CLIENT PERCEPTIONS OF THERAPEUTIC FACTORS IN THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR (MBTI) AS A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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Abstract

This study explored participants' experiences of engagement with the collaborative group interpretation of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). It adapts the collaborative model described by Newman and Greenway (1997) in their study using Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 results. Participants were 12 adults recruited from the general population in a large urban centre who were interested in obtaining MBTI results. All participants simultaneously completed the collaborative group administration and interpretation of the MBTI in a four-hour session and immediately completed a self-report questionnaire. Five weeks after the interpretation session three participants completed follow-up interviews, and field notes summarizing my observations as the primary researcher and facilitator were made throughout. Data were analyzed via constant comparative analysis and interpreted through a constructivist lens. Participants all indicated an engaging experience that was both meaningful and useful. Participants described four characteristics attributed to the MBTI that facilitated their experiences of engagement: (a) it validated participants' self-perceptions, experiences, and the different preferences of others; (b) it provided a framework and vocabulary for exploring individual differences; (c) it explicitly allows for both individual variability and change over time; and (d) it is accessible and readily transferable to lived experience. Participants also described the collaborative group interpretation process as a significant contributor to their experiences of engagement. Overall, the findings support the efficacy of the MBTI as a therapeutic intervention.
Client Perceptions of Therapeutic Factors in the MBTI

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I. Introduction

Although it has long been the practice of many counselling professionals to engage with clients in a collaborative process of test interpretation, assessment is all too frequently approached within the psychotherapeutic paradigm as a tool for diagnosis and categorization; as something that is done to clients rather than with them. The mandate for assessment has been to yield a product, whether it is a score, a profile, or a designation. The current trend toward postmodern theoretical frameworks for psychotherapy (Mahoney & Marquis, 2002), and their fundamental commitment to therapist engagement with clients in a process of co-construction (Gergen, 1994), invites a repositioning of the role and mandate of assessment. To remain consistent with changes in the psychotherapeutic paradigm, assessment must be reconceptualized as a collaborative process that engages the client and the therapist in co-constructing new or more adaptive meanings. The interpretation of assessment results with clients can provide a vocabulary, a framework, and an opportunity for clients to begin making sense of themselves and their lives in new and different ways.

Clinical experience suggests that the interpretation of assessment results with clients, when framed within the post-modern theoretical paradigm, has immense therapeutic merit as an intervention. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), in particular, can be used to good effect as a therapeutic intervention with a wide variety of adult clients. Among the advantages of the MBTI are: (a) It is an assessment designed for use with non-clinical populations, and does not purport to diagnose 'abnormality' so there is no fear of stigmatizing clients by assigning a negative label; (b) it is a measure that encompasses the entire possible universe of preferences, no client is excluded from the MBTI system of categorization, so it is applicable to all possible
clients; and (c) the requirement that clients 'verify' their type ensures that the result arrived at is one that is 'taken' or owned by the client rather than 'assigned' by the assessor.

There are a number of accounts in the literature describing the process of assessment as a therapeutic intervention from the counsellor's perspective (Finn & Tonsager, 1992; R. A. Neimeyer, 1993), but there are no comparable studies examining the experience from the client's perspective. Counsellors' efforts to refine the use of assessment as a therapeutic intervention can be aided by, and ought to be informed by, clients' perspectives on the benefits, advantages, drawbacks and difficulties associated with the experience. In a therapeutic paradigm that emphasizes the importance of collaboration between client and counsellor, it seems appropriate that the collaborative nature of the endeavor should extend beyond the confines of the counselling room to include the development and refinement of therapeutic tools as well.

**Purpose of the Study**

In order to better understand precisely what happens when clients engage with the interpretation of the MBTI within the therapeutic context, I undertook a qualitative exploration of clients' experiences with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI as a therapeutic intervention, using a mixed methods research design incorporating direct observation of the interpretation, a self-report questionnaire, and follow-up interviews with selected participants. It is my hope that by examining and reporting clients' experiences with the MBTI, the current study will contribute to a greater appreciation among practitioners of the therapeutic value of the collaborative interpretation of assessment results, decrease perceptions of assessment as diagnosis, and increase perceptions of assessment as an opportunity for transformative engagement. The research question was: "what (if any) are clients' experiences of engagement with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI?" The investigation included an exploration of
how clients describe the instrument, the process, and differences in the ways clients engage with the experience.
II. Literature Review

A number of assumptions underlie the current study, contributing to the formulation of the question(s) and informing the analysis of the results. In order to clarify the conceptualization of the research questions, and maintain appropriate transparency with respect to the biases of the primary researcher, it is necessary to articulate these assumptions. Relevant assumptions pertain to the nature of human experience, change processes, and the counselling relationship; and the use of assessment, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in particular, as a therapeutic intervention within the counselling paradigm. The focus of enquiry is the therapeutic factors or characteristics of the MBTI as perceived by participants. The sections of the literature review can be mapped loosely onto these assumptions, each of which is explicated and then explored in some depth. The framework within which this study is positioned posits a constructivist orientation to human experience, change processes, and the counselling relationship. It is further assumed that the counselling relationship, and counsellor empathy or collaborative ‘engagement’ with the client in particular, is fundamental to successful therapeutic outcomes and client change. It is argued that within this model, the collaborative use of assessment represents an effective therapeutic intervention, and that the MBTI is particularly appropriate for use as a therapeutic intervention.

*Constructivist Paradigm*

Although it can trace a legacy far back into written and oral history, constructivism is a term that is just now making its way into the vocabulary of psychology. It does not appear, as yet, in most dictionaries of psychology. If one looks at the psychological literature over the past quarter-century, however, it is
being used with increasing frequency. "Constructive" and "constructivist" are being used, for example, to describe developing perspectives in domains ranging from biology and brain science to cognitive-behavioral, humanistic, and psychoanalytic psychotherapies. (Mahoney & Marquis, 2002)

As suggested in the excerpt above from Mahoney and Marquis, constructivism is still coming into its own as an accepted theoretical orientation within psychology. The term 'constructivism' has been adopted here as the one which most accurately captures the constellation of assumptions contributing to my worldview, my beliefs about human nature and change processes, and my approach to counselling. An appropriate subtitle for constructivism, as seen through my eyes, might be 'the human meaning making enterprise'. (G. J. Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1993) Central to the constructivist approach to counselling is the assertion that there is no fixed 'objective' reality. Each individual constructs their own reality based on assumptions, experience, expectations and their relationships with others. These personal realities are subject to constant revision as individuals integrate new experiences. (Mahoney & Lyddon, 1998; Mahoney & Marquis, 2002) Within the counselling paradigm, constructivism asserts the importance of a client-centered approach. Recognizing that the counsellor's reality is no more privileged or correct than is the client's reality underscores the importance of honouring the client's worldview. Client change is described as a process of remaking meaning, whether through changes in assumptions or expectations, the integration of new experiences, or learning how to 'tell a different story'. Change is the client's responsibility; indeed, only the client is empowered to change their meaning making processes. Thus, counselling is understood as a partnership between client and counsellor in which each brings their own particular expertise: the counsellor with respect to therapeutic processes and the client with respect to themselves.
These basic assumptions about the human meaning-making enterprise and change processes constitute my biases, and inform both the conceptualization of the current study and the analysis of the data.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

"The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a 93 item test that classifies respondents into one of sixteen personality types, according to Jung’s theory of psychological types, based upon their scores on four dichotomous scales: Extraversion (E) – Introversion (I), Sensing (S) – Intuition (N), Thinking (T) – Feeling (F), and Judging (J) – Perceiving (P). For each scale, respondents are classified by one of the two preferences, yielding a four-letter combination representative of personality type. (Briggs Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998) The magnitude of scores on any given preference indicate “clarity of preference” rather than strength of trait.” (Robertson, 2001)

The stated objective of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is “… to make Jung’s theory of psychological types understandable and useful in people’s lives. The authors emphasize that the MBTI identifies preferences rather than competencies and describes normal, adaptive behaviour rather than pathology. No type is considered more adaptive than others. Verification of the accuracy of the indicated type by the respondent is essential to the theoretical conceptualization of type, the MBTI does not “tell” respondents who they are, it merely identifies, according to Jung’s type theory, the way they have chosen to be.” (Robertson, 2001) For these reasons, I concluded that the MBTI is particularly appropriate for use with normally adaptive populations in such settings as counselling, education, organizational development or research.
One of the greatest advantages of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as an assessment tool is that it does not pathologize behaviour and hence does not have the same stigmatizing potential as many other measures. As the manual suggests:

The standard of “normality” against which behavior is judged tends to depend on the prevailing societal and professional view of mental health and psychological adaptation. Jung’s observation of consistent, nonpathological individual differences in his patients casts doubt on such a normative view and provides the most compelling reason for taking type into account in psychotherapy and counseling settings. A systematic conception of normal personality differences such as that afforded by psychological type enables mental health practitioners to discriminate between behaviors that are “normal” for one type but may signal difficulties for another type. (Briggs Myers et al., 1998), p. 224)

As a result of this emphasis on normal individual differences as opposed to pathological differences, clients often experience the MBTI as validating and affirming (Briggs Myers et al., 1998). Thus, in addition to providing clients with a framework and vocabulary for structuring therapeutic change, the MBTI may empower clients to change through validating and affirming their normal individual differences. This notion of affirming individual differences is consistent with a constructivist approach to psychotherapy in that it acknowledges both the validity and the viability of multiple ways of making sense of the world or of constructing reality (Mahoney & Marquis, 2002).

*Psychometric properties of the MBTI.*

A thread of lively debate runs through the research literature on the MBTI about the psychometric properties of type scores obtained using the Indicator. There is general consensus
that reliability coefficients (split-half and test-retest) are respectable (Capraro & Capraro, 2002; Carlson, 1989; Harvey, 1996; Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2002) for type scores associated with "moderate" or higher scores on the preference clarity index, although it has been suggested that additional research is required to demonstrate reliability of type scores over long test-retest intervals (Carlson, 1989). Low test-retest reliability of type scores associated with "low" preference clarity scores, while consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the MBTI, have been the focus of much debate within the literature (Briggs Myers et al., 1998; Harvey, 1996; Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2002).

There is agreement within the literature that MBTI type scores "... have high face validity for many clients..." (Carlson, 1989; Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2002). There are "large amounts of empirical data" (Harvey, 1996) supporting the criterion validity of MBTI type scores, and there has been little contention in the literature of either of these two claims to validity. There has, however, been considerable debate about construct validity with respect to the dichotomous scales (E-I, S-N, T-F, and J-P) (Carlson, 1989). The forced-choice response format of the MBTI supports the classification of each respondent into one of two dichotomous categories on each scale. It has been objected that while "... Jung conceptualized personality as involving distinct preferences for attitudes and functions over their polar opposites (e.g., E vs. I), he did not assume that all people have definitive preferences." (Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2002, p.174). Raw scores on the MBTI are weighted in such a way that respondents cannot score at the mid-point on any scale; thus, even respondents with no definitive preference will obtain type scores suggesting one categorical preference or the other. The MBTI Manual anticipates such instances, and provides comprehensive direction to practitioners for the interpretation of low-clarity responses. (Briggs Myers et al., 1998, p. 122). This nuance of
interpretation is often lost when MBTI scores are treated and analyzed as quantitative data. This invites a consideration of the consequential validity of MBTI type scores, about which the literature has remained largely silent. In their 1989 debate on the utility of the MBTI, both Carlson (pro) and Healy (con) intimate that additional evidence of the consequential validity of MBTI type scores is required. With these exceptions, however, the literature explicitly reviewing the validity of MBTI scores does not include contextual information confirming adherence to the published guidelines for interpretation and identifying the application of the scores.

Research on Various Applications of the MBTI

In 1996, Consulting Psychologists Press, the publisher of the MBTI, released a compendium summarizing research on applications of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The stated rationale for the publication of MBTI Applications: A decade of research on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Hammer, 1996a) is the belief that “... effective and ethical use of the instrument will be enhanced if practitioners are knowledgeable about the available research (p. 1).” Each contributor also recommends areas for future research based on identified deficits in the existing literature within the area of application under consideration.

Applications of the MBTI of greatest interest to this study may be organized into broad categories: (a) educational applications, (b) career-related applications, (c) business applications, and (d) psychotherapy applications. A brief overview of the research literature in each of these four areas is provided below.

Educational applications.

Perhaps the most-researched applications of MBTI type scores, by sheer volume of studies, are in the area of education (DiTiberio, 1996). Areas of enquiry include: the
relationships between MBTI type scores and learning styles, the interaction of learners’ types and teachers’ types, and the correlation between type scores and academic aptitude and achievement. Evidence consistently confirms the accuracy of type-based predictions of learning styles. For example, Extraverts value active experimentation and collaborative learning, while Introverts value reflective observation and lectures (DiTiberio, 1996). With respect to the interaction of learners’ types with teachers’ types, “... more studies have produced nonsignificant results... than those with statistical significance...” (DiTiberio, 1996). Finally, with respect to academic aptitude and achievement, the only consistently predictive type scores are Intuition, which correlates positively with general academic aptitude, and Judging, which correlates positively with academic achievement (DiTiberio, 1996, p. 144).

Career-related applications.

“One of the first major efforts at applied research with the MBTI was in the area of careers (Hammer, 1996c).” The most common use of type scores within the field of career counselling is the comparison of clients’ scores with summary information of the distribution of type scores within target occupations. Empirical evidence supports the assertion that MBTI type scores are predictive of occupational choice (Hammer, 1996c). Studies examining the relationship between type scores and job satisfaction are less compelling, despite a great deal of research. Hammer’s one clear conclusion is that “... those who are dissatisfied in an occupation tend to be those types who are opposite from the modal type in the occupation (Hammer, 1996c).” A second line of enquiry with respect to the use of MBTI type scores within the area of career counselling turns the attention away from career outcomes, to focus on process issues (Hammer, 1996c). This emerging line of enquiry examines the implications of type for the career exploration and decision-making process. Of particular relevance to the current study is
research conducted by the National Research Council (NRC) as part of a 1991 review of the MBTI. The NRC study summarizes self-report data provided by respondents (sample size unspecified) five months after completing the MBTI. While the data are descriptive rather than exploratory, the study is the one example within the research literature of examining respondents' experiences of the MBTI to explicitly incorporate the respondents' perspectives.

Business applications.

MBTI type scores are applied in business contexts in two ways: (a) in the development or analysis of management and leadership styles (Walck, 1996), and, (b) in team-building scenarios emphasizing interpersonal communication (Hammer & Huszczo, 1996d).

Although research into the use of type scores within the area of management and leadership has proven predominantly inconclusive, one conclusion supported by Walck's (1996) research is the positive correlation between a preference for Feeling and avoidant, accommodating and compromising approaches to conflict management. (Walck, 1996, p. 67) Another interesting conclusion is that within the management context, task type is a better predictor of decision-making approach than is a manager's type score. Perhaps the most interesting outcome of research on the MBTI as applied to management and leadership is the identification of a fundamental tension between those pursuing descriptive research (generally psychologists) and those pursuing predictive research (generally management scientists). Of interest to the current study is the proposal for further research using an interpretive paradigm:

Instead of using questionnaires, which attempt to capture behavior with the researcher's predetermined categories for behavior, the researcher observes behavior as it emerges in the workplace and uses methods like in-depth interviews to get open-ended responses and the subject's point of view on what is happening.
This kind of inquiry can explore process, and it produces a way of knowing about behavior that anthropologists have traditionally considered reliable. (Walck, 1996, p. 73.)

While the area of application in question is different, the interpretive paradigm proposed above captures the intentions of the current study.

Research into the use of MBTI scores in the context of team dynamics suggests one consistent overarching conclusion: ease of process and quality of outcome are inversely correlated. Based on their meta analysis of team studies using the MBTI, Hammer and Huszczo (1996) suggest that communication (process) is easier for groups composed of individuals with similar type scores, but tasks (outcome) are not accomplished as thoroughly as they are by groups composed of individuals with diverse type scores (Hammer & Huszczo, 1996d, p. 91).

Of interest to the current research, a study “... using the MBTI as an intervention demonstrated that those who had the MBTI interpreted in a team context produced a higher quality outcome than did those who did not have the interpretation... [but] ... also evidenced more role conflict...” (Hammer & Huszczo, 1996d), suggesting that an awareness of the interpersonal implications of type for team dynamics can lead to improved outcome, but may increase the interpersonal effort required to achieve that outcome. Although the current study does not ask participants to collaboratively produce any specific outcome, it does replicate the group administration and interpretation of the MBTI used by Hammer and Huszczo (1996).

_Psychotherapy applications._

Research on the MBTI in counselling and psychotherapy focuses almost exclusively on either the correlations between MBTI type scores and other variables such as counselling outcomes (Quenk & Quenk, 1996), incidence of seeking counselling (Quenk & Quenk, 1996),
and coping resources (Shelton, 1996); or interactions between MBTI type scores and other variables such as therapists’ MBTI type scores (Quenk & Quenk, 1996) and therapeutic approaches (Quenk & Quenk, 1996). Williams and Tappan (1995) present a model for using the MBTI in couples counselling, suggesting that practitioners at least have begun this line of inquiry, but to date, no study has been published substantiating their model. Quenk and Quenk (1996) conclude:

Glaringly absent from the research on counseling and psychotherapy are studies that look at the effects of using type knowledge on the conduct of counseling and psychotherapy. … The general issue here is whether actually using type theory and the MBTI makes any difference. … Systematic evidence from researchers verifying or negating this belief would indeed be a major contribution to the field. (Quenk & Quenk, 1996, p. 105)

Thus, while research has been undertaken exploring the application of MBTI type scores to counselling, there is no research addressing the use of the MBTI in counselling (Healy, 1989); (Quenk & Quenk, 1996), nor is there any research specifically addressing clients’ subjective experiences of the MBTI.

Vacha-Haase and Thompson (2002) suggest, “… the primary counseling utility of most tools lies not in the scores themselves but rather in the framework a given measure provides for thinking about personality characteristics and as a starting point for presenting and discussing these dynamics with counselees.” It is suggested that the MBTI provides a framework for understanding personality and behaviour which, in and of itself, may prove beneficial to counselling clients, in other words, that the MBTI may be used as a therapeutic intervention. While no research has specifically addressed the use of the MBTI as a therapeutic intervention,
Newman and Greenway (1997), following Finn and Tonsager (1992), undertook a study exploring the use of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) as a therapeutic intervention, which will be described in detail in the following section.

Assessment as Therapeutic Intervention

Psychological tests and assessments are typically used within the counselling paradigm to provide diagnostic information to the counsellor about the client. This information generally takes the form of a ‘product’, whether a designation, a diagnosis, or the categorization of the client or their concerns. Rarely, in the literature, are tests and assessments treated as ‘process’ within the counselling paradigm. Thus, the notion of collaborative assessment may be novel for clients, who often have (negative) preconceptions about the assessment process, including distrust of the instrument, fear of being labelled, and concerns about the uses that will be made of the results. (Finn, 1996) Counsellors may find it necessary to introduce the idea of collaborative assessment and to clearly explain both the limitations of the instrument and the uses that may be made of the results before clients will be comfortable engaging in the collaborative assessment process.

To demonstrate that psychological assessment may be effectively employed as a therapeutic intervention, Newman and Greenway (1997) replicated and refined an earlier study by Finn and Tonsager (Finn & Tonsager, 1992), investigating “... the therapeutic impact of providing feedback from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) to university students considering counseling services.” They concluded that “... test result feedback seems to be the crucial element contributing to therapeutic effect, at least when offered using the collaborative model [italics added].” (p. 128) Within the collaborative assessment paradigm, “The client is actively encouraged by the assessor to begin problem solving, initially
by defining the questions for the assessment, then by deciding whether the interpretation is relevant or not, and finally, by being involved in developing strategies for change.” The collaborative model of delivery of test result feedback is critical to the proposition that psychological assessments are an effective therapeutic intervention. Newman and Greenway (1997) conclude that, “Further research should evaluate specific components of this method to identify the distinctive therapeutic value of each component.”

Newman and Greenway (1997) have demonstrated the efficacy of the collaborative interpretation of assessment results in contributing to increased client self-esteem and decreased symptomatic distress. However, their study did not identify the mechanisms by which these effects were achieved. It is hoped that the current qualitative enquiry into clients’ experiences of the collaborative interpretation of assessment results will help to address their call for an evaluation of the specific therapeutic value of components of the collaborative assessment model.

“One of the distinctive features of constructivist metatheory is its twin focus on both the structure and process of human knowing and the implications that both carry for the counseling context. … Thus, at a practical level, it may be useful to distinguish between methods of assessment that attempt to elucidate the implicit structure or organization of a client’s belief system and those that focus on the process, flow, and change of such constructions across time.” (R. A. Neimeyer, 1993), p. 58). The present study aims to examine both elements of the human meaning making enterprise, exploring the structure of clients’ belief systems and their processes of constructing those systems as exemplified by their experience with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI. Newman (1997) has suggested that the use of the MMPI-2 as a therapeutic intervention can provide both a framework and a vocabulary for clients to use in
remaking meaning within the therapeutic context. Finn (1996) further suggests that “... the general method and principles may be applied (with modifications) to other tests...” (p. 5). It is suggested that the MBTI similarly provides clients with a framework and vocabulary for remaking meaning or engaging in change processes.

**Collaborative Interpretation of the MBTI**

The collaborative interpretation model used by Newman and Greenway (1997) in their study of the MMPI-2 as a therapeutic intervention is consistent with the guidelines provided by the publisher for the interpretation of the MBTI (Briggs Myers et al., 1998). Critical elements of the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI include providing participants with an introduction to type prior to the administration of the instrument and emphasizing that the definitive outcome of the assessment is ultimately the one endorsed by the participant. More detail about the process for collaboratively administering and interpreting the MBTI is provided in the methods section (p. 12). A copy of the outline used for the group interpretation session is included in Appendix B.

**Rationale for the Current Study**

To address some of the unanswered questions raised by the existing research reviewed above, the current mixed methods study was designed to explore: (a) The process of assessment as a therapeutic intervention from the client’s perspective; (b) the consequential validity of MBTI scores; (c) whether using the MBTI makes any difference to the conduct of counselling; and (d) the distinctive therapeutic value of specific components of the collaborative interpretation model.
III. Method

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a personality assessment instrument, measures personality style or 'preferences'. It is frequently used to explore personal options, predominantly in career decision-making contexts, and to explore interpersonal dynamics, often in team-building contexts. My experience using the MBTI with clients during the course of therapy has suggested that the instrument has merit as a therapeutic intervention in and of itself. The study explored clients' perceptions of the therapeutic factors experienced during the administration and interpretation of the MBTI. Participants' self reports about their experiences with the instrument provided insight into the elements or characteristics of the MBTI that allow clients to derive therapeutic benefit from the collaborative administration and interpretation of the MBTI. The research design followed a mixed methods approach using a structured questionnaire administered in a group format followed by open-ended interviews administered individually with a subset of participants.

Choice of Methodology

Given that the research question asks about clients' experiences of engagement with the MBTI, the focus of enquiry in the current study is the subjective experiences of clients or participants. In order to access these subjective experiences, it is necessary to engage with participants within their own individual frames of reference, and in their own terminology. Thus, the mechanisms for collecting data rely heavily upon self-report. The self-report questionnaire was chosen as an ideal balance between direct access to participants' experiences and ease of administration. The exploratory nature of the study dictates that the structural parameters for organizing the collection and analysis of data had to be flexible and adaptive in order to accommodate whatever the data themselves suggested. The follow-up interview was
included to enable adjustments to the parameters of data collection "mid-study", as it were, to accommodate unexpected or emergent trends in the data. This emergent research design allowed the research to follow the results in whatever direction the data suggested.

Participants

Participants were adults recruited from the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), who self-selected based upon an interest in taking the MBTI, and who were willing to share their experiences with the instrument for research purposes. Participants were required to possess functional English language fluency, both written and spoken, to fulfill the self-report expectations of the study.

The MBTI is sufficiently well known and popular that no difficulty was anticipated in attracting participants. (Hammer, 1996a; Healy, 1989; Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2002) One of the objectives in recruiting participants was to attract participants of all possible MBTI types. In order to achieve this, advertising was targeted in a variety of ways to appeal to individuals with different preferences.

Applicants for participation would have been excluded if they were not legally adults, if the researcher deemed their English-language fluency insufficient to meaningfully communicate their experiences, or if, for any reason, the primary researcher had concerns about their appropriateness for inclusion in a group administration and interpretation of the MBTI. No prospective participants were excluded from participating in the study.

Subjects were asked to commit to 5-6 hours: 1/2 hour telephone screening, 3.5 hours test administration and interpretation, 1 hour for self-report questionnaire, and a 1 hour qualitative, open-ended audio taped interview.
Although the study proposed to mimic the therapeutic context, the parameters of the study did not permit the development of a sustained counselling relationship with any of the participants, thus, participants were screened to ensure that expectations for the assessment were reasonable.

Recruitment strategy.

Recruitment was approached via several different methods with the objective of attracting a diverse group of participants. Posters were placed at The University of British Columbia’s Point Grey Campus, at UBC’s Robson Square Campus, and at Community Centres throughout the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). Participants were also solicited via word-of-mouth by e-mail distribution to Counselling students, especially those undertaking practicum placements in various settings, with the request that they disseminate recruitment posters within their placement agencies.

Procedures

The study consisted of several stages: initial contact, screening telephone conversations, group administration and interpretation of the MBTI, self-report questionnaire, follow-up interviews with selected participants, transcription of audio taped interviews, and analysis of the data. A detailed description of each of these stages follows.

Initial contact.

Initial contact was made by prospective participants in response to recruitment activities. Recruitment materials directed interested individuals to contact the primary researcher by telephone or e-mail (see Appendix A).
Telephone screening.
Subsequent to initial contact, I screened participants via telephone interview for inclusion in the study. Screening items included: a) age of majority, b) verbal fluency in English, c) interest, d) time commitment, e) availability, f) evidence of appropriate social and communication skills during the telephone conversation, g) reasonable expectations, and h) willingness to provide informed consent.

Participants were provided with a brief introduction to the study, and when they had agreed to participate, were invited to attend the collaborative administration and interpretation of the MBTI. Terms of consent were explored during the screening telephone conversation between researcher and participant, and participants were asked to review and sign a written consent form immediately prior to the administration and interpretation of the MBTI.

Collaborative group administration and interpretation of the MBTI.
This session entailed an introduction to the study, an explanation of the subsequent stages in the process, and participants were asked to sign an informed consent form to secure their permission to use data resulting from the study for research purposes. A single form was used to secure consent for participation in all aspects of the study.

The MBTI is a written assessment completed individually. The MBTI (Form M, self-scorable) was administered to all participants simultaneously and interpreted in a group setting within a classroom at UBC during the Spring of 2005. The group session took approximately 4 hours, and included a break. During the course of the group session, I observed participants and noted my observations at the end of the session.

The collaborative administration and interpretation of the MBTI began with an introduction to Jungian typology and an explanation of the four dichotomies described by the
Client Perceptions of Therapeutic Factors in the MBTI

MBTI. Characteristics of typology which were emphasized, in lay language, included: it is
descriptive rather than diagnostic (you tell it, it doesn’t tell you), and it describes preferences
rather than abilities (what you like to do, not what you’re good at) or traits (what you do most
often, not what you always do).

The orientation to type included a description of type dynamics and type development.
Briefly, type dynamics refers to the way in which the functions and orientations described by the
MBTI interact in combination. For each four-letter type, there is a dominant or most preferred
function. Depending upon whether the individual prefers to take in information (perceiving) or
make decisions (judging), the dominant function will be either the perceiving function (Sensing
or Intuition) or the judging function (Thinking or Feeling). The dominant function is
characteristically supported by the secondary function which provides whichever function is not
represented by the dominant function. Thus, an individual with a dominant judging function will
have a secondary perceiving function. This hierarchy continues through the tertiary function,
and culminates with the inferior function, which is the dichotomous opposite to the dominant
function. The individual with a dominant (judging function) preference for Thinking will have
an inferior (judging function) preference for Feeling. Type development refers to the assumption
that over the course of the life span, individuals continually practice and refine their use of each
of the four functions, beginning with the dominant (or most preferred) and culminating with
refinement of their use of the inferior function.

After an opportunity to clarify their understanding and discuss the implications of type
dynamics and type development, participants were asked to identify their preferences on each of
the four dichotomies, thereby estimating their MBTI type. These estimates were subsequently
compared to the results provided by the indicator, and used as part of the process for verifying type.

Participants were then asked to complete the self-scorable Form M, a pencil and paper version of the MBTI which can be scored by participants. The primary researcher led participants through the interpretation and verification of type as indicated by the MBTI Manual (Briggs Myers et al., 1998). The verification of type provides an opportunity for a final “sign off” by the participants, ensuring that their self-assessment takes precedence, if necessary, over the results indicated by the measure.

The MBTI is often best “experienced” when interpreted to a group containing individuals with a variety of preferences so that participants can experience “type in action”. A group administration and interpretation was selected to ensure that participants had the most thorough experience possible of the effects of the preferences described by the MBTI. Interpretative discussion was interspersed with experiential examples to emphasize the real-life implications of type. An experiential exercise was implemented to illustrate each of the four dichotomies. For example, to illustrate the differences between the Sensing and Intuitive perceiving preferences, participants were divided into two groups based upon their preference for Sensing or Intuition, and asked to complete a task based upon perception. After a timed viewing of a painting, the painting was removed and groups were charged with describing it. The two groups then reported back to each other, sharing their descriptions. Typically, descriptions provided by those with a preference for sensing are factual and detail-oriented and descriptions provided by those with a preference for intuition are interpretive and speculative. Participants were encouraged to discuss the different responses and to explore the real-life implications of observed differences. They
were invited to ask questions as they arose throughout the course of the interpretation session. For a summary outline of the group interpretation process see Appendix B.

**Self-report questionnaire.**

At the conclusion of the administration of the MBTI and interpretation session, participants were asked to complete a self-report questionnaire exploring their experiences with the MBTI. It took participants between 20 minutes and 1 hour to complete the questionnaire. (See Appendix C.) Areas of enquiry addressed by the questionnaire include: items or dimensions of greatest relevance to participants; changes, if any, in participants' self-awareness; participants' perceptions of implications for specific interpersonal relationships; participants' expectations of applying results within their lives; and participants' perceptions of beneficial or detrimental effects of their experiences of the administration and interpretation of the MBTI.

**Follow-up interview with selected participants.**

A subset of participants was selected for follow-up interviews, based upon the results of the self-report questionnaire. The purpose of the follow up interviews was to seek clarification on specific responses given in the self-report questionnaire. Participants were selected for facility with expression and varity of responses to enable the researcher to address the broadest possible range of experiences with the instrument. After the primary researcher had an opportunity to review the self-report questionnaires, selected participants were contacted by telephone and asked to participate in the interview. All three participants invited to participate agreed to the follow up interview. Interviews were conducted five weeks after the administration/interpretation session, and lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. Interviews were audio recorded. Consent to participate in an audio taped interview was obtained at the time of initial consent prior to the administration of the MBTI.
Participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions that had arisen since the interpretation session. The interview explored participants' most salient and persistent experiences of the interpretation, and the MBTI (i.e., what has stayed with you?). Participants were asked to describe any use they had made of the MBTI or their results since the interpretation. In addition to exploring significant points of engagement with the MBTI, attention was paid to the way in which the participants described this engagement. The objective was to arrive at an understanding of the participant’s subjective experience of engagement with the MBTI and the thoughts, feelings, and assumptions informing that experience. In other words, the interviews investigated the meaning assigned to the experience by the participant. In closing, participants were invited to contact the assessor/researcher if they had any additional follow-up questions.

Transcription of audio taped follow-up interviews.

Audio tapes were transcribed by the primary researcher to maximize consistency of both bias and procedure in the transcription process, and to enable the inclusion in the text of contextual information not captured by the recording. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) emphasize that transcription is an interpretive process because “[t]he innumerable procedural and methodological decisions that researchers make while transcribing reflect their theoretical assumptions and rhetorical purposes.” Contextual information, including intonation, gestures, and non-verbal communication was incorporated into the text during transcription. Transcripts were edited for ease of reading including the omission of conversational pauses and the replacement of colloquial language, and for clarity of content information including the synthesis of descriptions obtained over several conversational ‘turns’, and the alteration of syntax where changes did not detract from the authenticity of the participant’s voice.
Analysis

The analysis of the data collected during the administration and interpretation session, from the self-report questionnaires, and subsequent follow-up interviews is conceptualized as exploratory and qualitative. Three main sources of data are included in the analysis including: 1) participants' responses to the self-report questionnaire, 2) transcripts of audio taped individual follow-up interviews, and 3) the primary researcher's field notes from observations throughout the study. The data collected by the questionnaire provided descriptive statistics and subjective descriptions of participants' experiences; these descriptions and the interview data have been analyzed using a constant comparative analysis (see below), and field notes inform both the interpretive process and the analysis of the data from the questionnaires and the transcripts. In constant comparative analysis, the qualitative data were read several times and meaningful statements were extracted and coded. The coded data were then categorized and by process of iterative comparison collapsed into higher order categories. These comprehensive categories were then organized into main themes for discussion purposes.

Responses to self-report questionnaire.

In addition to yielding descriptive statistics, the self-report questionnaire provided qualitative data in the form of participants' descriptions of their perceptions of, and experiences with, the MBTI. With the exception of age, no sociometric data were collected about the participants. Age data were included because the theoretical assumptions underlying the MBTI posit a developmental model implying age-related effects in the experience of preferences as measured by the MBTI. The subjective descriptions provided by participants on the self-report questionnaire constitute one source of data for post hoc analysis, and directed the selection of participants for the follow-up interviews.
Transcripts of follow-up interviews.

The narrative portions of the self-report questionnaire and the transcripts of follow-up interviews were analyzed via constant comparative analysis. Originally developed for use in grounded theory (see below), constant comparative analysis makes comparisons within and across participants to capture how one participant’s statement regarding a certain topic compares to what other participants have said with respect to the same topic. The purpose is to develop conceptualizations ‘from the ground up’, using the data to shape the emerging conceptual organization. Constant comparative analysis may be used for descriptive or interpretive approaches (i.e., where the researcher is trying to discover patterns and commonalities). Thus, the organization of the analytical portion of the study depends upon the data. Each successive engagement with the data clarifies, expands, and refines the framework for classifying both previous and subsequent data. The development of substantive theory is not an explicit objective as would be the case in a classic grounded theory approach (Merriam, 2002).

It may be suggested that the choice of constant comparative analysis, a grounded theory strategy frequently linked with positivism (Glaser, 2002) is theoretically inconsistent with the constructivist paradigm described in the literature review. There are a number of ‘voices’ within the grounded theory literature, each articulating their own assumptions of the theory and epistemology underlying grounded theory strategies and objectives. (Bryant, 2003; Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 2002). Constructivist grounded theory, as articulated by Charmaz (2000) is consistent with my theoretical orientation and the objectives of the current study. In essence, “[a] constructivist grounded theory recognizes the interactive nature of both data collection and analysis,” and “… that the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher’s interactions within the field and questions about the data.” (Charmaz, 2000)

This explicit acknowledgement of the necessary contribution of the researcher’s biases to the
interpretive process is consistent with my assumptions. As the focus of the present study is participants' experiences of engagement with the MBTI, it is necessary, in so far as is possible, to capture and preserve participants' own representations of their constructions of their experience. Constant comparative analysis, as understood within the constructive grounded theory model, prioritizes this commitment by recognizing the importance of enabling respondents to "... cast their stories in their terms." (Charmaz, 2000, p. 525)

Field notes.

Field notes include my summary notes, as both facilitator and primary researcher, on the administration session, the follow up interviews and any additional observations that arose throughout the process. One advantage to having all interpretations administered by the same facilitator is the consistency of the interpretive process across participants. It was critical, however, for me as the primary researcher to be very clear about my biases, assumptions, doubts, and concerns throughout the process. This has been addressed by including my field notes and reflections in the constant comparative analysis process along with participants' self report data.

Ethical Considerations

The most significant ethical considerations associated with the current study center on participants' confidentiality and were addressed as part of the process of obtaining informed consent. No identifying information is attached to any of the transcribed materials, and the audiotapes, transcripts, and MBTI results will be held in confidence upon completion of the study until destroyed after the five years prescribed by the American Psychological Association.
IV. Results

Results were obtained for 12 participants who underwent an intensive one-day (5 hour) experience of the collaborative group administration and interpretation of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Data consist of participants' responses to a self-report questionnaire administered at the end of the administration and interpretation session, and the transcripts of follow-up interviews conducted with three participants 5 weeks after the original session.

Demographics

Participants were 8 women and 4 men between the ages of 26 and 55 living within the Greater Vancouver Regional District in the summer of 2005. Half of the participants (n=6) were between 26 and 35 years of age, one third were between 36 and 45 (n=4), and two participants were between 46 and 55. Seven of the 12 participants identified themselves as single, and five
indicated that they were partnered. Four participants were parents. Four participants indicated that they lived alone, four lived with their partners, two lived with their parents, and two lived with roommates.

The sample was relatively homogeneous with respect to education: 11 of the participants indicated they had completed post-secondary education, and 1 had completed secondary education. Five participants were employed on a full-time basis, 4 were employed part-time, and two participants were unemployed (and described themselves as being in career transition). One participant was a full-time student, and two were part-time students. Three participants had previously taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

"Typographies"

Distribution of Type within the participant sample included 4 INFJ, 2 ENFP, 2 INTJ, 2 ISTP, 1 ISTJ and 1 INFP. For comparative purposes, a summary of the distribution of Type in a representative sample of the Canadian Anglophone population (Briggs Myers et al., 1998) is provided, along with the distribution of Type within the current sample.

The Introverted preference generally, and the preference combination INFJ in particular, were disproportionately represented among participants. Based on a 1996 sample, approximately 56% of the Canadian Anglophone population prefers Introversion. (Briggs Myers et al., 1998) The preference for Introversion was expressed by 83% of the sample in the current study. While the INFJ combination is found in only 3% of the Canadian Anglophone population (Briggs Myers et al., 1998), this combination represented 33% of the sample in the current study.
It is also noteworthy that fully 75% of the participants in the current study (n=8) are those for whom Intuition is their dominant function. Two participants claimed Thinking as their dominant function, and there were single representatives with each of Feeling and Sensing dominant.

**Forced-Choice Self-Report Data**

All participants (n=12) indicated that they would recommend taking the MBTI to others. Participants all found their MBTI results either “very” (n=8, 66%) or “somewhat” (n=4, 33%) meaningful, and “very” (n=7, 58%) or “somewhat” (n=5, 42%) useful. None of the participants selected the “not meaningful” or the “not useful” options on the self-report questionnaire. The
majority of participants (n=10, 83%) indicated that they were “very interested” in learning more about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and 58% of participants (n=7) indicated that their confidence had increased as a result of their experience with the MBTI.

Participants were asked to select from a list of descriptors those that matched their experience with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. A summary of responses follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reassuring</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberating</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Fun</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrating</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulting</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Write-in response.

Table 4.1: Summary of Descriptors of Participants’ Experiences with the MBTI.

A number of other write-in responses were provided, each occurring only once. These included: knowledgeable, ambiguous, flexible, realize potential, compelling, and catalyst.

Participants were asked to identify the dichotomous preference scale (E-I, S-N, T-F, or J-P) which was most significant for them. Responses were distributed across the four preference dichotomies, with 4 participants selecting each of Extraversion-Introversion and the Thinking-Feeling scales, and 2 participants selecting each of the Sensing-Intuition and the Judging-Perceiving scales.

Participants were asked to identify the dichotomous preference scale which seemed to explain the greatest source of interpersonal tension in their life experience. Half of the participants (n=6) indicated that the Thinking-Feeling, or decision-making preference was most
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explanatory of their experience of interpersonal tension. The remaining participants were evenly divided between citing the Extraversion-Introversion scale and the Judging-Perceiving scale as explaining the greatest source of their experience of interpersonal tension.

This concludes the summary of the forced-choice data. The balance of the results chapter represents the synthesis of narrative responses on the questionnaire and the transcripts of follow up interviews with three participants. Responses were compared across participants, and across questions. In addition to seeking clarification on specific questionnaire responses, the follow-up interviews were used as an opportunity to verify the themes emerging from the synthesis of questionnaire responses.

While there was some variety with respect to the contexts or particular relationships against which participants experimented with their understanding of the MBTI, all participants were able to apply their MBTI results to their lived experience in some way. In addition to a number of thematic domains describing properties or characteristics ascribed to the MBTI and to the collaborative interpretation process which facilitated participants’ engagement with their results, there are patterns to the ways in which (“how”) participants made sense of their MBTI results.

The analysis of survey responses and interview transcripts yields a number of emergent themes or categories describing participants’ perceptions of the characteristics of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator contributing to their experience of engagement with the MBTI. Characteristics attributed to the MBTI that participants described as facilitating their engagement include: it is validating; it provides a framework for understanding individual differences; it encompasses a non-static description of personal preferences; and it is readily transferable to lived experience. In addition, a minority of participants identified as a characteristic that
detracted from their engagement the fact that the MBTI is *culturally biased* in favour of individualism. Participants also described characteristics of the collaborative interpretation process that contributed to their experience of engagement with the MBTI. They indicated that the *experiential* components of the interpretation session facilitated their understanding of preferences and that the collaborative group administration and interpretation of the MBTI was *fun*. Examples of participants' responses informing each of these themes are provided below in the relevant sections.

*Characteristics Attributed to the MBTI*

*Validating.*

There are two distinct thematic threads encompassed by this category: personal validation, and a construct I have labelled “global validation” which encompasses participants' descriptions of the MBTI as valuing and validating all possible preference combinations equally. Thus, the MBTI is validating of both self and others.

What I have called personal validation is consistent with the accepted use of ‘validation’ within the counselling context, and encompasses ‘confirmation’ and ‘affirmation’. Participants described feeling validated in a variety of ways. One (ISTJ) participant noted, “I had an idea of my personality, and this test confirmed what I thought about myself.” Similarly, a participant preferring ISTP indicated that the MBTI “[r]eaffirmed what I inherently know already.” From an INFJ perspective, “I have found it somewhat affirming to see a concrete representation of an abstract idea such as ‘what kind of person am I’, and have used it as a bit of a compass for career path, or understanding why I have enjoyed some jobs/relationships/social settings more than others, and what I need to feel balance / well being.” A participant preferring INFJ, who had previous experience with the MBTI noted, “It re-confirmed that my Type has been consistent; it
is meaningful in that it may help me re-direct the focus of my employment at a time when I’m between jobs.” Perhaps the most comprehensive description of feeling validated by her experience with the MBTI comes from a participant preferring ENFP: “I was initially curious, but it didn’t really matter to me what the results were. However, having taken the test – the results were affirming – validating – felt good – yes, that is me – I understand me – I like who I am – value the gifts I have – and have a greater appreciation of how people who are different respond – I know how those responses affect me.”

In addition to describing the experience of personal validation, participants described a more universal experience of validation. The notion of global validation arose from the synthesis of participants’ descriptions of the MBTI as valuing and validating all possible preference combinations equally. The clearest description of this observation is offered by a participant preferring INTJ: “I also liked the idea that all of the personality preferences were presented in positive terms. No one preference was given a greater position of status. All the personality profiles were presented as worthy and valuable.” Perspectives offered by two INFJ participants position their observations against the world of human interactions: “It is meaningful to continually recognize that everyone is unique, and it takes all kinds of personalities to ‘make the world go round’,” and “I found it interesting how we all manage to accomplish things and go about our tasks and our lives, given all the variables in personality and what that implies for interaction. The possibilities amaze me. It makes communication appear an opportunity for unlimited learning and experience - we all have so much to offer.” Responding to a description of the emerging theme during the follow up interview, a participant preferring INFP offered this summary, “It’s brilliantly constructed, with 16 types and no hierarchy. Certainly, there wasn’t even a hint of ‘judging’ different Types during the workshop. Even splitting into different
groups, there was no sense that some would be better or different in some favourable way. I hadn’t though about it, but now that I do, I like it.”

*Provides framework.*

Participants’ reports suggest that one of the most engaging features of the MBTI is the provision of a framework and vocabulary for exploring lived experience with respect to both self-perception and understanding, and the effects of interpersonal differences. One (INFJ) participant “… liked being able to find explanations for things I’ve just felt before.” Similarly, another INFJ participant explained, “I like it when things are classified to some extent, or ordered for me. [It] gives me a point of reference for understanding myself and others.” An ISTJ participant underscored the importance of the vocabulary of type, “I can describe myself better. I can use words to do that.” Another INFJ participant circumscribed the utility of the framework with a qualification, “Great platform to discuss and explore who you are, but don’t expect black and white solutions!” When prompted during the follow up interview to comment upon the framework and vocabulary provided by the MBTI, an INFP participant responded, “That’s a key one. That’s very, very important. Not just the buzzwords, but the whole conceptualization of what it means in a nutshell – a wonderful starting point for understanding yourself, for reflecting on what that means.”

*Non-static.*

This theme also includes two distinct threads. The first sense of the construct I have labelled “non-static” that participants appreciated in their experiences with the MBTI is the flexibility that allows for the existence of intra-individual variability regardless of preference; the second is the developmental assumption that allows for refinement of less-preferred functions over the life span.
Participants appreciated the flexibility inherent within the Jungian model that underlies the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The acknowledgement that everyone “does” every function, that preference is a statistical tendency or measure of frequency rather than a measure of ability or aptitude was important to one INFJ participant: “This has been a rewarding experience because it reinforces that things aren’t black and white, that I have a lot of everything across the 4 MBTI dimensions.” The recognition of intra-individual variability and the representation of preferences on a continuum were important to one INTJ participant, “I liked the MBTI because it did provide ‘room’ for personalities to move along a continuum rather than rigidly categorizing them into narrowly defined ‘boxes’.”

A number of participants were particularly drawn by the developmental implications of the MBTI, specifically that over the life course it is anticipated that people will successively develop their less preferred functions. Participants commented that it was reassuring to know that they could practice their non-preferred functions and improve the comfort and grace with which they use them. For one ISTJ participant, it was important to “[k]now that I can develop or practice other dimensions in order to be more versatile.” In describing how she could use the MBTI in ‘real life’, a participant preferring INTJ planned to practice “[r]ecognizing my strengths and ‘weaker’ / ‘less preferred’ traits. I can certainly try to use these to my advantage in life, recognize ‘pitfalls’ or stressors and try to compensate for some [preferences] in interpersonal relationships (i.e., try to be a little more sensitive and respectful toward the ‘feeling’ people of the world).”

Participants were also sensitive to potential for violations in practice of this flexibility in theory. Asked to identify what they perceived were “pros” and “cons” to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the one consistent theme that emerged as a “con” was participants’ concern about the
ease with which MBTI results can be over-simplified, resulting in "pigeon-holing" individuals, thereby limiting or invalidating personal agency. One ISTP participant captured the concern, adding a caution about how to prevent it: "[it] gives preconceived notions about how someone will behave. It 'tells' a person who they are - it does so to an extent, but is abstract and we have to remember this.” The notion of “pigeon-holing” was revisited with this participant during the follow up interview. Asked for comment, he made the following association: “That’s my experience of the OMS [a personality profiling tool used by his employer]. Too much weight placed on too little information. When I talk about wanting all my friends and co-workers to take the MBTI, I’m as guilty of that as the next person. Over-generalizing.” He agreed that there is a tension between the validation experienced being accurately described and the discomfort of feeling limited by categorization. Another (INFP) participant succinctly named the tension: “it can be [over-]simplified and misunderstood.”

Transferable.

The MBTI is readily transferable to lived experience. Participants were asked a series of questions about the usefulness of the MBTI in everyday life, including what would be useful, how it would be useful, and with whom it would be useful. The diversity of applications described by participants, encompassing various situations, contexts, and relationships, underscored the transferability of the MBTI — each participant was able to transfer the MBTI experience into their life in a personally relevant way.

Generally, participants anticipated that the most useful outcome of their MBTI experience would be their heightened awareness of differences, and the implications of those differences for interpersonal communication. An ENFP participant described this as “understanding our differences more completely”, and an ISTJ participant focused on “knowing
a little bit about others' personalities in order to know how to approach people and understand them". Participants responded to a question about how the MBTI would be useful by indicating their intentions to maintain awareness of type differences and to modify their understanding and behaviour to improve communication. An INTJ participant suggested this would include "developing greater empathy and respect for others", and an ISTP participant intended "taking into account how my particular preferences are different from others". In response to a question about who the MBTI would be useful with, participants' responses included: partners, children, parents, siblings, friends, colleagues, co-workers, supervisors, administrators, and everyone really!

_Culturally biased._

One participant (ENFP) identified the MBTI as being _culturally biased_ toward "individualistic" cultures. "Coming from a 'collectivistic' culture, it is hard for me to find my true self. 'Me' I define in a relationship with others or they define 'me' a lot more than it is expected in our North American society." Similarly, a second participant (INTJ) expressed difficulty separating her "self" from specific contexts, "During the MBTI assessment, I found myself questioning several of the questions. My own understanding, values, etc. were superimposed on many of the terms and situations presented. I found I spent a lot of time thinking about various factors and life style situations that might influence my choices."

**Characteristics Attributed to the Collaborative Interpretation Process**

*Experiential components: informative and engaging.*

The *experiential* components of the interpretation session were designed to facilitate participants' understanding of preferences. Participants identified the experiential aspect of the interpretation as both informative and engaging. "The group activities were excellent in showing
the differences in each category,” according to an INFJ participant. In the words of an ISTJ participant, “The games were fun.” An ENFP participant’s take on the same question identified “enjoyment of moments of spontaneity or feelings of camaraderie with others, [and enjoyment in] learning about other people and what they do.” For an INTJ participant, “I think it is interesting to see how others respond to similar tasks (group interaction good).” Another INFJ participant was “overwhelmed by information, yet stimulated by the vast possibilities opened up in group discussions.” The opportunity to see type differences in action, paired with the guidance of an experienced moderator to identify implications, summarize patterns, and respond to questions helped to bridge the gap between theory and practice. A number of participants were able to confirm a preference about which they had been unclear after their experience of participating with a group of others sharing that preference. As described by an ISTJ participant, “It was not very clear, when I did the test, which type I am, until we did ‘the game’ [experiential activities]. The game was pretty helpful. I think if anyone wants to do the test, they should do the MBTI in a group setting with someone who knows the MBTI.”

Fun.

An unanticipated outcome is that a significant number of participants described their experience with the collaborative administration and interpretation of the MBTI as “fun”, “pleasant”, or “enjoyable”. This array of similar participant reactions has been collected under the construct “fun”. The least committal of these is the participant (INTJ) who noted, “This was fun, not really helpful for me personally, but useful professionally.” An ISTP participant indicated, “Very much enjoyed participating in the session.” More descriptively generous, an ISTJ participant summarized, “During the test I felt relaxed and I wasn’t afraid to ask or share info about myself. The activities after the test were nice and fun.” A succinct description, “It
was a very pleasant experience,” was provided by an ENFP participant. An INFJ participant was comprehensive, “I enjoyed the process, had fun, and learned a lot about myself, my type, and others.” A slightly different emphasis was placed by the INFP participant, “Enjoyed taking this time out of a very busy schedule to self-examine and reflect.” Perhaps the unasked question is captured best by this participant’s (INFP) response during the follow up interview: “Fun? It was, truly, I agree. To what extent is that because of you? Would that hold with a different facilitator?”

*Intersecting Trends in Meaning-Making*

In addition to these thematic domains describing characteristics of the MBTI, and of the collaborative interpretation process, that facilitated participants’ engagement with the assessment, the data suggest the existence of trends with respect to the ways in which participants processed or accessed the experience. These trends occur not in parallel with the themes described above, but across thematic descriptions, and might be said to intersect the themes. In exploring ways in which they might “export” their understanding of preference implications into every day life, participants tended to imaginatively focus the application of what they had learned or experienced in one of three ways: through themselves, via understanding others, or directly on the interactions between themselves and others. I have described this as the *locus of understanding*. Participants also differentially emphasized the importance of various *modes of meaning-making* when describing how they experienced and understood the MBTI interpretation: some valued the graphical presentations depicting personal preferences as occurring within a system; some valued the experiential illustrations of type differences in action; and one participant emphasized the importance of “talk” as a mode of processing information.
Locus of understanding.

The majority of participants in this study chose themselves as the locus of their understanding. They applied the MBTI to themselves and imagined exporting it to their lived experience primarily via the vehicle of their own awareness. An INTJ participant explains, “I think it helps to recognize tension in myself within interpersonal interactions. For example, I am often impatient and uncomfortable when others base their decisions on ‘feelings’ when I like to base decisions on logic and facts. Being aware of this tension might help me identify my own bias and work toward making a mutually satisfying decision while demonstrating greater respect toward others.” This construction makes it apparent that ultimately the interpersonal implications are addressed, but the access to the field of interaction is through the self. Similar approaches are described by other participants: “I’ll understand more – maybe be more patient and also assertive about who I am,” (ENFP); “Realizing the extent to which my feeling influences my decisions – much more than I was aware. This new awareness is something I will use in adjusting to challenging situations and people, with more attention to making sure I’m balanced in arriving at decisions,” (INFJ), and “[b]eing an extravert, I would like to learn how to give my husband and co-workers more time (opportunities) to express themselves. I often feel that I am doing much of the talking, and I think it is not fair” (ENFP). The last word on applying the MBTI to interpersonal interaction via the self goes to an INTJ participant: “I think what I found the most interesting was realizing how certain [preferences] were so natural / automatic to me. I think I also recognized how other [preferences] that are not dominant in my personality profile can also cause me some level of frustration in my work life and social interactions.”

One participant focused his application of the MBTI on others, and imagined exporting it to his lived experience via the vehicle of using it to better understand others’ behaviour. He imagined “knowing a little bit about others’ personalities in order to know how to approach
people and understand them” (ISTJ). Again, the interpersonal implications are ultimately addressed, but the access to the field of interaction is through perception of others’ behaviour.

Some participants applied the MBTI directly to the field of interpersonal interaction. Both self and other are considered, but the locus of understanding is the interaction itself. For one INFJ participant, the focus for applying the MBTI is “understanding the way I make decisions in consultation with others, how I like to plan and how to make best use of my style when it comes to interacting with others.” Another INFJ participant suggests that “I can recall my preferences and adapt when I recognize clashes in personality with others.” In a follow up interview, an ISTP participant clarifies his description: “At work now, I think about it all the time. ‘This is why I’m doing things the way that I am.’ I look at how other people do things, and I don’t put them in particular categories, but I do look at what they’re doing, and compare it to the way I do things, and some are closer and some are more different.” Perhaps the most succinct summary is provided by an ENFP participant, who emphasizes the importance of “understanding our differences more completely.”

*Modes of meaning-making.*

*Modes of meaning-making* is used here to describe different ways of processing information or making sense of things. A number of participants offered comments suggesting that there was one particular mode that they found very accessible or helpful in understanding type and the implications of preferences. A *graphical* or *systemic* presentation of the framework proved helpful for many participants. As described by an INTJ participant, “The grid, the continuum, and the description page you provided. These help me to put it in a framework and make it easier for me to access the information.” An INFJ participant appreciated both the graphical presentation and the *experiential* opportunities: “The explanatory material (written and
exercises) seemed extremely helpful and gave me better insight into myself.” The experiential component was particularly helpful for an ISTJ participant: “It was not very clear, when I did the test, which type I am, until we did ‘the game’. The game was pretty helpful. I think if anyone wants to do the test, they should do the MBTI in a group setting with someone who knows the MBTI.” Finally, one ENFP participant identified her preferred mode by recognizing a deficit in her experience, suggesting that it “feels impersonal, maybe, in a counselling setting, to be working with paper rather than talking. I’m not sure about this – may be very helpful with certain types.” It is noteworthy that the mode she identifies is the speaking part of talking rather than the listening part of talking, as the predominant (and unnamed by participants) mode employed throughout the administration and interpretation session was the classic ‘talking head’ lecture style. Thus, in addition to the modes of meaning-making specifically identified by participants, auditory processing was necessarily a key component in the meaning-making enterprise.

Participants’ descriptions provided both structural information about the content domain ‘characteristics of the MBTI’ relevant to their experiences of engagement and process information about the means by which participants made sense of their experience with the MBTI. Participants’ perceptions of both the content domain and the process domain have implications for the use of the MBTI as a therapeutic intervention, and these will be explored in the subsequent discussion chapter. Though it does not necessarily map conveniently to either the content or process domain as described within the current study, the most gratifying response from a therapeutic perspective is this excerpt from an interview with an ISTJ participant, “What has stuck with me is that I am interested in learning more, reading more. It was fun, but I need more. I don’t get it yet. It triggered something inside, and now I need more.”
In order to better understand precisely what happens when clients engage with the interpretation of the MBTI within the therapeutic context, I undertook a qualitative exploration of clients’ experiences with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI as a therapeutic intervention. The research question was: “what (if any) are clients’ experiences of engagement with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI?” The investigation included an exploration of how clients describe the instrument, the process, and differences in the ways clients engage with the experience.

Engagement is arguably the central construct informing the current study, and as such merits further elaboration. The sense of ‘engage’ which is intended within the research question, and throughout the study, as defined by the Oxford Reference Dictionary is, “… 6. to interlock (parts of a gear etc.) so as to transmit power; to become interlocked thus.” (Hawkins, 1986) The language used to elicit participants’ experiences of engagement was deliberately open-ended, and included such prompts as “relevant,” “meaningful,” “useful,” and questions about what “made sense.”

The evidence is that all participants can be described as having engaged with the instrument and the process of collaborative administration and interpretation. All participants indicated that they would recommend the MBTI to others, and all participants described their experiences with the MBTI as either very or somewhat meaningful and as very or somewhat useful.

The exploration of how clients described their engagement can be viewed through a lens suggested by constructivist metatheory with its “... twin focus on both the structure and process..."
of human knowing and the implications that both carry for the counseling context.” (R. A. Neimeyer, 1993, p. 58). Participants’ reports addressed both elements of the human meaning making enterprise, exploring the structure of participants’ belief systems and their processes of constructing those systems as exemplified by their experience with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI. The exploration of the structure of participants’ beliefs or the content domain follows the “characteristics attributed to the MBTI” identified in the results chapter and the exploration of the process domain takes as its points of departure the “characteristics attributed to the collaborative interpretation process” and observations summarized under the heading “intersecting trends in meaning-making.”

Content Domain: Characteristics Attributed to the MBTI

There are four thematic content domains describing characteristics attributed to the MBTI that encouraged participants’ engagement with the instrument: it is validating of both self and others; it provides a framework for understanding differences; it admits intra-individual variability and development; and it is readily transferable to lived experience. Generally, these characteristics are consistent with the claims made for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator by the developers of the instrument and with the expectations of the researchers and practitioners who use it.

Validating.

The MBTI Manual suggests that, as a result of its emphasis on normal individual differences as opposed to pathological differences, clients often experience the MBTI as validating and affirming (Briggs Myers et al., 1998). Results of the current study support this claim, most obviously in that 9 of the 12 participants explicitly described their experience with the MBTI as validating. Less obviously, however, each of the participants described the
experience of feeling validated at some point in responding to the questionnaire, whether by having their self-perceptions affirmed or confirmed, or in recognizing the explanatory power of the MBTI to account for interpersonal dynamics. One participant, who did not explicitly describe the MBTI as validating, noted the following with respect to her relationship with her son: “I can see where he is an extravert and with me being an introvert, we seem to miscommunicate or reach different conclusions about events or situations, affecting the way we value our places in the experience – and the outcome.” The MBTI validated her experience rather than her self-perception, as was the case for the majority of participants.

Based on my observations using the MBTI in clinical practice, I suggested in the introduction to this study that one of the advantages of the instrument is that it is a measure that encompasses the entire possible universe of preferences; no client is excluded from the MBTI system of categorization, and so it is applicable to all possible clients. This observation corresponds to participants’ descriptions of the MBTI that I have collected under the designation “globally validating.” It was important to many participants that the MBTI validated not only their preferences but also the very different preferences of others. Many of the participants in the current study benefited from the validation and normalization of interpersonal differences as well as from the validation and normalization of their own preferences.

 Provides framework.

In reviewing the literature relevant to the current study, it was suggested that: “… the primary counseling utility of most tools lies not in the scores themselves but rather in the framework a given measure provides for thinking about personality characteristics and as a starting point for presenting and discussing these dynamics with counselees.” (Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2002). Participants recognized the utility of both the framework and the vocabulary
provided by the MBTI as a starting point for understanding self and others. Participants consistently described the framework as the ground upon which the action of exploration occurred. From this perspective, it might be suggested that the specifics of the framework itself are not as important as is the provision of ground rules to circumscribe the action of personal and interpersonal exploration. The framework provided by the MBTI is both comprehensive and accessible, which contributes to its efficacy with clients.

Non-static.

The bug-bear of personality measures, from the client perspective, might be said to be the tendency of such measures to reduce individuals to rigidly defined scores (Finn, 1996). No one likes to be told that they are thus and so, or to be deprived of their right to act unpredictably. The MBTI is one of the few personality indicators that explicitly incorporate an assumption of variability. The acknowledgement that everyone “does” every function and that preference is a statistical tendency or measure of frequency rather than a measure of ability or aptitude is an important distinction between the MBTI and other personality indicators. Similarly, the MBTI assumes a developmental perspective and anticipates refinement of less-preferred functions over the life span.

Participants in the current study recognized these characteristics of the MBTI as important factors in their experiences of engagement with the instrument. Even so, a number of participants remained concerned about the susceptibility of MBTI results to oversimplification and possible abuse. While participants seemed comfortable with the application of results within the collaborative interpretation session, they did not seem willing to extend that trust to all possible uses of MBTI results in the world at large. This underscores the distinction between participants’ experiences of the measure itself and their experiences of the collaborative
interpretation of the MBTI in the current study. Participants recognized the virtues of the MBTI as a therapeutic tool, but remained sensitive to the fact that any tool is subject to the intentions of those applying it.

**Transferable.**

This characteristic attributed to the MBTI differs from those above in that rather than naming it, participants enacted it. Participants did not report that they were able to apply the MBTI to their experiences; they described the ways in which they applied it. This is attributable, in part, to the fact that questions about applying the MBTI were framed as “how” questions rather than as “if” questions, revealing my bias that all participants would indeed be able to apply the MBTI to their everyday lives. None of the participants, however, indicated that they were unable to apply the MBTI. In fact, participants all provided examples of how they would use the MBTI and described the contexts in which they would use it. All participants provided at least one example of type differences at work in their relationships with others, supporting the suggestion that one potential benefit of participating in the study was the transference of acceptance of type differences to real-life relationships. The range of applications, in terms of both contexts and relationships, cited by participants is evidence of the accessibility and transferability of the MBTI. Perhaps because it describes interpersonal communication processes or preferences rather than personal qualities or traits, the MBTI might be said to be a “one size fits all” therapeutic tool.

**Culturally biased.**

Two participants indicated that they experienced difficulty responding to the indicator questions because they asked about a decontextualized self. In each case, I was given the impression that had I specified a context (i.e., work) the participants would have been able to
complete the indicator several times over without difficulty, provided they could complete it once for each context in which they live. This concern is identified in the MBTI Manual: “Cultures classified as ‘collectivist,’ in which group identity is more important than individual identity, may present special problems” for the administration and interpretation of the MBTI (Briggs Myers et al., 1998).

One of the two participants citing this difficulty was able to resolve it: “After it was explained to respond to questions according to my initial reactions without thinking about work related / family related expectations it was easier.” The second seems to have been stranded between contexts: “I tried to answer questions ‘as I am on my own time’ and realized that in this busy world, I hardly ever have ‘my own time’; therefore, I had a difficult time answering some questions. Who am I really?” The MBTI does assume the construction of a self which transcends context. Although the collaborative interpretation session included an exploration of contextually invited preferences, and participants had the opportunity to discuss the interaction of context and preference, the assumption that there is a context-neutral self remains a barrier to engagement for those for whom self is context-dependent. It is difficult to answer questions about a decontextualized self, when the experience of self is inherently contextual (Belenky, 1997). Both of the participants who struggled with identifying a decontextualized self ultimately did engage with the measure and claimed preferences which validated their various experiences.

As suggested above, the evidence that participants recognized characteristics of the MBTI as facilitative of engagement does not adequately explain their experiences with the collaborative interpretation process. As is suggested by one participant, “It is just one tool to understand communication and reaction.” A number of participants echoed this sentiment, acknowledging the viability of the MBTI as a therapeutic tool, but suggesting that the instrument
itself cannot account for the degree of engagement experienced during the collaborative interpretation process. One part of the story is the efficacy of the tool; perhaps a more important part of the story is the use to which it is put.

**Process Domain: Characteristics Attributed to the Collaborative Interpretation Process**

The exploration of the process domain takes as its points of departure the “characteristics attributed to the collaborative interpretation process” and observations summarized under the heading “intersecting trends in meaning-making.”

*Experiential and fun.*

The experiential components of the interpretation session were designed to facilitate participants' understanding of preferences. While participants' self-report data support that this objective was achieved, the value of the experiential paradigm goes well beyond showing participants what type differences look like in action. I was surprised at the number of participants who described their experience with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI as fun, enjoyable, or pleasant. In attempting to tease apart the elements contributing to these characterizations of participants' experiences, I was inspired by a question posed by one of the participants during a follow up interview. “Fun? It was, truly, I agree. To what extent is that because of you? Would that hold with a different facilitator?”

The critical components of the collaborative group interpretation of the MBTI as implemented in the current study are: the instrument – the MBTI, the program – the collaborative interpretation process, the facilitator, and the group. While the instrument possesses characteristics that make it eminently suitable for such therapeutic use, the contributions of the other components are perhaps more significant.
In their 1997 study of the collaborative interpretation of the MMPI-2, Newman and Greenway concluded that, “Further research should evaluate specific components of this method to identify the distinctive therapeutic value of each component” (p. 128). I suggested, in my introduction to this study, that the requirement that clients ‘verify’ their type ensures that the result arrived at is one that is ‘taken’ or owned by the client rather than ‘assigned’ by the assessor. The only direct comment upon this question by participants is one woman’s observation that one of the ‘pros’ of the MBTI is its “flexibility, because I can also identify my ‘best fit’.” In a more general way, however, the proliferation of possessive pronouns as participants describe “my preference” for this or “I’m a…” that is evidence of ownership of the results. The characteristics attributed to the MBTI by participants in the current study may represent some of the components referred to by Newman and Greenway, but I argue that the single most significant component of the collaborative interpretation process is the way that it facilitates participants’ ownership of the interpretation process and results thereby fostering a sense of agency or authorship. Collaborative interpretation transforms assessment from something done to clients to something that clients do.

In order to determine the extent to which participants’ experiences are attributable to personal qualities or skills of the facilitator, I would like to see the study replicated with another facilitator.

The importance of the final component, the group, was not adequately recognized during the conceptualization of the study. I suggest that participants’ experiences of engagement with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI are in large part attributable to the therapeutic factors associated with participation in a therapeutic group. Many of the characteristics participants attributed to their experience with the collaborative group interpretation of the MBTI
can be mapped onto the therapeutic factors of a group as outlined by Corey (Corey, 2000). These are enumerated below and linked to their correlates as described by participants in the current study.

1. Trust and acceptance: a significant component of this factor according to Corey is validation, which has been established as a characteristic of participants’ experiences with the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI.

2. Empathy and caring: this factor is described as “understanding the feelings of others”. The group interpretation session provided participants with the opportunity to explore their different preferences including discussion across preference groups, allowing for an appreciation of others’ ways of making sense of communication.

3. Intimacy: a key term associated with this factor is “self disclosure”. Participants in the current study were encouraged to identify their preferences and openly discuss their perceptions and reactions throughout the interpretation session.

4. Hope: a characteristic of this therapeutic factor is the belief that “change is possible”. As described above, it was important to participants in the current study that the MBTI takes a developmental perspective, as it allows for the possibility of refining or developing less-preferred functions.

5. Freedom to experiment: one participant in the current study identified the experience as a “chance to explore outside your comfort zone.”

6. Catharsis: perhaps the closest thing to catharsis demonstrated within the current study is the collective “a-ha” experienced by a predominantly introverted group simultaneously experiencing the validation of introversion as a viable and desirable preference.
7. Cognitive restructuring: described by Corey as "challenging and exploring beliefs about situations". Evidence provided by participants' self-reports suggests that understanding both self and others is the focus of participants' application of the MBTI; that participants are challenging and exploring their beliefs about themselves and others.

8. Self-disclosure / confrontation / feedback: this constellation is described by Corey as characteristic of the working stage of a well-established group. To some extent, this constellation was also experienced by participants in the current study, albeit in a limited way. Participants were asked to 'declare themselves', to enact and discuss their 'ways of doing things,' and to listen to feedback from others (who do things differently) about the experience.

The only therapeutic factor associated with groups which cannot be linked to participants' experiences with the collaborative interpretation session in the current study is "commitment to change." Evidence of commitment to change was provided by one participant, interviewed 5 weeks after the collaborative interpretation, who was sufficiently committed that he had invested time and money in further reading, and had invited his partner to join him in his explorations.

Though not intended as a therapy group, per se, the collaborative group interpretation of the MBTI demonstrated many of the therapeutic factors associated with groups. I suggest that the success of the collaborative group interpretation of the MBTI is as attributable to the therapeutic factors associated with groups as it is to characteristics of the MBTI.

*Locus of understanding.*

As indicated in the results section, the majority of participants in this study chose themselves as their locus of understanding. They applied the MBTI to themselves and imagined
exporting it to their lived experience primarily via the vehicle of their own awareness. The predominance of this locus of understanding among participants in the current study may suggest a global tendency, or it may correlate with preference combinations predominant among participants. In addition to being predominantly introverted, the composition of the group is unusually biased in favour of preferences for both intuition and feeling, and it is possible that the personal locus of understanding correlates with any combination of these preferences.

The one clear association between preference and locus of understanding in the current study is the one participant who emphasized applying the MBTI to understanding others' behaviour and who claimed the preference combination ISTJ, which entails a dominant sensing function. No association can be made between preferences and the application of the MBTI via an interactive locus of understanding as the participants describing this use of the MBTI represent diverse preference combinations and different dominant functions.

In proposing the current study, I suggested that one of the potential benefits of participating in the study was the development of type-related interpersonal communication skills. While there is no direct evidence that this was achieved, a number of participants indicated that they intended to implement changes, either with respect to their own awareness or with respect to their behaviour with others, with type considerations in mind.

Modes of meaning-making.
Four modes of meaning-making were discussed in the results chapter: experiential, graphical/systemic, talking, and listening (auditory). Type theory predicts a correlation between some preferences and particular learning styles. Correlations are expected between Sensing and experiential learning, between Extraversion and experiential learning, between Extraversion and talking, and between Intuition and a graphical or systemic approach to learning. (DiTiberio,
Once again, the current sample is too small to draw any definitive conclusions, but generally these predictions are borne out. The participant who indicated that she would have liked more talk time preferred ENFP (Extraversion); the participant who credited 'the game' with clarifying his preferences preferred ISTJ (Sensing); and the participants who particularly commented upon the value of the printed, graphical representations of the material all preferred Introversion and Intuition. These examples support existing research suggesting correlations between preferences and learning styles.

Interaction of meaning-making and Type

During the collaborative administration and interpretation session and throughout the follow up interviews I made a number of observations about the interaction between type and meaning-making which were evident against the backdrop of previous clinical experience and familiarity with the MBTI. The first observation stems from the fact that this is the first time I have facilitated an MBTI group composed predominantly of participants preferring introversion. The second observation reflects upon my own practice and the necessity to be vigilant about the persistent and subtle influence of preference bias. Third, participants' comments supported the importance of including an explanation of type dynamics, which has not always been part of my practice. Finally, I am aware of differences in the language and syntax participants used to describe their experiences, especially during the follow up interviews.

A significant portion of my field notes reflecting on the collaborative group interpretation process are given to exploring the implications of interpreting the MBTI with a predominantly introverted group. The first observation I noted was "apparently low engagement (unresponsive audience for the 'talking head' bits)." Only later in the interpretation session did I recognize that apparently low engagement was perfectly consistent with the predominant preference for
introversion. The first apparent ‘spark’ appeared during my explanation of the interpersonal implications of introversion and extraversion. The predominantly Introverted group seemed to find my description of Introverted processes enormously validating, specifically, they responded to descriptions of introverts as (a) requiring processing time, (b) preferring to take notes during meetings, and (c) “thinking on the inside” rather than “thinking on the outside” (as extraverts tend to do). For a number of participants, it was a novel experience to hear introversion described in positive terms, and the normalizing effect was underscored by the fact that introversion was the majority preference. Fortunately, the extraverts in the group were equally intrigued by the implications of the differences between introverted and extraverted processing. One participant with ENFP preferences indicated that the thing that made the most sense to her about the way the MBTI explained preferences was that “Extraverts process externally and introverts process internally.” Overall, the single most engaging element of the interpretation session, in terms of the interlocking of gears to transfer power, was the destigmatization of introversion. Two of the three participants interviewed 5 weeks after the interpretation were actively incorporating a new understanding of introversion into their self-concepts. To illustrate, I have included the opening remarks offered by each of these two participants at the beginning of their respective interviews:

**ISTJ Participant: Are you an Introvert or an Extravert?**

Primary Researcher: I’m an Introvert. (INFP)

**ISTJ Participant: I’m an ISTJ. I’m still in the process of getting information. This was all new to me. I’m still on Introvert vs. Extravert. I don’t understand the Sensing vs. the Intuition, yet. Is it too confusing for me? I’m still on the first step. Exploring the e-i**
scale is really fun. I’m reading “The Introverted Advantage”. I got a copy for my partner too. He is ENFP.

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INFP Participant: I found it to be a real eye-opener. And it came at the right time. I had just graduated, and was deciding what to do next. Wondering why the things I thought I wanted weren’t engaging me. I’d always thought of myself as an Extravert, but I very clearly came up as an Introvert. It will still take some reflecting on that.

I talked to [my friend who also participated in the study] on the weekend, and we hashed it out again. Yeah, that was really interesting, to see it like that. We carry around these self perceptions, and unless they’re challenged, or questioned, or we’re forced to express them, we just behave as if they’re true. Or we try to. I find that the longer I live, the harder it becomes to do that. The influence of parents and first jobs fades … the old cliché is that your twenty-year-old self decides what your forty-year-old self will do.

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I was fortunate to commit a demonstration of preference bias during the collaborative interpretation session, and even more fortunate that one of the participants called me on it. To illustrate the difference between the sensing and intuitive perceiving functions, I created an example which relied upon attribution in an ambiguous situation. I described a scenario in which an individual returns to their workplace to find it completely empty of people. My intention was to illustrate the difference between sensing (Hmm, the people are all gone.) and intuition (Where is everybody? Maybe they’ve… ). I had, however, stumbled into an illustration of my feeling bias in my attempt to highlight intuition. With preferences INFP, my dominant function is feeling, and I was unable to divorce my intuitive perception (expansive, speculative, abstract)
from my feeling judging function (subjective, people-oriented, value-centric). Quite correctly, a participant with INTJ preferences, and dominant intuition, suggested that my example did not make sense to her, and did not illustrate intuition. It was a wonderful opportunity for immediacy, and provided an entrée to a discussion of preference bias and blind spots. I was concerned that the distinction might have been a bit too fine to be meaningful for participants exploring the MBTI for the first time, but at least one participant – the one who had challenged me – left with an appreciation of the insidious nature of preference bias: “I think what I found the most interesting was realizing how certain [preferences] were so natural / automatic to me.”

I provided a much more thorough explanation of both type dynamics and type development to participants in the current study than is my usual practice in the collaborative interpretation of the MBTI, and based on participants’ responses, it is an innovation that I will incorporate into my practice on an ongoing basis. Type dynamics require a complex and detailed explanation (see p. 21), and it has been my perception that participants do not necessarily want that much detail, especially upon first exposure to the MBTI. To some extent, my initial perception is accurate, at least for one (ISTJ) participant: “To be honest, I’m not interested in learning to understand ‘type’ – I think it is too complicated for me. I am interested in getting other books, other measures, to learn to understand myself.” However, there were several dissenting voices among participants. A participant preferring INFJ, responding to a question about what made most sense to her about the way the MBTI explains preferences, identified “[t]he hierarchy of the [preferences], and more specifically, the 2 dominant dimensions of S/N and T/F. I previously thought all 4 dimensions were of equal value/weighting. Plus, I really found fascinating how with ‘introverts’, their dominant [functions] are not displayed.” As discussed above, a number of participants indicated that the developmental assumption of the
MBTI was very important to their engagement with the indicator in that it allowed for the possibility of refining the use of less-preferred functions. My conclusion is that the value of understanding type dynamics and type development for those favourably disposed toward theoretical complexity outweighs the adverse affects on those not desirous of such theoretical complexity. Participants will discard whatever is not meaningful to them, and work with that which is meaningful.

It became evident as I transcribed the follow up interviews with three participants that they employed three very distinct communication styles. Differences included both what they chose to communicate and the language they employed to do so. While a sample of three cannot conclusively demonstrate patterns, the differences are of interest and may serve as a point of departure for future enquiry. The three participants with whom I conducted follow up interviews all had ‘minority preferences’ within the context of the current study: ISTJ (dominant sensing); ISTP (dominant thinking); and INFP (dominant feeling). The predominant preference combination within the current study was INFJ (dominant intuition).

The interview with the participant preferring ISTJ (dominant sensing) focused on concrete examples and specific incidents illustrating his experience integrating elements of the MBTI into his lived experience. The following reflection is a good example: “I’ve been reading that introverts often speak with gaps… pauses, between their thoughts, and words. I can’t remember whether I do that in [my first language]. I certainly do it in English.” In addition to focusing on specifics, I would describe his communication as concise. His sentences are short and direct as illustrated by this clarifying question: “Please clarify the kind of ‘energy’ that is being described that extraverts get from people and that introverts get from being alone? I mean, if I don’t eat well, or I don’t sleep, or an extravert doesn’t sleep – that person is going to be tired.
What kind of energy do they mean? It is the same kind of energy?” Finally, it is noteworthy that
the only digression occurring during this interview was upon the arrival of the participant’s
partner: “I’m distracted. My partner and my dog have just arrived.” The interruption was brief,
introductions were made, and we promptly returned to the interview.

The participant preferring ISTP (dominant thinking) focused on outcomes, and
consistently balanced assertions by acknowledging the opposing perception as well. Thus,
“That’s what I came up with from our session. I’ve decided that my single point of
accountability is that I like to get things done. Doesn’t really matter how I get them done, I just
want to get them done.” This participant, focusing on outcomes, is the only one to express
care concern about whether I was meeting my research objectives. “I’m thinking about whether I’m
giving you what you need or want here. I don’t think I’m being very helpful.” An example
illustrating both of the above characterizations is his description of himself: “I like to be
efficient. Other people may not perceive me that way, it doesn’t matter to me, but I’m cognizant
that there is a world outside of my experience, and I imagine that I look as strange to other
people, the way that I do things, as they way they do things looks to me.” This participant
explicitly prefers brevity in communication, on both the giving and receiving ends. “Even with
social relationships, I prefer a ‘just the facts’ approach to communication. I have a friend who
likes to just go on and on, everything about him. I get tired and I get really impatient;” and, “I
don’t really talk about myself a lot. People will ask me, ‘What’s new?’ My answer is like, ‘I’m
really good.’ I don’t provide a great deal of information.” Again, I would describe this
participant’s communication as concise, though not quite as concise as the first example. There
was one significant digression during this interview, into an exploration of various ways of
pronouncing difficult words.
The final interview, with a participant preferring INFP (dominant feeling) focused on exploring possibilities for (re)constructing self. “I’m still teasing this out. I’m not really acting on it yet, just mulling it over. When you carry around all those ‘have tos’ and ‘shoulds’, and then start to think, maybe I ‘don’t ought’ and ‘shouldn’t.’ It really opens up a lot. I’ve been guilty of taking on a lot of things because people wanted me to.” I would describe this participant’s communication as comprehensive, he seems to think in paragraphs and generously employs subordinate clauses to clarify and contextualize on the fly. Thus, “Again, it sounds like non-action, but it’s pre-action. I was in a real knot about what program of study to pursue next. And that of course is intimately bound up with ‘where are you going after the program of study, and what are your career choices, and so on?’ So I’ve been in kind of a holding pattern about that, and doing a lot of research on it, in certain areas that, before, I wasn’t letting myself explore because I have prejudged … don’t look there.” This participant signals that he is very much “in process” with reconsidering his vocation: “I’m still figuring it out, but I think it has to start with separating the voices behind the calling. They can be inner voices, voices of a younger you (who started on this path so many years ago), voice of people, living and dead, in your past, the voices of God or spirit or however you want to define that, and (I use this more and more) collective…, the voices of the marketplace, of the world around you, of the demands – where do I belong? What’s calling me? Where are the needs greatest? Where can I serve? And where can I be rewarded?” There were frequent and detailed digressions throughout this interview, some tangentially related to the participant’s experience with the MBTI, and some completely unrelated.

It is consistent with type theory that a participant with a dominant preference for introverted sensing would prefer personally relevant concrete examples, that a participant with a
dominant preference for introverted thinking would focus on objective outcomes, and that a participant with a dominant preference for introverted feeling would focus on the possibilities for personal meaning. One advantage of the follow up interviews for these three participants is that each had an opportunity to further explore their experience of the MBTI with the facilitator, allowing for some individual tailoring of the interpretation. One participant took the opportunity to ask very specific clarifying questions, one to discuss objective outcomes, and the third to explore possibilities for personal reconstruction. To some extent, each of the follow up interviews took place on a ground defined by the participants – or within a framework mutually negotiated by the two of us. An example of my movement toward a common ground with each of these participants is that my sentences were shorter in communication with the participants preferring ISTJ and ISTP than in communication with the participant preferring INFP, and the only significant digression that I initiated was during the interview with the participant preferring INFP. (Two INFPs don’t make for brevity?) In discussing the constructivist paradigm in the literature review chapter, I suggested that recognizing that the counsellor’s reality is no more privileged or correct than is the client’s reality underscores the importance of honouring the client’s worldview. I would argue that this is precisely what I did in the follow up interviews, meeting each of the participants on a mutually negotiated ground somewhere between their worldview and mine.

Significant interactions between type and the meaning-making enterprise in the current study included the validation of the introverted preference, the illustration via facilitator oversight of the pervasiveness of preference biases, the utility to participants of understanding type dynamics and type development regardless of the complexity of the explanation, and the adjustment of communication style to accommodate the participants’ priorities for
understanding. I would argue that each of these interactions is embodied or enacted by the facilitator. As the facilitator, I introduced these dynamics into the group experience, and to some extent, they characterize my therapeutic or facilitation style. Each of these specific interactions has implications for the use of the MBTI in a therapeutic context. As noted in the literature review, "[g]laringly absent from the research on counseling and psychotherapy are studies that look at the effects of using type knowledge on the conduct of counseling and psychotherapy. ... The general issue here is whether actually using type theory and the MBTI makes any difference." (Quenk & Quenk, 1996). Quenk and Quenk called for systematic evidence verifying or negating the efficacy of the MBTI in counselling and psychotherapy. The present study provides preliminary evidence for the efficacy of the MBTI in counselling, both as a structural tool for organizing clients' engagement with their beliefs, and as a process tool or therapeutic lens for guiding exploration.

Conclusion

Participants in the current study clearly engaged with the collaborative group interpretation of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The synthesis of participants' descriptions of their experiences yielded four characteristics attributed to the MBTI which facilitated this engagement: it validated participants' self-perceptions, experiences, and the different preferences of others; it provided a framework and vocabulary for exploring individual differences; it explicitly allows for both individual variability and change over time; and it is accessible and readily transferable to lived experience. These characteristics of the MBTI make it a good tool for therapeutic applications, but do not, in and of themselves, adequately explain participants' engagement with the collaborative group interpretation of the MBTI.
In addition to the characteristics comprising the “content” domain of participants’ observations, there were a number of “process” domain observations describing contributors to participants’ experiences of engagement. The experiential elements of the collaborative group interpretation process were intended to provide illustrations of ‘type in action’ but may also have been critical for creating the conditions that enabled participants’ engagement. The collaborative interpretation process was valuable for fostering a sense of ownership or agency in participants’ experience of their MBTI results. It was suggested that the group interpretation provided participants with the benefits of the therapeutic factors associated with groups, contributing significantly to participants’ engagement. Finally, the role of the facilitator in establishing the tone, orchestrating the collaborative group interpretation, and interpreting the MBTI with participants contributed significantly to participants’ experiences of engagement. The therapeutic alliance remains the *sine qua non* of effective therapeutic engagement.

I suggest that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator itself is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Effective use of the MBTI as a therapeutic intervention depends upon implementation. The collaborative group interpretation process is an effective mechanism for facilitating participants’ engagement with the MBTI. As illustrated by Irvin Yalom in “I Never Thought It Would Happen to Me,” from *Love’s Executioner* (Yalom, 2000), if emptying a woman’s handbag can serve as a therapeutic intervention – anything can!

*Limitations of the Study*

The study incorporated a small sample size and was designed to be exploratory. Participants were not selected based on demographic criteria, and the sample cannot be described as representative of any population, nor of the universe of possible type scores. Thus, results are
neither generalizable nor replicable. Findings do suggest implications for practice, and promising directions for further research.

*Implications for Practice*

There was consensus among participants in the current study that the MBTI possesses characteristics making it appropriate for therapeutic use. Two cautionary notes for practitioners arising from the current study pertain to: (a) the appropriate use of MBTI results and, (b) to a cultural bias assuming a context-neutral construction of self. The perception of assessment as diagnostic is pervasive, and concerns expressed by participants in the current study suggest that extreme care should be taken to clearly explain the appropriate application of type results to avoid potentially negative experiences of being labelled. The assumption within type theory that "self" is a context-neutral construct is problematic for individuals who construct "self" contextually; and whether this tension can be resolved within a constructivist paradigm is perhaps up to the individual's ability to reconcile contradictions.

It was suggested that the real "power" behind participants' experiences of engagement may be attributable to therapeutic factors associated with the group environment. Certainly, the collaborative group interpretation model employed in the current study was very well received by participants. Two notes of relevance with respect to reflections on my own practice using the MBTI include a reminder of the importance of vigilantly monitoring type bias and my conclusion that the benefits of providing a comprehensive explanation of type dynamics and type development far outweigh any perceived disadvantages associated with the complexity of the explanation.
Implications for Research

The current study provides evidence for the therapeutic efficacy of the MBTI both as a structural tool for organizing clients' engagement with their beliefs, and as a process tool or therapeutic lens for guiding exploration. One particularly striking illustration was the powerful validation of Introversion experienced by participants in the current study, which in and of itself was an effective therapeutic intervention. Assessment can be effectively used as a therapeutic intervention, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator does make a difference in the conduct of counselling. The current study suggests a correlation between type and participants' syntax or use of language, and further research might confirm such a correlation and further explore the implications of linguistic co-construction for the development of the therapeutic alliance.

Persistent mistrust expressed by participants in the current study underscores the importance of ensuring that practitioners adhere to published guidelines for the consequentially valid use of MBTI results. I suggest that participants' fears of assessment are tied to their experiences with the misapplication of results. Further research is required to demonstrate the consequential validity of MBTI results, but the current study suggests that a fertile field of enquiry might be exploring clients' experiences of the use and misuse of MBTI results.

Other areas of enquiry for further research indicated by the current study include: (a) Replication of the study with a different facilitator to ascertain the extent to which participants' experience of engagement was a product of my personal qualities and facilitation style, (b) the comparative exploration of differences between participants' experiences with the collaborative individual interpretation of the MBTI and participants' experiences with the collaborative group interpretation of the MBTI to ascertain the extent to which engagement was a product of the therapeutic factors associated with groups, and (c) more refined exploration of participants'
experiences with the collaborative interpretation model to prove or disprove the central importance of the experience of ownership of the process in fostering agency as hypothesized from the results of the current study.
References


Client perceptions of therapeutic factors of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a therapeutic intervention: an exploratory study.

Jeananne T. Robertson
28-May-05

Outline

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<td>Divide participants into &quot;E&quot; and &quot;I&quot; preference groups - each group is asked to physically arrange themselves in order of preference clarity (provided by the measure).</td>
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<td>Debrief with whole group - compare experiences during exercise. Discuss implications of E-I preference difference in &quot;everyday life&quot;.</td>
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<td>Divide participants into &quot;N&quot; and &quot;S&quot; preference groups. Participants asked to view a painting for 15 seconds. Painting is removed - participants are asked to describe the painting as thoroughly as they can.</td>
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<td>Compare the descriptions provided by the two preference groups - debrief experience, and discuss implications of N-S preference in &quot;everyday life&quot;.</td>
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### c. Elaboration upon Thinking - Feeling (T - F) Preference

**Illustrative Exercise - Decision Process for Selecting Corporate Reps at Conference**

Divide participants into "T" and "F" preference groups. Participants are presented with the following scenario, and asked to decide, as a committee, which members of the group will attend the annual conference in California.

**Scenario:** The company has budget to send only one person to the year's annual conference, in some desirable location. What do you decide, and what is the basis for the decision.

Debrief in large group, paying attention to decision criteria and process. Discuss implications of T-F preference in "everyday life".

### d. Elaboration upon Judging - Perceiving (J - P) Preference

**Illustrative Exercise - Planning a Vacation**

Divide participants into "J" and "P" preference groups.

**Scenario:** You are taking a vacation together, agree upon the destination and whatever arrangements are necessary.

Debrief in large group. Discuss implications of J-P preference in "everyday life".

---

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Q & A

Interviews by invitation within two weeks
Appendix C

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z1

Self-Report Questionnaire

Client perceptions of therapeutic factors in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as a therapeutic intervention: an exploratory study.

Intro spiel about questionnaire.

Demographic and Statistical Information

Please provide the following information about yourself (check all that apply).

Myers-Briggs Type: ____________________________

Sex: □ Female □ Male

Age: □ 18-25 □ 26-35 □ 36-45 □ 46-55 □ 56-65 □ 66+

Domestic Status: □ Single □ Partnered

Living Arrangements: □ Alone □ Partner □ Roommate(s) □ Parents

Employment: □ Full Time □ Part Time □ None □ F/T Student □ P/T Student

Are you a parent? □ Yes □ No

Education completed to date: □ Elementary □ Secondary □ Post-Secondary

Have you previously completed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)? □ Yes □ No

If yes, please include your type as previously assessed: ____________________________
Questionnaire: Section One – Experience of the MBTI Results

Please comment generally on your experience with the MBTI. Describe your thoughts, emotions, reactions, ideas, and realizations as completely as you can. (Please use the back of the sheet if you require more space.)

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

People often find that some of the dimensions expressed by the MBTI are more significant or relevant for them than others.

Please rank the dimensions below in order of their significance or relevance to you right now. (1=most significant, 4=least significant)

____ Extraversion – Introversion (E-I)

____ Sensing – Intuition (S-N)

____ Thinking – Feeling (T-F)

____ Judging – Perceiving (J-P)

Please check the words below that describe your experience of exploring your MBTI-type. (Check all that apply.)

☐ helpful        ☐ irrelevant        ☐ validating

☐ interesting    ☐ liberating        ☐ inviting

☐ frustrating    ☐ reassuring        ☐ confirming
Are you interested in learning more about the MBTI and the implications of your preferences?

- Not At All
- Somewhat
- Very

Questionnaire: Section Two: Personal Relevance

How personally meaningful did you find your MBTI results? Please check one box below:

- Not At All
- Somewhat
- Very

What was most meaningful for you about your results?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please describe any new ideas that you have about people, the world, or yourself as a result of learning about the MBTI.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What made the most sense to you about the way the MBTI explains preferences?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Therapeutic Factors in MBTI

What emotional reactions are you aware of experiencing while exploring your type preferences? In reaction to what?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Please make any additional comments you wish about the personal relevance of your MBTI results.

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Questionnaire: Section Three - Relevance in Relationships with Others

The MBTI often helps people to explain recurring communication patterns with others in their lives.

Please describe relevant patterns you are aware of with people in your life and your understanding of the explanations in MBTI terms. Please identify the person you refer to by their relationship to you rather than by name.

Person: _______________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Person: _______________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

How helpful do you expect that understanding preferences will be in your relationships with others? Please check one box below.

Person: _______________________________________________________________________________
Client Perceptions of Therapeutic Factors in the MBTI

Not At All  □  Somewhat  □  Very  □

Which one of your preferences seems to explain the greatest source of interpersonal conflict in your life?

□ Extraversion - □ Introversion
□ Sensing - □ Intuition
□ Thinking - □ Feeling
□ Judging - □ Perceiving

Please make any additional comments you wish about the relevance of your MBTI results to your relationships with others people.

________________________________________

________________________________________

Questionnaire: Section Four - Usefulness in Everyday Life

In what part of your life do you expect what you have learned about type to be most useful?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

What will be most useful?

________________________________________

________________________________________

How will it be useful?

________________________________________
Client Perceptions of Therapeutic Factors in the MBTI

With whom will it be useful, please describe others by their relationship to you rather than by name?

Questionnaire: Section Five - Perceived Pros and Cons of the MBTI

How useful was your experience with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator?

- Very Useful
- Somewhat Useful
- Not Very Useful
- Not At All Useful

Please list your perceptions of the Pros and Cons of your experience with the MBTI.

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<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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Has your confidence changed as a result of your experience with the MBTI?

- increased
- unchanged
- decreased

Community:
Would you recommend taking the MBTI to others? Why?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Please make any additional comments you wish.


Please confirm your type by circling the appropriate four letters below:

- E: Extraversion – I: Introversion
- T: Thinking – F: Feeling
- S: Sensing – N: Intuition
- J: Judging – P: Perceiving

Thank you very much for participating!