

Type and today's teenagers

Type frequencies in a sample of Australian teenagers are dissimilar to those for adults



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Ian updates his paper 'Under the Southern Cross (*part 2*): Type distributions in Australia by age, gender and occupation' (March 2005)

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The sample

The **Careers Archive** comprises data sets from 32 secondary schools and colleges, generated in career planning contexts by professional staff of Careers Fast Track, Melbourne, in 2003-2004. The activity included administration of MBTI Form M and the Self Directed Search. The MBTI codes were validated by the staff during individual debriefs with the students.

There is variety in the schools represented in the Careers Archive. They are mainly from metropolitan Melbourne, although some country schools are included. The majority are government schools, with a small number of independent (private) schools, and five single-sex schools.

In 24 of the schools whole classes took part in the career planning activity, while other schools are represented by much smaller numbers. Generally students were drawn from Year 10 classes, but there were some exceptions in individual referrals, depending on the assessed needs of the student and school. The mean age of the sample was 15.3 years. The median and modal ages were 15, with some students aged 14 (5.5%) and some aged 16 and 17 (25.1%).

The Careers Archive is a 'sample of convenience'. Although not a random sample, it is fairly representative of the variety of schools in Victoria and forms a reasonable group from which to draw conclusions about the distribution of psychological types in this population.

The findings

Table 1 shows that all 16 MBTI types are represented in this sample of teenage males and females. However, they do so in quite different frequencies and patterns.

Table 1: Type distribution for **Australian secondary students** (male and female)

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
M 3.9%	M 1.6%	M 1.6%	M 1.7%
F 3.7%	F 4.1%	F 3.4%	F 1.8%
I = 1.05	I = 0.39***	I = 0.46**	I = 0.91
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
M 4.8%	M 3.9%	M 6.4%	M 4.6%
F 2.3%	F 4.0%	F 9.5%	F 2.0%
I = 2.13***	I = 0.97	I = 0.67**	I = 2.30***
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
M 10.5%	M 11.9%	M 22.7%	M 8.7%
F 3.6%	F 9.6%	F 28.8%	F 5.3%
I = 2.95***	I = 1.23	I = 0.79***	I = 1.63***
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ
M 6.5%	M 5.3%	M 3.7%	M 2.6%
F 4.3%	F 7.0%	F 8.2%	F 2.4%
I = 1.49*	I = 0.75	I = 0.45***	I = 1.06

Careers Archive. n (*male*) = 1085, n (*female*) = 1598.

Table 1 also includes an 'I' score or Index score, comparing the differing proportions of males and females of each type. There are eight types with a higher proportion of males than females (that is, with an index greater than 1). This is true for all four of the ST types, three of the four NT types, and the ESFP type. Closer examination shows that four of these cases (ISTP, INTP, ESTP and ENTP) are unlikely to be due to chance factors alone ($p < 0.001$).

Table 1 also shows those types for which females recorded higher proportions than did males (i.e., where the Index scores are less than 1). Such gender-related differences were seen for ISFJ, ENTP and ENFJ (all $p < 0.001$) and for INFJ and INFP (both $p < 0.01$).

Statistically, nine of the 16 types show significant differences in frequencies between the genders.

Table 2 depicts the differences by gender in the proportions of each of the four pairs of MBTI preferences.

For three of the four pairs the differences are very unlikely to be due to chance alone ($p < 0.001$).

The **E-I** distributions show no statistical difference, with both genders reporting preferences of about 70% for extraversion and about 30% for introversion.

Table 2: Comparison of preference patterns (male versus female)

	Males	Females	
E : I	72% : 28%	70% : 30%	n. s.
S : N	48% : 52%	39% : 61%	***
T : F	43% : 57%	25% : 75%	***
J : P	27% : 73%	35% : 65%	***

Careers Archive. n (*male*) = 1085, n (*female*) = 1598.

Each of the other preferences is differentiated by gender. While males are close to evenly distributed on **S-N**, the female distribution is slanted more heavily towards intuition (61%) than sensing (39%).

The same pattern is found for **T-F**, but somewhat more marked: 25% of females prefer thinking and 75% prefer feeling.

Males show a stronger and marked preference for a perceiving orientation (73%) over judging (27%).

The modal type for males is **ENFP**, the same as for females—but the underlying distributions show different patterns between the genders. The *MBTI Manual* (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk & Hammer, 1998) describes the ENFP type in the following terms:

For people with ENFP preferences, life is a creative adventure full of exciting possibilities. ENFPs are keenly perceptive about people and insightful about the present and

the future. They experience a wide range of feelings and intense emotions. They need affirmation from others and readily give appreciation and support. (p 79)

This description would apply to one in four of the teenagers in this sample.

The distributions of the **temperaments** also show variation.

Both of the temperaments that involve *intuition* indicate significant differences in gender comparisons. More females (50%) than males (34%) report the NF (Idealist) temperament ($p < 0.001$), while the pattern is reversed for NT (Rational), with 18% of males and 12% of females ($p < 0.001$).

For the temperaments involving *sensing* there is no significant difference for the SJ (Guardian) temperament (17% of males and 19% of females), but the SP (Artisan) temperament shows a clear difference: 31% of males and 19% of females ($p < 0.001$).

Discussion

It is clear that these type distributions for teenagers participating in career planning are quite dissimilar to those in samples of adult Australians (Ball 2005). For adults, the ISTJ type ranks first in frequency for both genders (22% of males and 10% for females).

The frequency for ENFP varies widely between the adult and teenager data sets. In the adult results, about 4% of males and 9% of females express an ENFP preference.

The contrast between the data sets may be due to a number of factors, including contrasting inter-generational trends.

It is possible that the reported results were affected by the career planning context, but this seems unlikely, given the strength of the differences in type distributions. Why would a career planning process produce a distorted picture of type? What would teenagers have to gain by deliberately falsifying their responses to the MBTI and then validating their results using the descriptions of the 16 types?

The ENFP frequency varies widely between adults and teenagers

Are teenagers validating their type in terms of how they would like to be?

There is no evidence that these teenagers shared their responses to the MBTI items in some systematic way, across so many different school types and contexts, to portray a particular set of impressions.

Another possible explanation is that these distributions reflect the values of today's educational systems, through exposure to a common set of values embodied in the curriculum. It is true that these students have been schooled during a period marked by many programs and initiatives designed to widen choices for females, and to encourage students to view themselves as being able to make positive contributions to their communities. Perhaps this may help to explain the strong findings for particular preferences.

Can the importance of friends, family and the media in the formation of identity be a relevant factor? What are the messages in the mass media that are consciously and unconsciously absorbed by citizens?

Consider the messages about body image and attractiveness portrayed in *Home and Away*. Look at the emphases on competition and the reinforcement of extraverted behaviour fostered by *Big Brother*. Which role models influence today's teenagers? Do they affect how teenagers develop their preferences for receiving and processing information and making decisions?

Has the complexity and uncertainty of living in the 21st Century engendered a tendency towards the preference for the perceiving orientation over the judging orientation?

Are the differences a reflection of a paradigm shift in community values? Is this evidence of the type these teenagers are reporting and validating on the MBTI in terms of how they actually *are*, or rather descriptions of how they would *like to be*?

References

- Ball, I L (2005) Under the Southern Cross (part 2): Type distributions in Australia, by age, gender and occupation. *Australian Psychological Type Review*, 7, 1, 5-8
- Myers, I B, McCaulley, M H, Quenk, N L & Hammer, A L (1998). *MBTI Manual: A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. 3e Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto CA

The Australian MBTI Data Archive needs *your* MBTI forms

The Australian **MBTI Data Archive** invites contributions of **completed MBTI forms**.

Submission of your forms is subject to the following conditions:

- **Confidentiality.** Deakin University's institutional ethics committee requires answer sheets to be submitted without respondents' names. Please white out the names, blacken them, or cut them out of the answer sheets.
- **Consent.** It is expected that respondents will have given informed consent for their data to be entered into the Data Archive. Submission of answer sheets implies consent to take part in the research.
- **Demographic data.** Inclusion of details of respondents' ages, genders, occupations, education and state of residence would be appreciated.
- **Labelling.** Please provide the nature of the group data being submitted, and the reason for the typing of the individuals (e.g. career guidance, job application, professional development, training, etc).

Material for the MBTI Data Archive may be directed to at:

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