

CNET News

[Technically Incorrect](#)

August 23, 2009 7:45 AM PDT

What your iPod playlist says about you

by [Chris Matyszczyk](#)

Who do you share your **iPod** playlist with?

Your lover? Your lover's husband? Your colleagues at the office? The strangely smelling man who sits next to you on the bus?

Well, researchers at the University of Cambridge have a message for you. It reads: "Don't."

According to these flatland boffins, your values, your personality, even your ethnicity, and social class (well, it is England, after all) will be judged by what you slip onto your iPod.

Jason Rentfrow, the chap who dreamed up this vital and surprising study at the university's Department of Social and Developmental Psychology, [declared to the Telegraph](#) that letting others sneak a peek at your Blondie and Mahler may "reinforce stereotypes and, potentially social prejudices."

He added: "This research suggests that, even though our assumptions may not be accurate, we get a very strong impression about someone when we ask them what music they like."

You will, I know, both fear and adore some of Rentfrow's conclusions. Those who have a predilection for jazz are, supposedly, liberal, friendly, and sociable. Well, of course. That's what pleasantly discordant music has always said about anyone.



Clearly a cheerful, optimistic, quiet-spoken, philanthropic type.

(Credit: [CC Stephen Hucker/Flickr](#))

However, those who love classical music should beware of showing their iPod even to their children. Especially to their children. You see, while classical music elicits some positive traits, such as intelligence (really), it also rings with it an aura of dullness, ugliness, and a lack of athleticism.

And, please get this (and keep it), those committed to electronica are viewed as "a bit neurotic".

Yes, someone paid for this wisdom. Sadly, not Rentfrow. Perhaps I am too cynical, too liberal, or just too into Steve Harley and Cockney Rebel. Perhaps I am made slightly intemperate because I am a graduate of this Cambridge University. Yes, in those social and political sciences.

However, what I learned in my studies is that people are generally quite a wicked lot. They make judgments about others all day. They do this mainly in the hope of making themselves feel better. They do this mainly so that they can take a rest from confronting their own deeply trifling lives.

They judge your shoes. (God, not Aldo) They judge your shirt. (Has to be Ross Dress-For-Less) They judge your hairdo. (Supercuts, surely) And they judge your taste in men, women and pets. (I fear he likes all three)

It constitutes nothing other than a reflection on their own fine, deteriorating selves. Yes, you can choose to be moved by their prejudices. And many are. Especially those who adore Kraftwerk.

However, an alternative is to fill your iPod with Nigel Kennedy's wonderful rendition of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, followed by some Arctic Monkeys, followed by a little A-Ha and Abdullah Ibrahim.

And then perhaps a couple of Brahms's Hungarian Dances, some Argentinian folk music, a dollop of Steel Pulse and a little T-Rex, not forgetting some Waylon Jennings, some Lambchop, a small sprig of mid-period Britney, some Glasvegas, some Sweet Billy Pilgrim and a little Southside Johnny. All smartly rounded up by a touch of Wagner, some of William Shatner's finest recordings and a sprinkling of Big Squirrel.

Before you know it, they'll be calling you Renaissance Man.

And before you know that you really may not be Renaissance Man, you'll be thinking up some more pressing subjects to research.

Yes, we are all vulnerable, pathetic beings. But if we really have to worry about telling others what music we have on our iPods, then we might as well relinquish what remains of our selves and join the Miley Cyrus Fan Club.



Chris Matyszczuk is an award-winning creative director who advises major corporations on content creation and marketing. He brings an irreverent, sarcastic, and sometimes ironic voice to the tech world. He is a member of the CNET Blog Network and is not an employee of CNET.