The Enneagram of Personality is a typology system that claims individuals develop the dominant desires, fears, and attachment strategies that emerge from one of nine distinct “core types.” The system, supposedly based in ancient wisdom and a nine-pointed figure composed of interconnected lines, has gained popularity as a tool of self-understanding and personal development in recent years, but its acceptance as a valid instrument of psychological assessment among academics and clinicians has been mixed. A 2021 research review found correlations between the Enneagram and other personality metrics, such as the Big 5 Inventory, as well as adequate, if not excellent, evidence of reliability and validity when assessing the most popular measurement scales used to determine Enneagram type, all of which ask users to rate their identification with certain words or phrases. However, the same review also found significant disagreements between self-identified type and test-determined type, as well as insufficient differentiation between the nine types (Hook et al., 2020). Enneagram practitioners would account for these deficiencies by arguing that individuals can frequently mistype themselves and that two types in particular (types 6 and 9, the “Loyalist” and the “Peacemaker”) tend to do so as inherent reflections of their core defense strategies. One could therefore suggest that the Enneagram is unfalsifiable and therefore pseudoscientific.

In this study, I sought to evaluate the claim that the Enneagram’s nine core types somehow exist beyond the instruments used to assess them. If, as practitioners claim, individuals reveal their type through the language they use, then everyday discourse should reveal the nine types’ distinctions. I downloaded the fifty-dimensional version of Pennington et al.’s pre-trained “GloVe” vectors, derived from data on Twitter, to assess whether words associated with each Enneagram type did or did not co-occur on social media posts in a manner that revealed nine distinct types (2014). I chose ten words for each of the nine types based on items in the two assessment scales found to have the highest reliability and validity, the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (RHETI) and the Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales (WEPSS) (Riso and Hudson, 1999; Wagner, 2022). To account for the possibility that certain words may co-occur more often because of semantic similarity, each list of ten contained five words that represented the healthier attributes of each type and five words that represented the less healthy traits. While one could perhaps expect the five positive terms attributed to Type Five to co-occur more often because of similarities in meaning (“Insightful,” “Wise,” “Observant,” “Curious,” “Cerebral”), the link between these terms and the negative traits (“Distant,” “Withholding,” “Greedy,” “Isolated,” “Condescending)” is less clear. To assess the proximity of different word groups, I loaded the GloVe vectors into Python and used the data visualization tools modeled in Theiler’s Medium article, “Basics of using pre-trained GloVe vectors in Python.” (2022). The t-distributed stochastic neighbor embedding (t-SNE) method, imported from the scikit-learn machine learning library, allowed me to reduce the 50-dimensional vectors to points on a two-dimensional space that I could then visualize using scatterplot tools in the Matplotlib library.

An initial plot of all 90 words did not seem to reveal the expected clustering, though it was hard to tell with so many points. I then created a new plot to compare the eighteen averaged vectors of each set of five. As the plot demonstrates, all nine averaged positive term vectors were closer to at least one of the averaged negative term vectors for the other eight types than they were to the averaged negative term vector of the corresponding type. This study therefore failed to find compelling evidence of the Enneagram’s manifestation in the language used on Twitter. If Enneagram types *are* real (and the present study can neither support nor falsify this claim), they likely do not reveal themselves in the communications people exchange on social media.

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