

New study identifies links between musical tastes and lifestyle

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The music we listen to can tell a lot more than you might think about what kind of people we are, according to research findings by a University of Leicester psychologist.

Now, Dr Adrian North is extending his research worldwide. He is looking for 10,000 people from all over the world to take part in an online survey at www.musicaltastetest.com, stating their preference from over 50 musical styles and completing a questionnaire.

The survey, funded by the British Academy, will help Dr North and his team determine to what extent people's musical tastes can be predicted on the basis of basic demographic information, such as age, sex and earnings.

Dr North said, "Although we know a lot about musical preference, musicaltastetest.com is the largest ever academic survey of who likes what. Nothing on this scale has ever been attempted before."

Related research by Dr North about to be published in the journal *Psychology of Music* shows that a person's musical preference tells a great deal about their lifestyle and interests. Over 2,500 people in the UK were asked to state which musical styles they liked most, and then complete a questionnaire about their living arrangements, political and moral beliefs, travel, personal finances, education, employment, health, media preferences, and leisure time interests.

When it comes to relationships, beliefs and breaking the law, fans of different musical styles gave very different responses, with fans of hip-hop and dance music standing out in particular. 37.5% of hip-hop fans and 28.7% of dance music fans had had more than one sexual partner in the past five years, (compared with, for example, 1.5% of country fans). They were also the least likely to be religious, least likely to recycle, least likely to favour the development of alternative energy sources, least likely to favour raising taxes in order to improve public services, and least likely to favour the retention of a National Health Service.

In addition, they were more likely to have broken the law. 56.9% of dance music fans and 53.1% of hip hop fans admitted to having committed a criminal act (compared, for example, to just 17.9% of fans of musicals). Hip hop and dance music fans were more likely to have tried a range of illegal drugs. However, about a quarter of the classical music and opera fans admitted to having tried cannabis, and 12.3% of opera fans had tried magic mushrooms.

On questions concerning money, education, employment and health, fans were separated along the lines of socio-economic status. Fans of classical music and opera had lifestyles indicative of the middle and upper classes. They had an average annual income of £35,000 before tax, whereas dance music fans earned only £23,311. Classical music and opera fans also paid a much higher proportion of their credit card bills each month than fans of dance music (75% and 49% respectively).

They were also more likely to have been educated to a higher level. 6.8% of opera fans had a PhD, compared to none of the chart pop fans. When it comes to eating, fans of classical music, opera and jazz tended to spend rather more money on food and preferred to drink wine to a greater extent than fans of other musical styles.

Results also showed that fans of different musical styles often had

different tastes in the media. Viewers of BBC1 are more likely to be fans of rock or classical music, whereas ITV1's viewers are more likely to listen to disco and pop music. Readers of broadsheet newspapers are more likely to listen to classical and rock music, compared to readers of the tabloids, who prefer dance music, pop and music from the sixties.

Dr North added: "Surprisingly, there have been very few studies on how people's age, sex, socioeconomic status, and personality relate to the music they enjoy listening to. Moreover, this limited amount of research has focussed almost exclusively on North America. This is despite the fact that music is enjoyed by people all around the world and, in addition, there are numerous stereotypes about the types of people who listen to certain musical styles that may or may not be true (e.g. goths are depressed, classical music fans are upper-class, jazz fans are like the presenter of The Fast Show's 'Jazz Club' etc.).

"Musicaltastetest.com aims to recruit over 10,000 people to paint the first worldwide picture of who likes what."

Source: University of Leicester

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