

Eng. 8

Music Preferences and Your Personality

What does your taste in music reveal about you?

By [Kendra Cherry](#).

✓ Medically reviewed by [Amy Morin, LCSW](#) on January 28, 2020

Music plays an important role in the lives of people all over the world, which is why many wonder what individual factors might influence musical preferences. Could the contents of your playlist, for example, reveal something about your personality?

People listen to music as a way to set the mood, to motivate a workout, or even to gain inspiration. How much are those choices influenced by underlying personality traits?

Personality Traits Linked to Musical Styles

One large-scale [study](#) conducted by researchers at Heriot-Watt University looked at more than 36,000 participants from all over the world. Participants were asked to rate more than 104 different musical styles in addition to offering information about aspects of their personalities.

According to the researcher, Adrian North, the reason people sometimes feel defensive about their taste in music might be related to how much it relates to [attitudes and personality](#).

North suggests that people do define themselves through music and use it as a means to relate to other people. His research points to the connection that people often make between who they are as an individual and their musical tastes.

Keep in mind that these are the results published in only one study rather than being replicated and validated by a variety of researchers and different study designs. The following are some of the [personality traits](#) the study linked to certain musical styles.

Pop Music

Fans of the top 40 pop hits tend to be extroverted, honest, and conventional. While pop music lovers are hardworking and have high self-esteem, researchers suggest that they tend to be less creative and more uneasy.

Rap and Hip/Hop Music

In spite of the stereotype that rap lovers are more [aggressive](#) or violent, researchers have actually found no such link. Rap fans do tend to have high [self-esteem](#) and are usually outgoing.

Country Music

Country music fans are typically hardworking, conventional, and outgoing. While country songs are often centered on heartbreak, people who gravitate towards this genre tend to be very emotionally stable. They also tend to be more conservative and rank lower on the trait of openness to experience.

Rock/Heavy Metal Music

Despite the sometimes aggressive image that rock and heavy metal music project, researchers found that fans of this style of music are usually quite gentle. They tend to be creative, but are often [introverted](#) and may suffer from low self-esteem.

Indie Music

Fans of the indie genre are typically introverted, intellectual, and creative. According to researchers, they also tend to be less hardworking and less gentle. Passivity, anxiousness, and low self-esteem are other common personality characteristics.

Dance Music

According to researchers, people who prefer dance music are usually outgoing and assertive. They also tend to rank high on the trait of openness to experience, one of the [five major personality traits](#). People who prefer fast-paced electronic music also tend to rank low on gentleness.

Classical Music

Classical music lovers are typically more introverted but are also at ease with themselves and the world around them. They are creative and have a good sense of self-esteem.

Jazz, Blues, and Soul Music

People who enjoy jazz, blues, or soul music were found to be more extroverted with high self-esteem. They also tend to be very creative, intelligent, and at ease.

What the Research Says

A number of studies have found that musical tastes can actually be good predictors of personality traits, yet not all the research agrees.

Predictions of Personality Traits

[Research](#) conducted by psychologists Jason Rentfrow and Sam Gosling suggested that knowing the type of music you listen to can actually lead to surprisingly accurate predictions about your personality.

Researchers found that people could make accurate judgments about an individual's levels of extraversion, creativity, and open-mindedness after listening to 10 of their favorite songs

Extroverts tend to seek out songs with heavy bass lines while those who enjoy more complex styles such as jazz and classical music tend to be more creative and have higher IQ-scores. Rentfrow and Gosling have extended their studies, looking at the different facets of music that can be linked to preferences.

Music and Cognitive Styles

Another study found that the types of music you enjoy may be connected to the ways your brain processes information. Researchers suggest that there are two ways of responding to the world: empathizing involves being able to respond to the world based on social cues, while systemizing involves interacting based upon preset conceptions of how people think they should respond.

In the study, researchers found that people who were empathizers were also more likely to enjoy mellow but emotionally-rich contemporary music, which ranged from indie-rock to country to folk. The systemizers, however, were more likely to prefer complex, intense, energetic music that was upbeat and positive.

The systemizers, who researchers suggest tend to follow career paths in math and science, are more drawn to the structural complexity of the music, often liking classical, jazz, and world music.

Empathizers, who are often drawn more to creative careers or those that involve working with people, are more likely to prefer softer music that evokes strong emotional responses.

Not all research supports the idea that personality traits play a role in determining musical preferences, however. One [2017 meta-analysis](#) found that personality traits played very little of a role in accounting for these individual differences.

Other Factors Also Play a Role

Experts note that personality traits alone do not account for musical preferences. While music is often an important way to express self-identity, research has shown that people listen to music for a variety of purposes.

[One study](#) suggested that some of the key psychological functions that music serves include improving performance, stimulating curiosity and imagination, and amplifying certain moods or emotions. Other factors including gender, age, social class, and cultural background also play important roles in musical taste.

A Word From Verywell

The next time you are putting together a playlist to listen to during your commute or workout, consider how your personality might be reflected in your song choices. You might also consider listening to styles of music that you don't normally prefer; [research suggests](#) that doing this may actually have a lasting impact on the brain.

Related: [The Psychological Benefits of Music](#)

0 Sources

Verywell Mind uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our [editorial process](#) to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

taste, reveal, rate, keep in mind, gravitate towards, rank, prediction

What kind(s) of music do you prefer?

Do you have the personality traits that are mentioned in the examples?

What kind(s) of music don't you like?

Where and when do you listen to music?

Have your tastes changed over the years?

Are you an empathizer or a systemizer?

Honestly, the more I listen to _____, the more I like/dislike it.

The less I think about _____, the better I feel.

The older I get, the more I gravitate towards _____.

The more _____, the _____.