

**The effects of personality type on musical preference**

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine correlations between personality type and musical preference. Participants took a Myers Briggs personality test and then answered three questions regarding musical preferences. Although there were small correlations found between personality type and musical preference, many of the large trends were consistent throughout each personality type examined.

As a music educator or music therapist, it is imperative that one knows how the student or client is being effected by the music used in lessons or sessions. If one demonstrates this kind of understanding, one will be better able to meet the long-term goals of the student or client. Research has been conducted which concludes the correlation between personality type and musical preference, but little is known in terms of what those correlations are. The purpose of this study is to test the theory of psychological type, developed by Carl G. Jung<sup>1</sup>, as it relates to music. The survey given will determine participants personality type according to the Myers-Briggs personality test and measure correlations between their results and their musical preferences.

### Review of Literature

A study by Ochse and Plug (1986) determined that there are “intercorrelations between those personality components that have passed [the subjects] critical stages.” (Ochse& Plug, 1245). Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) did further investigation to find that there is a relationship between personality characteristics and musical preference. These findings lay the groundwork for this study, indicating that there is a relationship between a student’s personality type and how they will be effected by the music they are exposed to. Hunter& Schellenburg (2011) examined student’s liking for music based on personality type and frequency of exposure to different types of music, concluding that their likeness for a piece of music increased the more a student was exposed, but then decreased as a student became over-exposed. It is important to note that the number of exposures did not correlate with the personality dimensions measured (openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability) however, levels of

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<sup>1</sup> C G Jungs Theory. (n.d.). Retrieved December 1, 2015, from <http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/c-g-jungs-theory.htm>

openness did correlate with these four dimensions. Delsing (2008) determined that personality characteristics can be used to predict changes in one's musical preferences over a 3-year period. This kind of information is necessary, particularly working with students at the middle school and high school level, as those programs last 3-4 years each.

### Methods

This quantitative study will have two surveys. First, participants will take the Myers-Briggs personality test to measure their personality characteristics according to four different aspects: Level of introversion/extroversion, information processing (intuition vs. sensing,) decision making(feeling vs. thinking,) and structure (judging vs perceiving.) There are sixteen different personality types that can result from this survey. These dichotomies are the foundation for Carl G. Jung's theory of personality type. The data from this survey will be organized based on which of the sixteen results each participant is given. After completing the Myers-Briggs test, a separate survey will be given to measure each participant's musical preferences based on genre. (Shown in Appendix B)The data from this survey will be used to find common trends between personality type (obtained from the first survey) and musical preferences (obtained from the second survey.)

Participants in this survey will be students who are majoring in music at the University of Kansas. The diversity level of students in these programs paired with their knowledge of music make them an ideal population from which to conduct this study.

### Results

31 students were surveyed (N=31.) The personality test determined that collectively, these participants represented 13 of the 16 personality types. Six participants were found to be

ENFJ (19.3%) five were INFP (16.13%) four were INFP and four ISFJ (12.9% each.) Three ESFP (9.68%) two ESTP (6.45%). ENTJ, ENTP, ESFJ, INFJ, INTP, ISTJ, and ISFP each had one participant in their category (3.2% each.) These results support a conclusion that has not yet been made in the literature previously discussed. 26 of the 31 participants (83.87%) received results of F in the 3<sup>rd</sup> dichotomy (decision-making,) meaning their decision-making process is feeling-based rather than thinking-based. (Shown in figure 1 of Appendix A)

Those with personality types involving extraversion showed a significantly lower preference for country music than introverts. Three extraverts listed it as a favorite genre compared to 10 that listed it as a least favorite genre. Three introverts also listed country as a favorite genre, however only six introverts listed it as a least favorite genre. Extraverts showed a higher preference for alternative music than introverts. Three extraverts listed the genre three times as a favorite and it received zero listings for least favorite. Introverts listed this genre once as a favorite and once as a least favorite.

Several trends in preference were consistent across a majority of personality types. Classical music was listed as a favorite genre in eleven out of the thirteen personality types represented and received zero listings for least favorite genre. Soundtracks were also listed as a preference by a majority of personality types (seven of 13 with no significant majority in a particular dichotomy) and received zero listings for least favorite. Metal was listed as a least favorite genre in ten out of the thirteen personality types listed and received only one listing for favorite genre. (Shown in figure 2 of appendix A)

An Overwhelming majority of genres listed as most prevalent in the household the subject grew up in were listed as favorite rather than least favorite. Collectively, there were 66

responses listed in that category, 37 (56%) of these responses were also listed as a favorite. Three of the 66 (4.5%) were listed as least-favorite. The other 39.5% of responses in this category were not listed as a favorite or least favorite genre.

### Discussion

The results of this survey support the research discussed in the review of literature. However, this study did not measure changes in musical preference over time, so it can neither support nor contradict the findings of Delsing (2008.) While this survey did detect trends in musical preference among differing personality types, it also found that the most prevalent likes and dislikes according to genre did not apply only to specific personality types.

There were two significant conclusions that can be made from the data collected. The first is that the majority of collegiate musicians make decisions based on feeling rather than thinking. The second is that among collegiate musicians, a majority of their preferred genres are a result of the music they were exposed to in their household. Music educators and music therapists alike can apply these results to their work with young adults through selection of repertoire and establishment of goals or objectives.

This study was limited to current students of the KU School of Music, which means that it was limited to students of collegiate age (18-25) currently living in the Midwest. Due to this limitation, there was no way to truly measure changes in musical preference over time, as mentioned above. Although I reached out only to current KU School of Music students, the fact that my survey was online means that I cannot guarantee that these students were the only ones that took the survey.

Participants in this survey represented 13 out of the 16 personality types. A larger demographic which represents all 16 types would have yielded more significant results.

Future research is needed both to support the general findings of Delsing (2008) and to compare the data to a wider demographic. Because of the high amount of possible personality results and the mostly free-response nature of this survey, grouping the personality type into subgroups and having pre-determined genre selections may increase the statistical significance of this survey.

Appendix A

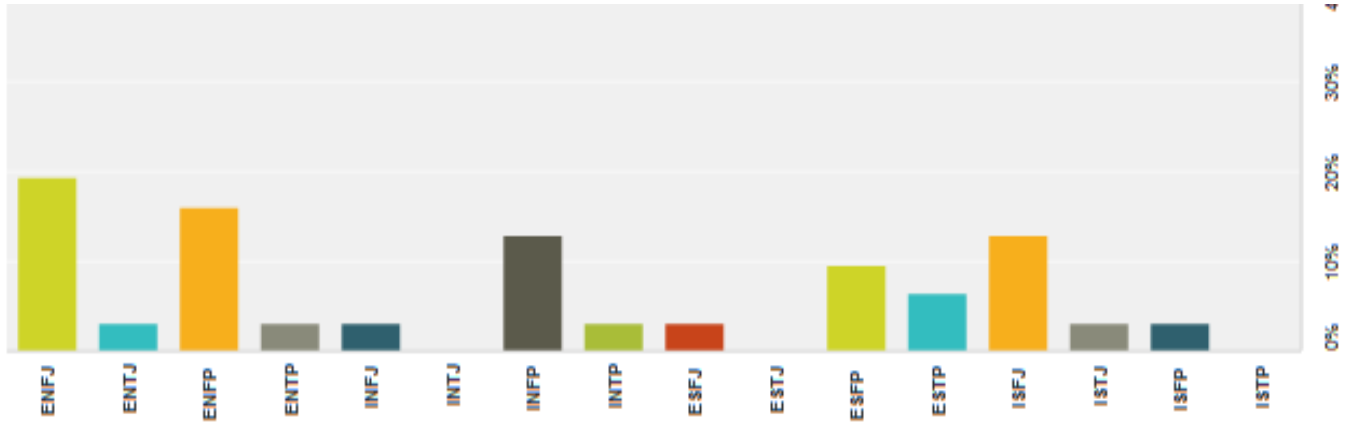


Figure 1: Percentage of participants who fell under each of the 16 Myers Briggs personality types

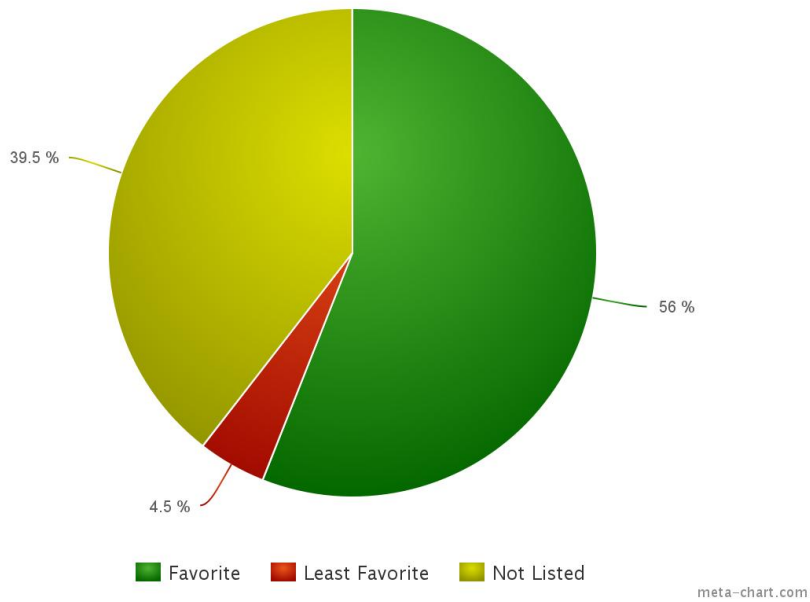


Figure 2: Percentage of prevalent household genres also listed as favorite, least favorite, or not listed.



## Appendix B (survey)

1. Please take the personality test in the link below. What was your result?  
<http://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>

- ENFJ
- ENTJ
- ENFP
- ENTP
- INFJ
- INTJ
- INFP
- INTP
- ESFJ
- ESTJ
- ESFP
- ESTP
- ISFJ
- ISTJ
- ISFP
- ISTP

2. Please enter your three favorite musical genres

Favorite

Second favorite

Third favorite

3. Please enter your two least favorite musical genres

Least favorite

Second least favorite

4. What musical genres were most prevalent in the household you grew up in?

Done

## Resources

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