

Exploration of Personality Traits of Family Nurse Practitioner Students

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Abstract

Background: Understanding personality types have been an unwavering desire for professionals making career choices. Online education of Family Nurse Practitioners is expanding rapidly. Studies have been conducted concerning learning styles of students and performance in online and on-campus education. Few studies have been conducted that examined the personality types of Family Nurse Practitioners. Objective: To examine the personality types of students entering online and on-campus Family Nurse Practitioner programs.

Methodology: Exploratory descriptive cross-sectional design. Sample 109 entering FNP students (50 online and 59 on-campus). Instrument Form M of Myers Briggs Personality Inventory administered anonymously online.

Results: Significant differences in Sensing versus Intuition and Judging versus Perceiving types were found across cohorts. No significant difference were found between online and on-campus cohorts. Highest composite indexes were Introvert, Sensing, Feeling, Judging and Extrovert, Sensing, Feeling, Judging.

Conclusions: Further research on personality types of FNP students and practicing FNPs is needed to determine which students would be best fitted for the FNP curriculum.

Personality type is defined as the dominant type that emerges after being administered the Myers/Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI). The Myers-Briggs is an instrument designed to measure psychological preferences. Myers reported that personality types varied with career selection. Limited explorations of personality types of nurses, and specifically advanced practice nurses, have been conducted.

Family nurse practitioners (FNP) are emerging as a profession created to expand patients' access to health care, with over 9,000 graduates in 2010. Few studies have examined personality types of FNPs. Education programs for FNPs are rapidly

expanding to an online format. This is consistent with The Chronicle of Higher Education (2009) projection of increasing online enrollments that states by 2020 over 60 percent of students will be taking all of their classes online. Knowles' Model of Adult Learning provides the framework for examining individual student characteristics and understanding how they impact the education process.

No research was found that examined differences in the personalities of online versus on-campus FNP students.

The purpose of this study was to examine the personality types of students entering a FNP program and to further examine differences of those enrolled in online versus on-campus education. Two research questions directed this study:

1. What are the personality types of students that enter Family Nurse Practitioner Education programs?
2. Is there a difference in personality types of FNP students who are enrolled in online versus on- campus education programs?

Methods

Study Design: Exploratory descriptive cross-sectional design.

Sample: A pilot study of 109 FNP students (50 online and 59 on-campus). Subjects were recruited using convenience sampling of all new entrants into the two educational programs.

Setting: On-campus- A private university in the southern United States.

Online- A private university in the northeast region of the United States

All students formally enrolled in the FNP program at either of the two sites were recruited.

Data Collection

IRB approval was obtained from both institutions. Participants were approached in their online or on-campus classroom and asked to complete the inventory. They were instructed to proceed to a web link to complete the MBTI Form M. The students anonymously completed the personality questionnaire. Consent was implied by the completion of the survey. Brief demographic data including age and gender was collected.

Instrument

The questionnaire consists of 93 questions and took an estimated 15 minutes to complete. MBTI form “M” contains four pairs of preferences or dichotomies, which include the following: Extroversion (E)/Introversion (I); Sensing (S)/Intuition (N); Thinking (T)/ Feeling (F); Judgment (J)/Perception (P). There are 16 type combinations created from the dichotomies. The reliability of the instrument varies from 75-90% for personality type in repeated measures and has been reported to be good across age and ethnic groups (Lawrence & Martin, n.d.). The validity of the instrument has been studied extensively and has been deemed valid for the four scales, for the preference pair’s dichotomies, and for combinations of preferences.

Data Analysis

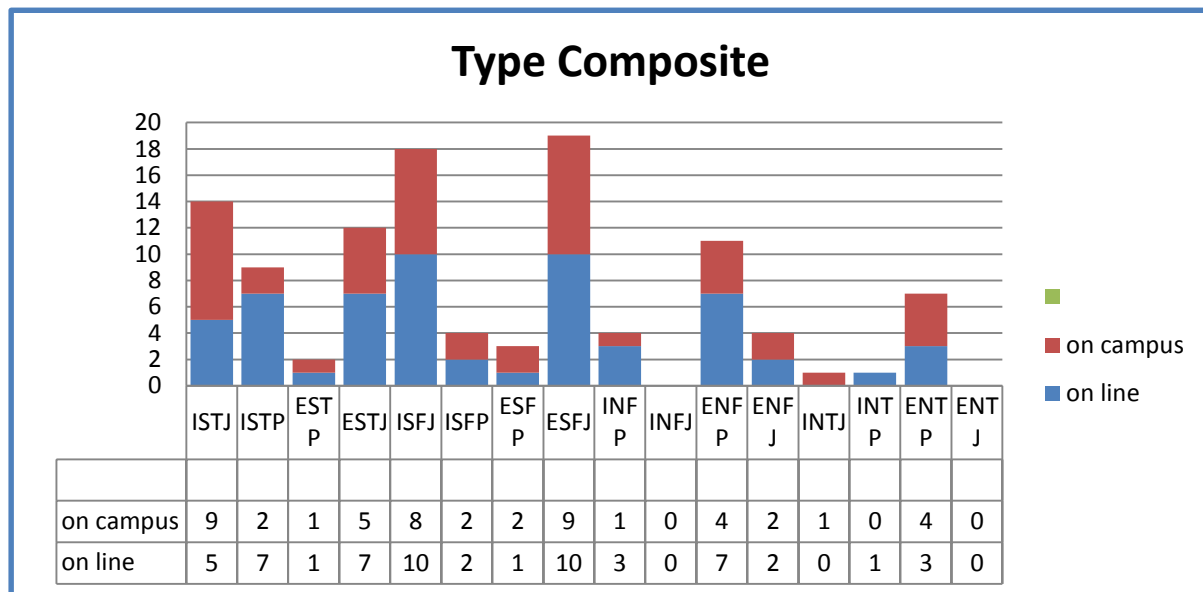
Age, gender, trait information and personality trait profile results were downloaded from the Myers/Briggs website and loaded into SPSS version 16. Frequency distributions were run on all variables. Chi Square statistics were computed for personality types and composite types. Additionally, chi square analysis of differences between online and on-campus cohorts was obtained. A t-test for differences in age of the two cohorts was calculated.

Results

A total of 109 participants with a mean age of 31.7 (online) and 33.29 (on-campus). There was no statistical difference between the ages of the two cohorts. Twenty males (7 on-campus, 13 online) and 79 females (42 on-campus, 37 online) comprised the study population. Results indicate (Table 1) a significant number of total FNP students were “sensing” over “intuition” sub-type. Total FNP students were “judging” versus “perceiving” sub-type. Both were statistically significant for the overall sample. Figure 1 illustrates that the most common composite personality types are Introvert, Sensing, Feeling Judging (ISFJ)(n=18), Extrovert, Sensing, Feeling, Judging (ESFJ, n=19), Introvert, Sensing, Thinking, Judging (ISTJ, n=14), and Extrovert, Sensing, Thinking, Judging (ESTJ, n=12). There were inadequate numbers to calculate Chi Square statistics between composite types. However, there was a larger number of Introvert, Sensing, Thinking, and Perceiving (ISTP) in the online(n=7) versus on-campus (n=2) students.

Table 1: Chi Square of Personality Sub-types *= $p < .05$, n=109

Results:	Cohort Online	Cohort On-campus	Total FNP Students	Significance Total
Extrovert Introvert	27 23	32 27	59 50	.444
Sensing Intuition	38 12	43 16	81 28	*.000
Thinking Feeling	22 28	24 35	46 63	.125
Judging Perceiving	34 16	34 25	68 41	*.013

**Figure 1: Type Composite of Online and On-Campus Students n=109**

Conclusion

The results of this pilot study indicate a predominantly “judging” personality type across both cohorts of FNP students. The MBTI suggests that “judging” types prefer a world that is logical. The type indicator is frequently used in career counseling and professional development. The study results support the findings of Bean (1995) who reported that Adult Nurse Practitioners (ANP) were “sensing,” 56%, and “judging,” 86%.

The results of this study indicate a significant sub-type of “sensing” versus “intuition”. The tendency toward “sensing” versus “intuition” of the FNP students emerged from this pilot study. Durham (2009) reported that results from using the MBTI indicate that “perceiving” nurses and “sensing” nurses preferred simulation over “intuitive” nurses.

The results of this study indicate that ISFJ, ESFJ, ISTJ, and ESTJ were the most common composite types. In a study conducted by Busen & Jones (1995), researchers examined personality types of Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (PNP) students using the MBTI. Although there were only 21 participants, the study showed that 67% of participants had either “sensing/feeling” or “intuitive/feeling” preferences” (Busen & Jones, 1995). This is consistent with the results of this study which found that the FNP students were predominately “sensing” In another study that examined thirteen FNP students’ personality types, the majority of participants scored in the ESTJ category on the MBTI (Kelly, 1998). This agrees with the results of this study which found ESTJ to be one of the more common composite types. Lastly, in a study conducted by Bean (1995), researchers examined the personalities of Adult Nurse Practitioners (ANPs).

Limitations of this study include the small sample size and data limited to two universities. Further research on personality types of FNP students is needed to determine if true differences exist between online and on-campus FNP students. Bayram, Deniz, & Erdogan (2008) reported that personality types explain 53% of academic achievement and 52% of attitudes. Harrington and Loffredo (2010) examined personality type and preference for online versus on-campus instruction of 166 female college students using the MBTI to determine their preferred learning style. They report that “perceiving” types prefer on-campus classes, prefer learning through listening, and desire to gauge the emotional reactions of others (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010). These studies indicate that there may be differences, however, we do not know if that exists for FNP students. Therefore more extensive studies of personality types of students in FNP programs are needed to expand the understanding of and meet the needs of FNP students. Additional research is needed to determine the personality types of graduate FNPs to see if the entering students are similar to the currently practicing professionals.

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Key Words: Myers Briggs, Family Nurse Practitioner, Online Education

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