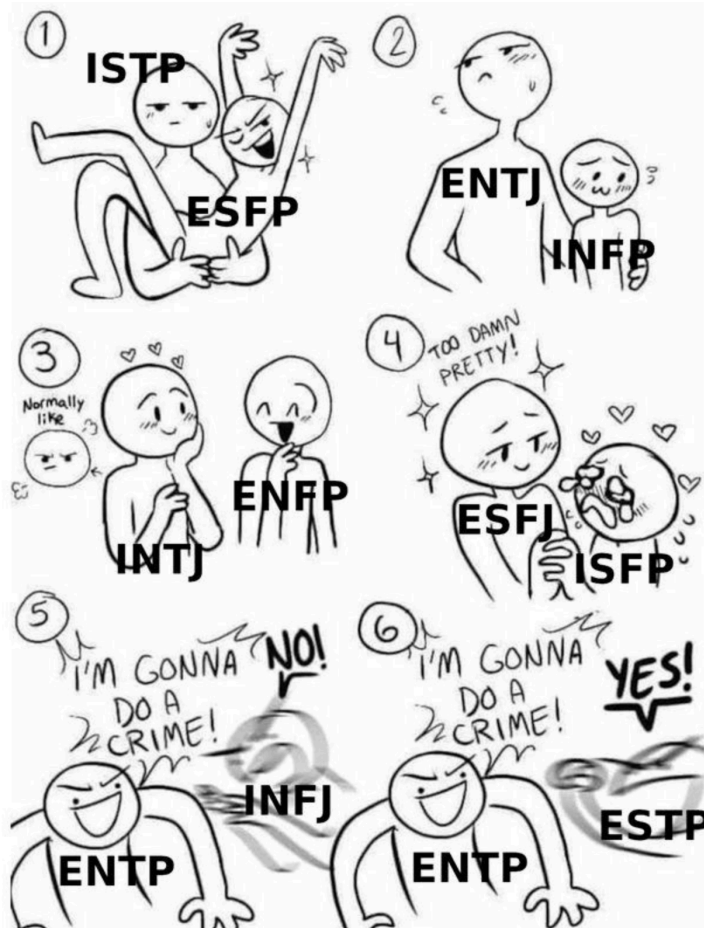
While astrology draws from astrological traditions and is often categorized as a pseudoscience, MBTI markets itself as a "personality test," seemingly grounded in psychology. This lends it greater credibility, even though, as previously discussed, many psychologists regard MBTI as pseudoscientific due to its low reliability and questionable academic foundation.

From a psychological perspective, MBTI and astrology can be explained using similar principles, including the Barnum effect. Despite appearing to differ—one as a psychological tool and the other as mysticism—both serve comparable social functions.

- Social Bonding: Both MBTI and astrology facilitate connections by offering topics for discussion and shared experiences, fostering a sense of belonging.
- Self-Exploration: For those interested in self-discovery, MBTI provides an accessible entry point into personality assessment, much like astrology appeals to those seeking meaning in the stars.

For individuals intrigued by psychology, MBTI serves as an approachable and widely popular tool for exploring personality. It can act as a gateway, encouraging further interest in more scientifically rigorous psychological theories and tests, such as the Big Five model or deeper research into interpersonal dynamics.

While its scientific validity is limited, MBTI indirectly contributes to psychological awareness and education by sparking curiosity. In this sense, MBTI's popularity may play a small but meaningful role in advancing the public's understanding of psychology and fostering conversations about self and others.



How Should MBTI Be Used?

As discussed earlier, MBTI serves as a tool for self-understanding but should not be relied upon as a sole guide. It highlights strengths and weaknesses that individuals may not have been aware of, offering an opportunity to reflect and address challenges in daily life.

MBTI can also be a fun way to break the ice in conversations or bring humor to social interactions. The popularity of MBTI memes allows people to relate personality traits to themselves and their friends, sparking laughter and playful teasing. For instance, recognizing yourself or someone else in the classic "INFP as the emotional thinker" or "ENFP as the happy-go-lucky dog" memes can be a source of amusement and bonding.

However, MBTI is just a test and should not restrict your self-perception. Online communities often attach stereotypes or labels to personality types—such as INFPs being overly sensitive and prone to melancholy or ENFPs being relentlessly exuberant. While these stereotypes can sometimes resonate, they may not fully align with an individual's unique traits.

Over-identifying with these labels risks turning them into a self-fulfilling prophecy, where individuals unconsciously mold themselves to fit these traits, even if they do not naturally embody them. For instance, an INFP might internalize the stereotype of being overly emotional and introspective, potentially adopting behaviors that reinforce this image despite their capacity for confidence and resilience.

Another important point to consider is that personality has both stability and malleability. Personality traits are formed over time and remain relatively consistent, but they are not immutable. As individuals age and their environments change, personality traits can shift, sometimes subtly and sometimes more significantly. This explains why repeated MBTI tests may yield different results for the same individual.

"A Tool, Not a Definition"

MBTI is a simple classification system, not an exhaustive explanation of human complexity. While it can provide insights and spark curiosity, people should approach each person as a dynamic individual, beyond the confines of 16 personality types.

The world is not painted in only 16 colors; each person is a unique hue, contributing to the diverse and vibrant canvas of humanity. MBTI can help us appreciate these colors, but it is the recognition of individuality that truly enriches our understanding of ourselves and others.

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