

A Heartbreak could be Healed by Listening to Sad Music

Romantic breakups are extremely common in adolescence and early childhood, but leave behind [emotional scars](#). Listening to music is often used to cope with these emotions. A recent paper explores the differential use of music listening as an adaptive or maladaptive coping strategy for such emotions after a breakup.



Study

The study involved 389 Chinese college students who had experienced at least one romantic breakup in the past five years. Participants completed surveys on their levels of [neuroticism](#), emotional responses to the breakup, and how they used music to cope.

The researchers used statistical modeling, specifically [structural equation modeling](#) (SEM), to assess whether music coping styles mediated the relationship between personality and emotional outcomes.

The study tested three hypotheses: That neuroticism is linked to both types of music coping and negative emotions (H1); that adaptive music coping mediates the relationship between neuroticism and [breakup distress](#) (H2); and that maladaptive coping plays a mediating role (H3).

Results

The investigators found that individuals with higher levels of neuroticism reported more negative feelings about [romantic breakups](#). They were also more likely to use maladaptive listening to music as a coping mechanism to regulate their emotions and less likely to use music in adaptive ways. Maladaptive music listening was positively associated with greater negative emotions following a breakup.

Statistical modeling showed that neuroticism is associated with greater negative emotions following a breakup and that this relationship was partially mediated by maladaptive music listening as a coping strategy. However, adaptive music listening was not found to mediate the relationship between neuroticism and [emotional distress](#), providing no support for H2.

Conversely, adaptive music listening did not reduce such negative feelings. This may be because adaptive coping, such as listening to uplifting or [relaxing music](#), does not directly counteract the intense and uncontrollable emotional reactions triggered by romantic loss.

Additionally, adaptive music listening tends to have a neutral effect, supporting emotional balance rather than enhancing positive mood. Instead, adaptive coping encourages a reasoned

approach to the situation, which helps people rebound from distress over the long term and promotes [mental health](#).

Maladaptive music-listening is thus partly responsible for increased negativity after a breakup in neurotic individuals, but not [adaptive listening](#). Maladaptive coping, including venting or disengagement through music, predicts poorer outcomes. Possibly this is because they provide a false sense of having overcome the stressor or of comfort. Subsequently, rebound negativity occurs, which persists longer and becomes more frequent.

If neurotic individuals begin to use maladaptive coping routinely, it makes them less able to respond with proper [behavioral changes](#) when in a bad mood. It could cause the underlying negative thoughts to become permanent.

The study also noted that in collectivist cultures like China, where open emotional expression is often discouraged, [neurotic individuals](#) may be particularly prone to internalizing distress after a breakup. This cultural factor could amplify emotional challenges in this group.

Conclusion

As consistent with earlier studies, neurotic people were found to be more troubled after a romantic breakup because of higher moodiness, [anxiety](#), and depression.

More importantly, the study confirms that [neurotic individuals](#) are more likely to resort to maladaptive music listening to cope with their distress. Again, the study affirms that negative feelings become stronger when people use maladaptive coping.

The present study also extends current knowledge about the link between neuroticism and emotional coping strategies, particularly listening to [music](#), following a significant life stressor such as a romantic breakup.

It is the first study to examine how music listening mediates the link between neuroticism and break-up-related emotions. It also highlights the need to evolve personalized interventions to improve the mental health of college students. Since the neurotic personality cannot be altered, coping strategies should be tailored based on such [evidence](#).

The authors suggest that [mental health](#) programs should include guidance on identifying and avoiding maladaptive coping strategies, such as overusing sad music, and instead promote healthier options. They also recommend teaching students how personality traits affect emotional regulation and recovery.

Source:

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20250903/Can-listening-to-sad-music-heal-a-heartbreak.aspx>