

The new type community

The online type experience is muddled with naiveté and ignorance



Vicky Jo Varner

A reformed freelance computer consultant whose clients have included The Disney Channel, Buena Vista Pictures and the Getty Center, **Vicky Jo Varner** (INFJ) attained her MBTI qualifications over 12 years ago from TRI (now Interstrength Associates), and has achieved the status of MBTI Master Practitioner.

Vicky Jo is a Certified Professional Co-Active Coach, Certified Guided Imagery Practitioner and member of the International Coach Federation. She regularly presents sessions on psychological types at international conferences, including APTi, Share, and Convergence.

www.TypeInsights.com
VJ@TypeInsights.com

Four out of every five homes have access to the internet. 'Google' is a verb. The 'net' is a part of modern life. Along with it, there's growing interest in social networking. People want to hook up with other like-minded individuals. So we see common-interest groups forming—stamp collectors, quilters, horse-riders, redheads, left-handed people and, predictably, people who share the same personality type code.

Personality type is becoming the new astrology—people sign off emails with their sun sign, four-letter code, temperament and enneagram numbers. Several years ago Dr John Beebe made the wry comment that 'type can now be found on the backs of cereal boxes'. He has fretted that we may 'lose type to the Collective'. That seems to be coming true these days.

In these text boxes throughout this article, I'll be quoting from actual internet postings I've encountered.

How do they get it?

People troll the internet for free online quizzes, and don't realise the benefit of professional facilitation in helping them determine their best-fit type. A quiz on Facebook pretending to be the real MBTI (with text lifted from CPP's website and a graphic from Steve Myers' MTR-i website) had 3 043 296 active users and 4386 fans at this time of writing.

People take the results of such online gimmicks as gospel. They don't appear to realise it isn't the real thing, and don't know (or don't care) that the genuine MBTI has had 60 years of psychometric development behind it and is classified as a Level B validated instrument.

In the past, a truism was that, 'I read it in a magazine, so it must be true'. The modern-day equivalent is 'I took the test online so it must be true'.

I'm ISTJ. last time i did that. the time before i was INTJ. IM A LOT OF PEOPLE!

As a predictable result, hordes of people are misclassified. From the quiz, they are directed to read some romantic portrait of a type that's posted online, generally fall in love with that description, perhaps delight in being told their type is rare, and crow about their new identity. These users tout their results and exhort others to take the 'type test'.

Blogs abound of people posting their scores, analysing their results, explaining the dichotomies to others, and liberally sharing their opinions and personal 'tips' about type. When confronted with any contradiction, they typically adopt an attitude of 'I don't want to hear it'. Consequently, there are a lot of urban myths springing up around type that we, as professionals, have been educated to avoid.

I believe that any scores below 25 are not necessarily to be relied upon. My extraversion score is typically about 22. It can swing to introversion at the same level. What are your scores?

What does it mean to the type community?

Like it or not, this is the new type community! We can't turn our back on it, ignore it, or pretend it doesn't exist.

Armchair psychologists perpetuate misconceptions, misinformation, misunderstandings and misapprehensions

We can't assume that the MBTI publisher, CPP, will eliminate all the knock-off sites. We dare not expect that APT International has any control or jurisdiction over these new members of our 'type community'. Welcome to the 21st Century!

The notion of discovering one's personality type has become increasingly popular, but what's the benefit? Certainly there's greater awareness and acceptance of type as a valid means of classifying people, which is good news. In a best-case scenario, people would use this knowledge to appreciate differences and become more tolerant. However, the reality falls somewhat short of this ideal.

If you're about to comment suggesting that my need to label myself is pathological, I will only reply that you are probably a 'P' and it's a typical feature of both INTJs and INFJs.

The cult of the amateur

In his book *The Cult of the Amateur*, Andrew Keen writes:

We—those of us who want to know more about the world, those of us who are consumers of mainstream culture—are being seduced by the empty promise of 'democratised' media. For the real consequence of the Web ... revolution is less culture, less reliable news, and a chaos of information. One chilling reality of this brave new digital epoch is the blurring, obfuscation, and even disappearance of truth.

This 'democratisation' has been spreading to the world of psychological type, and we now have a proliferation of armchair psychologists who perpetuate misconceptions, misinformation, misunderstandings, and misapprehensions.

The online type experience is muddled with naiveté and ignorance. There's even a free PDF book available that consists of little more than a collection of the author's type prejudices.

I admit it. I am a Myers-Briggshead. That means I am a 'devotee' of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator method of personality classification. It is an easy and effective way to pigeonhole your loved ones into one of 16 neat little personality types. You can use their type description to examine their strengths and weaknesses, their inner motivations, and figure out the best and most effective ways to hit them up for money.

Worse, many of these amateurs adopt a confrontational attitude against type professionals, somehow believing we're out to 'rip them off'. They don't seem to understand that our role is to clarify type, to counteract the inherent inaccuracies in assessments, and to coach people to their best-fit pattern. Many's the time I've been demonised online for having unwanted expertise.

First, the online tools are just that ... tools. Any intuitive worth his/her salt will quickly discard such things once they know what the silly tests are trying to get out of you.

Second, if I was serious, the last thing I would do would be to go to a professional. That is exactly why this group was formed. To get away from that kind of thinking. If you had come to one of our meetups then you would know that there is a very strong 'down with the system' theme that is pervasive in every meetup we have had and that your professional schtick would be ill received.

The proliferation of readily-available information on the internet has emboldened people to believe they know more than they actually do. As Andrew Keen says:

Today, on a Web where everyone has an equal voice, the words of the wise man count for no more than the mutterings of a fool.

I prefer to talk about traits rather than a personality types since over time, and sometimes short periods of time, these traits change. Fifteen years ago, I was an INFJ like you!

How do they use it?

Most novices on the internet assume type describes personality traits. The majority believe they know what *introversion* and *extraversion* mean. They assume that the social definitions of *thinking*, *feeling* and *judging* match C G Jung's usage. Of course, type professionals know the definitions are different, but trying to get that message across is a Sisyphean task.

I'm still an INTJ, but getting dangerously close to becoming an INFJ.

Another common misconception is that the scores on each scale represent ability or facility. The assumption is that these numbers demonstrate strength of a process, rather than certainty of preference.

I see many who trumpet their scores as though they were points hard won in a basketball game—in some cases being outright deceived by the quiz authors, who misrepresent the meaning of the figures. Even those who take the official MBTI reify their scores, imbuing them with far more significance than was ever intended.

I have never met another person with an iNtuition score as high as mine!

Alternatively, some believe an ideal, 'well-balanced' personality features zero results on all scores. There's an attitude that Jung's concept of individuation equates to equal proficiency with all 8 letters of the code, and that there's an ideal 'midpoint' on each dichotomy that one should strive for.

I just took the online test for the 27th time and I'm nearly at an XXXX type. After a few more attempts I'm sure I'll be able get zero on all my scores and be perfectly balanced.

Then there are those who have preconceptions about certain type issues and will poke experts like me as if we are a piñata, asking questions that the askers don't truly want answered. They've already made up their minds and merely want to be validated, responding with pique or disinterest if we don't 'rubber stamp' their queries.

Why are we INTJs always treated like extraterrestrials and why can't other persons just accept us the way we are!!!

Some people take advantage of my offer of a free strategy session and then indicate that what they really want is for me to tell them what type they are, for free, in less than 30 minutes on the phone. I've been invited to surf someone's website and guess what type they are (as if I have nothing better to do). When I'm engaged to facilitate a self-discovery session, I must often devote as much time to *un-learning* as to learning, and I frequently find myself in the position of trying to make sense of other people's nonsense.

I finally thought of a reason for you to actually help me! I re-took the Jung type test again and I scored 56 introvert, 12 intuitive, 44 feeling, 33 judging. I would like to know how to raise these scores back up.

Type is routinely used to make nonchalantly demeaning comments about other types, sometimes employing deliberately provocative and hateful barbs. It's often used for slander and readily invoked in 'flame wars'. Type has become a primary weapon in the arsenal of bigotry, with MBTI letters being hurled like projectiles.

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People think they already know what the topic is about
and don't give credence to professional knowledge

The reply was No to answering his question. That was a negotiating position, but Guardians do not understand this, especially the ESTJ bullies.

Lest you think it's all bad, there are some islands of hope in this sea of despair. A few people are using type to bridge differences in the spirit that Isabel intended. Many are using it to develop themselves, and regard individuation as the ultimate goal, much as Jung had hoped for.

I am now an INFJ. I used to be an ISTJ. I love the new me.

One type expert holds the contrarian view that this wealth of attention is a good thing—it increases awareness of psychological type and raises its profile, rather than diminishing it. He views these tools as a first step on the individual's type journey, and takes the thought-provoking stance that exploring one's type pattern *should* be fun, and more power to them.

How does it affect us?

In his book *Why Good People Do Bad Things*, James Hollis recalls 'when the Internet was first becoming a reality for ordinary folks':

One person said to me that this breakthrough would ensure world peace and the spread of democracy ... I predicted that if a new instrument was available, new darkness would follow. ...

So today we know the Internet is used by terrorists to communicate, that the virtual ether is full of pornography, seductions of innocents, political vitriol, and that phlegm in the body of capitalism called 'spam'. So much for enlightened progress.

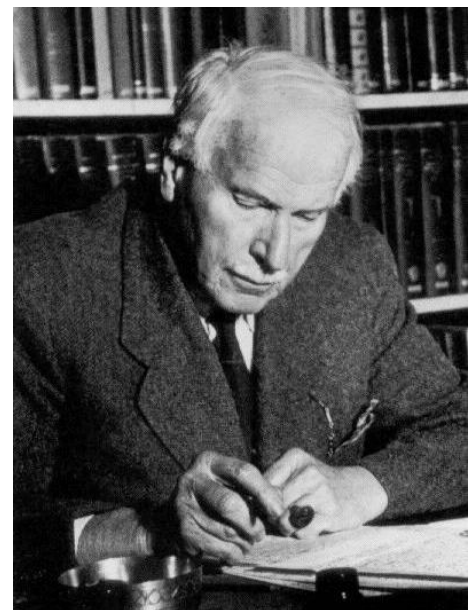
As a psychological type professional, I find the online trend alarming—it trivialises type. On some days I feel as anachronistic as a telephone switchboard operator, since so many people think they already know

what the topic is all about and don't give any credence to professional knowledge, training, or experience.

This saddens me, because it seems type is heading where Jung didn't wish it to go—devolving into the very parlour game he decried. Type is now used to marginalise people and to propagate stereotypes. It's gone horribly wrong from Isabel's idealistic vision.

I do not believe that I am completely a J. In fact, I still think I am a P, but I also believe it may be possible for some INFJs to have INFJ qualities (and vice versa), or perhaps individuals can develop functions that are not typically their strong ones and thereby use them in their day-to-day situations.

When I've approached companies to provide them with coaching services and propose assessing type as part of a team development program, I'm sometimes told that everyone's already done the free online test and they think they've already mastered that topic. Or, because it's available online for free, it's considered devoid of any real value.



Many regard individuation as the goal, as Jung had hoped for

I'm on a type-related special interest group where someone recently wanted to know where to find the link to the 'free test'. Apparently their client didn't want to pay for a validated instrument.

Is anyone familiar with the Human Metrics MBTI online instrument? I've just had a client request this because it's free. I have no idea whether it's valid and/or reliable. Thanks!

What can be done?

How can we honour type if popular opinion is going to take over the type world? Are we as professionals to be dispensed with in favour of the amateur?

How do we retain the value of our education and experience? Most of us have invested time and money to acquire our certifications. These credentials were the destination, but during our journey we grasped the value of 'gifts differing'.

Now that value is being trampled by boorish dilettantes who perceive us as price-gouging 'middle men' raking in profits and preying on their vulnerability. How do we refute that image?

I would also like to add that only one percent of the population is an INFJ making it the most rare personality type. That's right, I am ONE PERCENT of the population!

Famous INFJ personalities include Oprah, Mother Teresa and MLK [Martin Luther King]. Another famous INFJ is Woody Allen but I'm not counting him because I do not get the guy and we apparently think the same.

Maybe this issue hasn't impacted you personally yet because you're in a brick-and-mortar business and feel the Web poses

no threat. Perhaps you're employed in an environment where the internet has had minimal impact thus far.

My particular business runs on the internet. I don't maintain a storefront; I'm not housed in a corporate environment; I'm not an academic. So perhaps I encounter these circumstances more than some type professionals do. Nevertheless, assuming your business won't be affected because it is not internet-based is equivalent to the proverbial ostrich burying its head in the sand.

I have noticed I'm really sensitive to loud noises and smells no one else can seem to smell. Since I'm apparently 100% iNtuitive and not Sensory at all, I find this weird.

I don't have answers, but I believe we need to raise these issues and begin considering solutions. How do we reinvent ourselves to be in tune with the modern notion of personality typing? What will it take to ensure that we do not become irrelevant? How do we uphold the values that Isabel Briggs Myers and C G Jung promoted in the face of such severe challenges?

Most of all, how do we hold the 'tension of opposites' between encouraging the delight of discovering one's type pattern, while equally honouring the professionalism of working with type and respecting the depth of this amazing tool?

Speaking from experience, this is not an easy tension to hold gracefully.

I'm pretty convinced by now that I've probably not used Ne before in my life.

References

- Hollis, J (2007). *Why Good People Do Bad Things*. New York, NY: Gotham
- Keen, A (2007). *The Cult of the Amateur*. New York, NY: Doubleday

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