

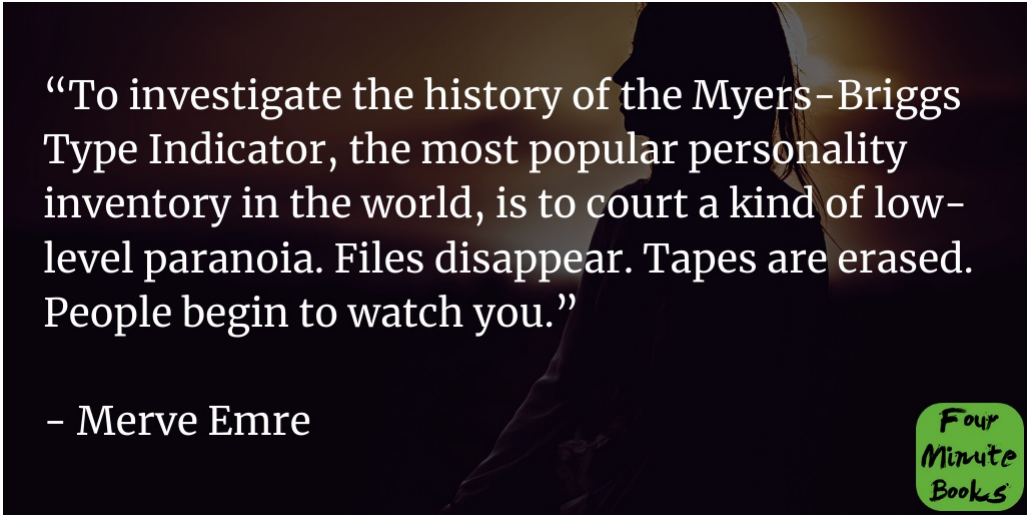
The Personality Brokers Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Personality Brokers* uncovers the true, yet un-scientific origins of the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



“To investigate the history of the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator, the most popular personality inventory in the world, is to court a kind of low-level paranoia. Files disappear. Tapes are erased. People begin to watch you.”

– Merve Emre

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Are you an INFJ? How about ENTP? Or maybe you're an ISFP. If you don't know what I'm talking about it's a wonder you haven't heard of the most popular personality test in history. And if you are familiar with this test on any level, prepare to have what you think you know about it ripped to shreds.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) test works by giving a four-letter personality type after you answer a questionnaire. You can find them online if you're curious to know your type and a little more about what each means.

I'm an INFJ. Once I was shocked to discover that a group of friends and I were nearly all INFJ's. But I'm also an ENFJ. Sometimes after answering the same questions, I'm something completely different. From the start I've been skeptical of the test. It turns out I was right to be.

The MBTI is based on questionable methods that were not scientific. This is the claim of Merve Emre's *The Personality Brokers: The Strange History of Myers-Briggs and the Birth of Personality Testing*, which explains the whole story of how this popular hoax came to be.

Here are the 3 most intriguing lessons I learned about the history of the MBTI:

1. Katherine Briggs-Myers and her daughter Isabel Myers based their personality test on the questionable principles of Carl Jung.
2. Briggs created her first personality test at a time when Americans were ready to receive it, thus beginning the era of self-help writing.
3. Although scientifically unsound, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator does have its benefits and uses.

Do you feel certain about your MBTI personality? After this you might not be, let's go!

Lesson 1: Carl Jung's questionable methods were the basis for Briggs' personality test.

The MBTI is named after its two creators, Katharine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Myers. They were obsessed with the ideas of Carl Jung and based theirs off of his tenets.

Briggs' obsession with the idea of fixed and classifiable personality is where the idea for the test sprouted. From the very beginning, her test came from an unscientific claim. Carol Dweck's book *Mindset* teaches that our brains aren't permanent, but changeable. Even today the test attempts to lure people into the trap of a fixed mindset.

Taking a closer look at Jung, whose notions the meat of the test is based off of, we see a man whose theories were heavily criticized by actual psychologists. **John B. Watson, a behavioral psychologist of the time, said that Jung's approach more closely mirrored religious mysticism than any actual science.** His primary reason was that Jung's theories had no proof of validity.

In Carl Jung's mind, however, he didn't need evidence and refused to test his ideas against modern empirical methods. His ideas centered around assumptions rather than facts. Unfortunately, these science-deficient guesses were the basis for Briggs' first personality test which eventually became the MBTI that we know today.

What's really strange is the depth of Briggs's obsession with Jung. In her mind he became like a divine oracle, even claiming that he appeared to her in a dream. At one point she began writing erotic fiction about him. Her zeal to become his disciple bordered on insanity.

Lesson 2: The roaring twenties was the perfect time for Briggs to release her first personality test.

So the big question now is why did the test perform so well if it had so many flaws? It was a mix of the right marketing at the right time.

After five years of musing on Jung's writings, Briggs looked toward sharing his doctrine on a wider scale. Her first version of the test, titled "Meet Yourself: How to Use the Personality Paintbox," came out in a 1926 magazine called New Republic. Her marketing tactic combined the intrigue and novelty of a personality test with the fun of arranging index cards in a way that described an individual's personality.

Briggs didn't realize that her methods were revolutionary. The implication of an ability to improve your life by self-discover was previously unheard of. **Her efforts helped begin the era of self-help writing that is still strong today.** The 1920s were the perfect time for this to start.

People needed psychologists, but there weren't enough to go around. Bringing the power of the study of the mind into people's homes changed their lives in just the way they needed. In the past, people looked to religion for this sort of help, but that wasn't working as well as it had before. It was the perfect timing for a self-help craze to begin, and Briggs' first test was right there to start it off.

Lesson 3: We can gain some useful information from the MBTI, even considering its questionable beginnings.

So the MBTI has a really weird history, does that mean it's all bad? Not entirely.

Even in my skepticism for the validity and assumptions of the test, I've gained some valuable insights about myself from taking it multiple times. I don't let myself get too far with that though. I often end up with different results after taking it even just a few months apart, as many people do.

It's almost as if each of the 16 types could describe anybody. Research shows that people will mostly agree with any personality description they receive after taking this or a similar test. It only makes sense that this questionnaire is still wildly popular today.

But it's not completely terrible. Many people are plagued with self-doubt these days. Imposter syndrome is rampant in the workplace and at home. **Taking the MBTI can give relief to some of these symptoms.**

With its focus on self-acceptance and self-justification, the test alleviates our overly high self-expectations. It allows us to let ourselves accept who we are, rather than always pushing ourselves too hard to change.

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longer - no matter what you read.

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The Personality Brokers Review

Well that was a fascinating story! I was already wary of the MBTI before reading *[The Personality Brokers](#)*, but now I know that my mistrust was correct. There are still some benefits of personality tests like this one, and I'm glad the book pointed that out.

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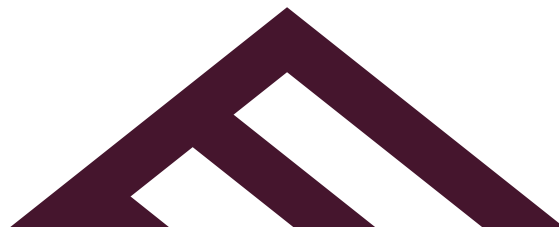
Who would I recommend The Personality Brokers summary to?

The 45-year-old who has been living by their four-letter MBTI personality and feels like something is missing, the 32-year-old female entrepreneur who is looking for some inspiring stories of women in business, and anyone interested in psychology.

What do you need help with at the moment?

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