

Have you got the personality to join Mensa?

Introduction

British Mensa recognised that people who apply to join do not always have the most uplifting experience. This is because they are invited to complete a test in which the standard is set very high. To join the society they need to score more highly than 98% of the general population which means that the majority will not reach this high bar and may end up disappointed. This may partially explain some of the negative comments that are sometimes thrown at Mensa. This article does not take a position – either positive or negative – concerning the value of Mensa. Instead it presents data on the personality types of applicants to British Mensa and how their personality type differs from the general population.

The background is that British Mensa decided to give the applicants who did not reach the standard something a little more useful than a simple rejection. As a result, all applicants since 2013 have been invited to complete the Type Dynamics Indicator (TDI[®]) as part of their application. The TDI is a BPS (British Psychological Society) Registered Test and so the results are not just the result of a completing an unfounded 'personality quiz' but rather is based on a well established personality model through a well constructed questionnaire.

How personality was measured

The personality differences measured are those defined by one of the best known models of personality as described in Carl Jung's theory of Psychological Type. For those who are not familiar with it, Jung proposed that all people have the same fundamental elements of personality. What makes us different is how we balance and express them. For example, everyone has elements of both Introversion and Extraversion. Jung proposed that these were opposing characteristics (i.e. cannot be expressed at the same time) and hence we each find a way to balance their expression in our everyday lives. Of course how we do this is partly dependent on context but also on some fundamental (perhaps genetic) preferences. The TDI invites a person to identify their preferences which then helps to suggest how that person will behave in general. In other words it suggests a predominant style rather than how they choose to behave in particular circumstances. If you would like to guess which preferences are likely to be more characteristic of Mensa applicants you can read the brief summary descriptions below and decide between each pair of opposing preferences:

Extraversion	Introversion	? Mensa
An extravert has a primary orientation outwards - they seek essential stimulation from the environment - the outer world of people and things.	An introvert has a primary orientation inwards - they seek essential stimulation from the inner world - their thoughts and reflections.	E or I
Sensing	Intuition	
The sensing preference takes in information 'as it is' - it is more literal and closer to the five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. It focuses on the elements and the details rather than the whole.	The iNtuitive preference takes in more holistic information - it sees the relationship between elements and can thus appear like a 'sixth sense' or hunch. It focuses on the patterns and possibilities rather than the details.	S or N
Thinking	Feeling	
The thinking preference seeks objective and logical reasons for decisions. It becomes comfortable when the rationale for decisions is established.	The feeling preference seeks to match decisions with important personal values. It is not dependent on a logical rationale to justify it.	T or F
Judging	Perceiving	
The judging preference is for deciding and closing. It works to introduce structure by organising, planning and getting results.	The perceiving preference is for exploring and keeping things open. It considers more options, seeks or listens to new evidence and enjoys flexibility and spontaneity.	J or P

Once you have guessed the preference for each pair, this can be summarised using the 4 letters –which leads to 16 possible combinations of four letters. This provides an easy way to summarise how you believe Mensa applicants differ from the general population.

Results

All applicants to Mensa are invited to complete the TDI. Clearly not all applicants take up the offer and not all applicants eventually join Mensa. In fact, Mensa have had 7,568 new members since 2013. In that period 9,272 applicants completed the TDI and their results are shown in the table below:

	Mensa Percent	General Population Percent	Ratio
I	70.00	43.50	1.61
E	30.00	56.10	0.53
S	64.30	63.80	1.01
N	35.70	35.80	1.00
T	78.50	53.10	1.48
F	21.50	46.50	0.46
J	72.00	50.70	1.42
P	28.00	48.90	0.57

The figures in the table above show that the most popular preferences in Mensa applicants are for I (70%), S (64%), T (79%) and J (72%). However, to understand how this is different from the general population it is necessary to consider the ratio between the proportion in the general population versus the proportion in the Mensa applicant group. This is shown in the column headed Ratio in the table above. Figures greater than 1.00 indicate that a preference is over represented in the Mensa applicant group. There are striking differences which are that Mensa applicants show a marked preference for Introversion, Thinking and Judging.

This same information can be analysed for each of the 16 types as shown in the table below:

4 letter preference	Mensa Applicants Percent	General Population Percent	Ratio
INTJ	10.3	3.0	3.4
ISTJ	34.2	12.6	2.7
INFJ	3.6	2.3	1.6
INTP	6.2	4.5	1.4
ISTP	7.3	5.8	1.3
INFP	3.3	4.0	0.8
ISFJ	3.7	6.4	0.6
ISFP	1.5	4.9	0.3
ENTJ	3.9	3.8	1.0
ENFJ	2.7	2.7	1.0
ESTJ	11.0	11.5	1.0
ENTP	2.7	5.7	0.5
ESTP	2.9	6.2	0.5
ESFJ	2.7	8.4	0.3
ENFP	2.9	9.8	0.3
ESFP	1.1	8.0	0.1

At the top of the table are the most over-represented types which are INTJ and ISTJ. The most under-represented types are ENFP and ESFP.

Conclusion

We cannot be sure that this sample is representative of all Mensa applicants or of the people who eventually join. However, the likelihood is that it does reflect both groups to some degree. If we accept this proposition then the results suggest a clear difference in the type preferences of Mensa applicants versus those of the general population. This information is interesting in itself but may also be useful for those who wish to join Mensa. Perhaps it is useful to consider knowing more about the type of people with whom they would be communing - 'forewarned is forearmed'? However, there is no reason to suppose that it is only similar types that will enjoy joining Mensa. It is true that some people enjoy joining groups where the people are similar to themselves but others enjoy joining groups precisely to extend their interactions with people less like themselves - perhaps in the spirit of appreciating difference. A person's type preferences should not be a barrier for applying to join - there are far more important issues for deciding whether to apply to join Mensa or not. And perhaps a future article will be able to shed light on what types are actually successful in their application to join.