

Musical Personalities

1. How important is the music we listen to? According to psychologists Peter J. Rentfrow and Samuel D. Gosling, it might be more important than we realize. Rentfrow and Gosling came up with the hypothesis that people choose music that reflects the kind of person they are. In other words, these researchers believe that our music preferences are tied to our personality type. In order to test this hypothesis, the psychologists interviewed undergraduate students at the University of Texas at Austin to see if they could categorize the students by their “musical personality.”
2. Their research, which appeared in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, led to some very interesting discoveries. The undergraduate students rated music to be as important to their lives as other hobbies and activities. Music was even more important than the television shows they watched and the types of food they ate. In addition, the researchers found that the students “believed that their music preferences revealed a substantial amount of information about their own personalities... and the personalities of other people.” But perhaps most interestingly, Rentfrow and Gosling began to see patterns when they looked at the link between music preference and personality type. Their conclusion was that people could be categorized into four distinct music personalities.

Reflective And Complex

3. According to the study, people who enjoy blues, folk, jazz, or classical music are open to new experiences, consider themselves intelligent, have active imaginations, and are good conversationalists. Reflective and Complex people appreciate the slower pace and complexity of these four musical styles because they match their relaxed, intellectual personality.

Intense And Rebellious

4. People in this personality category also welcome new experiences. Like the Reflective and Complex, they consider themselves smart and enjoy the company

of others. However, they do have two characteristics that make them unique: they are more athletic, and they get pleasure from taking risks. These thrill-seekers like high-energy music, including alternative rock, heavy metal, and hard rock. The power of the electric guitars in these music styles complements the intensity of this group's personality. Rentfrow and Gosling's study also showed that these people connected to the lyrics in these rock songs, which often spoke about rebellion, or resisting rules and authority.

Upbeat And Conventional

5. Many people fit this personality type, including fans of both pop and country music. These people prefer simple music that is upbeat or happy. Those who like the lyrics of pop and country tend to be more conservative, or more resistant to change and new experiences. They value tradition, and though they are not big risk-takers, they do enjoy being physically active. Like their music, they are cheerful people. The Upbeat and Conventional enjoy being social, and they take pleasure in hanging out with and helping other people.

Energetic And Rhythmic

6. Last but not least are the fans of rap, funk, and dance music. Like their music, these people are full of energy. They are enthusiastic and outgoing, both physically and socially. The Energetic and Rhythmic are extroverted, and they love social interaction. They tend to be talkative and what some people might call the "life of the party." They also don't like to keep their emotions hidden. They prefer to express their feelings to others immediately. Clearly, the electric instruments and rhythmic tempos of rap, funk, and dance suit these lively people perfectly.

Conclusions

7. Rentfrow and Gosling were the first psychologists to categorize personalities by music choice. Their four personality types – Reflective and Complex, Intense and Rebellious, Upbeat and Conventional, and Energetic and Rhythmic – emerged from months of research into the ways college students felt about music. From their research, they concluded that "knowing what kind of music a person likes could

serve as a clue to his or her personality.” However, they caution that the four personality types are only guidelines. Given the complex nature of human personalities and preferences, there will always be some overlap. Not all rock fans are risk-takers, for example, and not all extroverted people listen to rap. Plus, the researchers point out that the categories don’t account for those people who enjoy listening to all different kinds of music. In fact, this may even lead to the description of a whole new personality type.