

# Relationship between Music Preference and Personality Type

Dr. Vandana Sharma

Assistant Professor (Department of Music) Bhagini Nivedita College, University of Delhi, India

**Abstract:** Music is universally omnipresent and in contemporary society, music is so pervasive that it is absolutely unavoidable. The deliberate access of FM radios in cars, iPods, smart phones and speaker systems has made music potentially ubiquitous to the individual. It is believed that the average person listens to music 10 to 15 percent of the day. And importantly this percentage is approximately equal to the time spent watching television or reading books, and about half the time spent in daily conversation (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003, p. 1236; Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008, p. 494; Mehl & Pennebaker 2003, p. 866). Research shows people to prefer music consistent with their personalities (Rentfrow & McDonald, 2010, p. 680-1), and many believe music preferences provide information about the personalities of themselves and others (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003, p. 1250; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2006, p. 236-241). Because of the omnipresence of music, the amount of time and money spent consuming music, and its role in communicating one's personal image, it deserves to be well studied in combination with personality and individual preferences (Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2003, p. 1236).

**Keywords:** Music, Personality, Preferences, Relationship, personality traits

## 1. Introduction

Cattell (Cattell & Anderson, 1953; Cattell & Saunders, 1954) was the first to suggest a relationship between music and personality. He believed music can satisfy deep and unconscious needs and therefore studied music preferences in order to gain a deeper understanding of personality (Kemp, 1996, p. 121). Although Cattell believed music preferences provided information about unconscious aspects of personality other researchers have supported the idea that music preferences are a manifestation of more explicit traits of personality (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003, p. 1237). For example, sensation seeking was found to be significantly correlated with music preference. Sensation seeking is the need for new, various, and complex experiences, and the willingness to take physical and social risks in order to have such experiences. Music is more than just entertainment. If we scratch beneath the surface we'll find that music is even more delicate and personal than we think. There are numerous scientific disciplines – most of them relatively young – aiming to understand and explain our perception of music and its connection to the human psyche. It is scientifically proven that music has influence on cognitive skills, learning, working memory, way of thinking, and personal and social development – just to name a few.

## 2. Review of Literature

*"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything."* – Plato

Litle & Zuckerman (1986) were the first to adopt a broad range of music genres to measure the personality and music preference relationship, and were the first to examine this relationship using a specific unambiguous personality trait with dimensions of music preferences. It therefore laid the methodological foundation for future research (Rentfrow & McDonald, 2010, p. 675). Social identity research also reveals associations between personality and music preference. For example, people have been shown to prefer music that is consistent with their personalities (North &

Hargreaves, 1999, p. 90). It therefore seems that people enjoy listening to music which reinforces their basic psychological needs (Rentfrow & McDonald, 2008, p. 681). Most recently, Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) have created a way of categorizing musical preference with specific personality traits by adopting a new measure of music preference called The Short Test of Music Preference (STOMP). This research indicated how personality can lead to particular musical preferences. It also showed the possibility that exposure to certain types of music may lead to changes in the development of certain personality traits.

In a research conducted by Professor Adrian North of Heriot-Watt University in 2010, of more than 36,000 participants around the world, it was substantiated that one's music preference and personality type are closely related. People from all over the world were asked to rate 104 musical styles and also questioned about aspects of their personality. Unexpectedly, psychologists have uncovered that classical aficionados share identical personality traits with metal fans. North (2010) admits he was surprised by the results of the study as apart from the age differences, they were virtually identical. Both were found to be more creative than other people, both were not terribly outgoing and they were also quite at ease. The major findings of North (2010) have been mentioned in the table given below:

## 3. Musical Styles versus Personality Traits

Blues	High self-esteem, are creative, outgoing, gentle and at ease
Jazz	High self-esteem, are creative, outgoing and at ease
Classical Music	High self-esteem, creative, outgoing and at ease
Rap	High self-esteem, outgoing
Opera	High self-esteem, creative, gentle
Country and Western	Hardworking, outgoing
Reggae	have high self-esteem, are creative, outgoing, gentle and at ease, but not hardworking
Dance	Creative and outgoing but not gentle
Indie	Low self-esteem, creative, not hard working, not

	gentle
Bollywood	Creative, outgoing
Rock/ heavy metal	Low self-esteem, creative, not hard-working, not outgoing, gentle, at ease
Chart pop	High self-esteem, not creative, hardworking, outgoing, gentle, not at ease
Soul	High self-esteem, creative, outgoing, gentle, at ease

Source: Heriot-Watt University

Professor North is of the opinion that his research could have many uses in marketing because if one knows a person's music preference, one can tell what kind of person he/she is, and thus able to decide who to sell what. There are obvious implications for the music industry which is worried about declining CD/DVD sales.

In addition, a research was carried out Brown R.A. (2012) in Chigasaki, Japan which tried to find out more about the link between personality profiles and music genre preferences among Japanese students. Unlike the above, this research focused on merely 12 music genres, 6 dimensions and 24 facets of personality. Results indicated that, openness to experience and particularly the facet of aesthetic appreciation were associated with a preference for reflective music (jazz, classical, opera, gospel, enka), while one extroversion facet – *sociability* – was associated with the preference for pop music.

Most of the existing literature indicates that certain aspects of personality are associated with certain music preferences. Though a plethora of evidence of relationship between major aspects of personality and music genre preferences exist in the developed world, similar large scale research in developing nations including India are less. Besides, recently it has been observed that individuals use music for a variety of additional purposes. For example, most of the college-going students and young-age professionals spend several hours per day commuting to and fro in crowded trains and buses and it is observed that listening to music through headphones or ear-plugs while commuting is getting routine for some. It is known that musical preferences also interact with time of day and situation (Schafer & Sedlmeier, 2009). So new areas of research for music preferences are coming up and should be studied with varied individual types to check its effect on their personalities or vice-versa. Last but not the least, it is worthwhile to mention that characterizing people with their music preference may sometimes lead to false pretences, and not correctly gauging them because everyone is unique in that matter. In the future, it may be possible to accurately determine personality with enough background information. "Future research can build on this foundation by including a wider array of music from various genres and exploring music preferences across generations, cultures, and social contexts. Such work will serve to inform our understanding of the nature of music preferences and its importance in people's lives" (Rentfrow & Goldberg & Levitin, 2012).

Several studies have looked at how people's music preference and personality are related to the sub-culture surrounding the music they like (Arnett, 1991; North & Hargreaves, 1999). Future research focusing on these different sub-cultures may lead to pertinent discoveries

about how music affects individuals not only as a leisure activity but as a part of their identity and how it affects them socially. Finally, it may be useful to look at not only what music people listen to, and the different ways in which they listen to music, but finding out the reason why people enjoy listening to different types of music could also be invaluable.

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