

Misconceptions about Type 4

There is a lot of mistyping at 4 in the enneagram community, mostly due to misinterpretation of texts. This large-scale mistyping has even caused a feedback loop where the texts about 4 are describing mistyped people. Here are some of the most common misconceptions about type 4:

Myth: Being candid about traumatic experiences indicates type 4

Fact: Any type can have trauma and negative experiences/emotions. Being “dark” about things doesn’t indicate type 4 in itself. Being intense and problematic and feeling like people “can’t handle” you points more to psychological health than any particular type.

Myth: Self-deprecation indicates type 4

Fact: This is seen most often in 6’s and 9’s especially if there’s 4 in the tritype, also 7w6. 4’s tend to be arrogant and detached as compensation for how different they feel inside. This feeling “different” (either with the narcissism of 3 wing or the intellectual superiority complex at 5 wing) tends to translate to superiority/arrogance rather than self-deprecation. 4’s can be candid about their shortcomings, but they will not likely bash themselves publicly or turn into droopy complainers. 4 is a type that could not be a good sport at a roast.

Myth: Being artistic makes me a 4

Fact: Any type can be artistic. This is a plain and simple fact. Feeling deeply moved by every-day things doesn’t make you a 4. If anything, it’s anti-4 to be deeply moved by anything so common as “the gentle touch of the wind” for example. 4’s have a specific connection to aesthetic expression; they’ve rejected themselves somewhere deep down and so they fashion themselves into works of art as compensation. “I’m better than people, I’m art itself.” This plays further into the natural “arrogance” of 4.

Myth: Depression or dark feelings makes me a 4

Fact: Depression and/or sadness are emotions/conditions that can be experienced by all types, even bright 7’s, and many 4’s are not depressed at all. 4’s can be happy people, at least relative to what happiness is. They will just rarely identify with their own happiness as they can’t help but see negativity at every turn. This is different than the listless lifelessness of depression.

Myth: Being moody/dramatic makes me a 4

Fact: 4’s do tend to be reactive and moody, but so do 6’s and 7’s and other types. 4’s are a withdrawn type, so they are less likely to dive in and create/engage in drama. 6’s tend to be very intense and vulnerable, but 7’s are the ones who are naturally big personalities. The idea also that moods just come and go and “take” me where they take me is a passive 9 view of emotional life. 4’s are hyper-specific and focused. The idea the you’re a passive participant in an emotional ride is anti-4.

Myth: Being unique or weird makes me a 4

Fact: ALL TYPES want to be unique in some way. We live in a world where we’re expected to be unique and bring something different to the table, but we also all have the natural human impulse to belong and create common

ground. Some of the most unique people are not 4’s—for example, Lady GaGa is 739, Jaden Smith is 937, Robyn is 963, etc. The type that is most likely to stand out as being super “weird” and unique is type 7. 7’s can’t stand being restricted in any way, and this usually means that they can’t help but be exactly who they are no matter how strange it is. As a cultural example, gay male culture is very 7ish (rainbows, drag queens, drama, playful cattiness, abundant sex, etc.). I believe this is because it was type 7’s who were most likely to “come out” and wave their flags, be proud of being a “freak,” and loudly and proudly pave the way for the rest of gay people to find their footing. “Wanting to be unique” is the traditional wording for 4’s core desire. While I don’t think this is necessarily incorrect, I think we need to change phrasing depending on cultural climates. Being “unique” now has a positive connotation; so does being “weird,” being a “freak,” etc. 4’s internal identity struggle is not a positive one. They don’t want to be unique because everyone is unique. They also don’t consciously want to be different. The type structure is built around automatically differentiating themselves in every situation to the point where their own true selves are distorted. 4’s don’t worry about who they are, they worry about who they’re not.

Myth: Being overly emotional means I’m a 4

Fact: All types have emotions, but not all types identify with them. There are some types that do tend to be more emotion-centred, and 4 is definitely one of them. However, I would put type 6 as the most outwardly emotional type, depending on the tritype and specific case.

Myth: Enduring pain on the inside and having to smile on the outside means I’m a self-preservation 4

Fact: No, 100 times no. Naranjo was wrong. His instinctual subtypes are not based on human instinct research. He said almost nothing about what each instinct actually is. The idea that you must avoid letting others on to what ever you’re feeling is 100% anti-4. I’m not suggesting that 4’s are always outwardly dramatic, but it is in direct opposition to the basic type structure of 4 to not individuate your own emotions/identity. This phenomenon in the enneagram literature has caused a large multitude of more emotionally-centred or 4-fixed 9’s to mistype as core 4. This type description speaks to everyone who has negative emotions inside (which is normal) but feels unable to express them in most day-to-day environments. This doesn’t make you a 4, it makes you human.

Myth: Feeling detached from mainstream things means I’m super unique and a 4

Fact: This is true of 4, but any type can be sardonic and biting about “basic” people or mainstream things.

Myth: I’m empathetic, this is a quality of type 4

Fact: All human beings have the capacity for empathy unless they’re sociopaths. However, identifying with empathy is a superego trait. Many 4’s do great things with their lives like helping others, donating to charities, being a great friend/parent, etc. However, the type structure of 4

is not designed around identifying with goodness. 4's and 8's specifically tend to identify with "badness." This is a very blunt and wide statement, but I still think it's true: most 4's couldn't handle being a one-to-one talk therapist as their main vocation. Being a therapist requires complete and utter empathy and, in a sense, erasing yourself for your patient. You're not allowed to do the 4 thing where you insert your own unique identity into everything. You must absorb and restore equilibrium. These are very basic type 9 qualities. 4's tend to gravitate more towards activities where they can be constantly expressing themselves. Being a therapist is the inverse of self-expression.

Myth: 4's fear being flawed and emotionally abandoned.

Fact: It's not untrue that being flawed is a focus for 4's. However this is an unconscious focus. 4's are not afraid of being flawed, they feel they already are. Their deep fear is that they're actually okay, actually just normal, and that their problems are the same problems everyone else has. Again, I think there's a part of every human that wants to be special, even a special problem. But 4's are not afraid of this. 4's are not afraid of being emotionally abandoned or physically abandoned, at least not as a type-specific phenomenon. Abandonment is very much a core 6 problem. Deep down 6's are afraid of being too alone or having no support. 4's deliberately push most people away because they don't see value in people who are too "plebeian."

Myth: All the stuff I just read is describing unhealthy 4's, I'm not like that/I used to be like that.

Fact: Again, a big resounding no. The large majority of people, even people who do inner work, will spend their lives at average health levels. All the types are unhealthy. 9's for example can be incredibly empathetic, peacemaking, and warm people. But this occurs because they're asleep to their own gut centre and have dispersed ego boundaries. What's healthy about that? 6's can be freedom-fighters, friendly, and morally en pointe. But this occurs because they lack the self-confidence to trust their own thinking, over-question everything, and have a fear of being abandoned. What's healthy about that? 7's can be the most entertaining and special people who teach us how to be ourselves. But this occurs because they use distraction and entertainment to avoid their own depths and fears. What's healthy about that? So yes, 4's can be elitist, catty, unempathetic, self-absorbed, and negative. And the root causes of these behaviours are just as unhealthy as the other types. But why should 4's be positive? Other types don't like identifying with negativity, but this avoidance of negativity as a fact is a positive reframe. What's healthy about that? Negativity is a fact of life. Sometimes empathy isn't what's needed. Sometimes self-absorption is required to create good art. Sometimes we need catty people to tell the ugly truth. Sometimes hand-holding positivity is just a lie. Sometimes insisting on being "good" and "healthy" all the time is an exhausting way of ignoring our darker impulses. Sometimes elitism preserves high-quality practices. Sometimes we just want to be mean because it's

honest to our experience. Sometimes we shouldn't care about disrupting others' good moods if it means we're being authentic to ours. Sometimes hatred is the truth. Deep down, people all feel negativity. However, 4's do not need this pep talk. What they need is to understand that actually sometimes it's okay to be nice/positive. It doesn't mean you're too common.

If your anger has been bubbling higher and higher as you read these facts, ask yourself why you hold on to type 4 as an identity. Whether you believe you're mistyped or not, what does it do for your ego to say you're type 4? Does it give license to your internal darkness that you secretly judge as bad? Does it make you feel special? Does it feel good to say "I hate type 4 but I'm like totally a 4 though?" Does it promise the reward of being part of a group of likeminded "weirdos?" Does it give you a psychological explanation for why you don't feel like you always fit in? Does it make you feel more artistic? Does it remove the responsibility we all feel to other human beings because "it's not my fault, I'm just a 4"? Regardless of what our type is or whether we've mistyped or not, it's a good idea to always ask ourselves what we actually get out of this. Our egos trick us. What does our typing feed us? You can rage against the truth as much as you want and it will only be a detriment to you in the long run. I've been there, most people have.

Type 4 vs. "Self-Revealing"

I'm seeing something that keeps popping up in the enneagram community that I wanted to address. I'm writing this on the fly (like I do everything) so forgive me if it's not perfectly worded.

People seem to equate self-revealing honesty about trauma to 4. I'm seeing lots of people talk about trauma they've suffered and typing as 4. Or I'm seeing people try to use said brutal honesty as proof that they are 4 or 4-fixed. First of all, anyone who can talk about their trauma in such an honest way is BRAVE, because I certainly couldn't. It's difficult for any type to talk about deeply traumatic experiences especially to a group of almost strangers.

However, this is not type 4. Type 4 is an image type, and image types are concerned with looking at themselves in the mirror and seeing a person they like or that they want to be. For 4, that's an addiction to being frustrated about not being able to have something that would make you complete (among other things <http://www.theenneagramuniverse.com/type-4.html>). But this is not the true heart centre, the types are a crafted image, an ego, a personality problem. There are 4's that lived the easiest, most privileged lives that are still 4's. 4 is a reactive type, but they are also withdrawn. It's a lot more likely for a big bold type like 7 or 8 to come into a space and be able to speak candidly about trauma, or anything truly personal really.

4's like to think they are self-revealing and authentic, but TRUE authenticity is terrifying for a 4. The truth of what really hurts us, the things that have really damaged us, truly putting ourselves on the line, that is completely terrifying just as much as it is for any type. The kind of bravery I've seen from people in this group is not the same as the crafted image of brokenness that the 4 point lives at in the heart centre. You will find me complaining, being bitchy, being negative, making myself separate, pulling away, but you will never see me talk about the things that truly cut me deeply in this group, because that's too scary and it also threatens my self-image of being somehow separate. If anything, I withhold my weakest spots more than others. If everyone is self-revealing, then I can't be because I need to hold onto my separateness. If I just splat myself on the table for everyone to see then I'm going to have to shatter my own type ego which wants me to believe that I'm an alien. I can boldly throw my own self-image at others, but to actually discuss trauma, I won't. This isn't to say that all 4's will think like me, but I just need it to be understood that talking about trauma you've experienced does not make you a 4, it just makes you brave. 4's will often have certain "problems" that they are comfortable using as their broken self-image, but these are often not TRULY traumatic issues, but rather ways to feed the type 4 ego (see, I'm broken, see I created a problem, but it's not something that truly matters).

If you have been through trauma, you can use the enneagram to figure out how you've dealt with and processed the trauma. Reading type 4 might give you some sense of feeling like "oh that's why I'm so upset all the time." You are upset because you have a right to be. Suffering comes with trauma no matter what type you are. It's often the more positive types like 2, 7 (or some 6's) that take issue with that negative piece inside them and the ego can try to use type 4 as a way to explain why they have such a dark side. Type 4 becomes a way for the ego to say "It's not my fault I'm sad because I'm just a 4." But trauma is never your fault. And truly dark experiences are not the same as the gold-trimmed royally-crafted painting that 4's want to see when they look in the mirror.

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