­­­­­­­­­Dear readers,

In this revision, I reshaped my argument into a more well-structured and well-directed idea. Instead of the discussing the vague shift in consumer/society attitude towards sharing music, I made a more specific and clear argument about a loss of gifting culture in the format changeover to digital. Furthermore, I structured my paper with three key words in the thesis: tactile value, ease of production, and personalization. These key words definitely helped solidify and build up my argument, and I feel that the sections in which I address them are quite strong.

The secondary source that I was critically engaged with was Professor Hampton-Sosa's analysis of the attributes of digital culture products that led to illegal file-sharing amongst music consumers. I used his definition of a culture product to evaluate music in both cassette and digital form, but this time around, I made the use of the theory lens much more explicit. I explained how using his theory, I could make a better comparison of the social culture behind both digital and analog formats. Furthermore, in my first motivating move (the Gaipa introduction), I didn't reveal an answer as to *how* Hampton-Sosa's definition was incomplete – I feel that this gave the push behind the essay a better touch.

I also changed my research question to a "how does..." format – this allowed me to insert search terms that led up to the thesis, and provided a better segue from the motive to the thesis.

In the previous draft, a lot of the claims in the second half of the paper weren't built off of evidence from primary sources. In this revision, I sought to fix that problem, and I feel like I gained better credibility through the use of more sources to back up my claims. Furthermore, I provided more orienting regarding the advent of digital formats, as well as the nature of analog/cassette tapes.

Our discussion of style, titles, and conclusions this unit prompted me to put more effort into coming up with a creative title and a solid conclusion. I feel like my Beatles quote choice is quite relevant, and I took Professor Saini's advice in discussing the difficulty of digitizing Beatles music as a link to the rest of the essay.

I would welcome comments on my overall progression as a writer. I feel as though I have improved in structuring my thesis with key words and orienting the reader to keep him/her with the flow of the argument. I hope my writing style is as clear and efficient as the examples in class, and I would ask if you found the general writing style effective.

Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Saini for his immensely helpful advice throughout the semester – he has made me into a more confident and skilled writer, and this is the first paper I am truly proud of.

Sincerely,

Eddie Zhou

Eddie Zhou

WRI 121

Due: 12/17/12

Prof. Saini

From Me to You: The Shifting Culture of Music Sharing

Think back to the last time you listened to music. Was the file you played on your computer or iPod a streaming link, or was it actually yours? If it was yours, where did you get it? While you might have been exposed to the music by a friend through recommendation, chances are, that friend did not actually give you that file. According to empirical data collected by Professor Hampton-Sosa at the City University of New York (2011), 63% of 16 to 24 year olds in the United Kingdom have downloaded from a peer-to-peer file sharing site, and 42% of the same survey group has uploaded to a similar site (p. 6).

With the advance of digital technologies, sharing music has become easier and more widespread than ever. This advance in music sharing brings escalating concerns towards music piracy in the digital age. These concerns, though existent, were not nearly as dominant in the pre-information age, and I look to explore this inconsistency. Additionally, music, as Hampton-Sosa (2011) noted, can be viewed as a culture product, a product that embodies shared values and strengthens social bonds. His paper analyzes the importance of digital culture product attributes in contributing to illegal file-sharing on peer-to-peer networks. In this paper, we will use Hampton-Sosa's definition of a culture product to help us understand the nature of sharing music. After a close examination of pre-information music sharing and post-information age music sharing, however, we will see that Hampton-Sosa's definition is incomplete and can only be conditionally applied. This investigation also leads to the following question: how do different characteristics of analog and digital music formats – such as physical containment and personalized production – explain the changes in consumer distribution through these formats? Analyzing the differences in personalization, ease of production, and tactile value between analog and digital music formats points to a culture of gifting that, while deeply essential to the analog medium, remains nearly nonexistent in digital file-sharing.

Before we can delve into the argument, however, some clarifications must be made about sharing music now and in the analog age. The analog format I point to refers mainly to the cassette tape of the late twentieth century, a format consisting of two small magnetic tape spools encased in a plastic shell (Britannica Academic Edition, 2012). These tapes could either be purchased prerecorded from a record store, or taped over using recording devices to create personalized mixtapes. The digital format can include either of the two types of digital sharing, a concept that will be explored later. When discussed in this essay, it refers to digital music files, mainly stored on a computer device for playback on mp3 players. An intermediary format, the CD, will also be explored, and will help establish more of the characteristics that separate the cassette tape as a sharing mechanism.

Now, we look to refute a series of seemingly obvious explanations for the motivating inconsistency mentioned above. Exploring possible reasons for the escalating concerns of society towards music piracy will provide a better understanding of the issue at hand, and allow us to apply deeper analysis to the respective music formats more confidently.

The first explanation one might jump to is that society did not care about illegal distribution of cassette music because the music industry itself did not care. According to Vicki Anderson (2010), the author of an article discussing a resurgence of tape culture, home taping in the 1980s was "met with fierce condemnation from the music industry...who invented such slogans as Home Taping is Killing Music, complete with skull and crossbones on the back of some 80s releases" (Anderson, p. 1). Clearly, the music industry of the late 20th century was already opposing illegal distribution of cassettes, as they should.

The second intuitive explanation of why the societal view of sharing music has declined is that the average user now engages in illegal methods of obtaining the music, while previously, most people bought cassette tapes legally. While it is true that today, the average user engages in unauthorized downloading, copyright violation still existed in the analog age. Lanre Bakare (2012), a journalist for The Guardian, offers the following argument for the prevalence of illegal downloading:

iTunes has been successful but it depends on a user having an Apple product to put the music on after they've paid for it, and an average kid doesn't have money lying about for an iPhone. Streaming sites like Spotify for music and Netflix, which offers a similar service for film and TV, are an interesting idea and [growing rapidly](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/netflix-uk-ireland-1-million-subscriber-bskyb-390682), but at present they are still nowhere near popular enough to challenge torrents, filesharing and the attraction of free music. (para. 7)

Furthermore, according to a 1982 survey of cassette purchasers on the record industry's fight against home taping, "55 percent of those surveyed buy a record after they tape all or part of it. That way, taping actually stimulates record sales" (Bradley, para. 2). This disproves the notion that the majority of cassette users obtained their music legally.

Another possible argument one might make relies on the perceived physical limitations at the time. One might believe that technological limits on efficiently mass-distributing cassettes prevented the music industry from suffering any significant damage. According to an article written by Gael McDonald (1994), the International Federation of Phonogram and Ideogram Producers "implicated Singapore audio pirates in the use of high-speed cassette dubbing machines to manufacture 70 million copies of illicit music tapes each year" (p. 2). According to the same article, this high-speed distribution technology resulted in a loss of over 200 million dollars to the British and American music industries. It is certainly possible that this technology was inaccessible to the average user, but the point stands that the technology for distributing music quickly and widely existed at the time. Therefore, we can discard this argument.

With this information in mind, we can move forward to explore the aforementioned differences between analog and digital formats, and analyze how they contributed to the stark contrast in gifting culture. In our analysis, we shall view both forms of music as a culture product, "a source of entertainment and pleasure" that "can be used to establish and strengthen social bonds" (Hampton-Sosa, 2011, p. 53). Assuming that analog and digital forms of music both fit this definition helps us view the sharing process with a more informed eye – we can evaluate each format's ability to foster connections between people and examine music through a culture product lens. We must keep in mind, however, a conceptual leap in sharing that has followed from the advent of the information age. In the cassette age, giving someone a cassette in actuality represented two things – first, an actual exchange of possession of the item, and secondly, an exposure to, or sharing of, the music itself. Now, in the digital age, these two concepts can be separated. I can "share" music with my friend by sending him a URL to a streaming video, or I can actually email him a music file. The cassette parallel to the first form is bringing a cassette over to my friend's house, and listening to it together. The difference now, though, is that by giving him exposure to a link, he has the ability to access the music and play it at will (albeit with an Internet connection), but does not technically possess the file. The majority of sharing music between friends nowadays occurs in this "exposure" format, rather than an actual exchange of possession – this needs to be kept in mind as we proceed with the argument.

Now we shall analyze the tactile value of the analog cassette format. The phrase "tactile value" can be taken to mean any sort of value associated with the physicality of the format. For this analysis, it will be useful to examine Mix Tape: the Art of Cassette Culture, a unique compilation-based book edited by Thurston Moore. Mix Tape consists of various graphics, photographs, and stories sent in by musicians and listeners, friends and lovers. While the content of the book will be useful in exploring the other two characteristics, the physicality of the book will be useful to us in discussing the tactile value of cassettes.

At a glance, it is clear that Moore intended to model his book after an actual cassette tape. At first touch, the book is rough, with a thick cardboard sheet on front and back depicting the front and back of a Compact Cassette. Its dimensions are similar to a standard tape, its feel solid and heavy. Carrying the book is almost unwieldy, but it feels full of material, of purpose. It is a tangible thing, something you can grasp and hold. In general, physical items mean more to us than intangible ones. In a review of legislation on tax laws for gifts to charity, Wolfe Goodman (1981) asserts that a taxpayer may receive benefits from donating a gift of "tangible personal property" (p. 169). This exemption does not apply to intangible and digital gifts, demonstrating that our lawmakers, and therefore our society, place a high value on tangible items as gifts. An empirical study on physical souvenirs by Hugh Wilkins (2011) is also of use to our analysis. In his survey of various tourists on the value of their souvenirs, he highlights the "the role of the souvenir as a facilitator of memory" (p. 243). In this same way, a physical gift from a person is a tangible representation of a shared memory or emotion. The actuality and realness of the cassette tape is therefore a large part its value as a gift. Justine Cassell's theory of play (1997) further proves this point. Her writings on the playing activities of children embody ideas that also pertain to the entertainment activities of adults. She claims that during play, "all objects take on a meaning independent of their meaning as objects" (p. 2). In relation to our study of cassettes, cassette tapes then become more than simple objects carrying music – they take on a meaning shared by the giver and the receiver. This deeper meaning ensures the cassette's place as a culture product.

On the other hand, digital music formats lack this tactile value. Devices such as iPods and computers exist only as interfaces and systems for storing and playing back the music – in this format, there is no physical container attached to an individual song, or even a collection of songs. Now, the majority of sharing music has lost the actual gifting, the transfer of possession. Some may point to the CD, or compact disc, as an example of a physical container with a digital format. They might argue that this digital analog should carry tactile value as well. While the CD can indeed store selections of music in a physical container, its tactile value is decreased by its fragile nature. The East Kodak Company (1995) writes that "physical damage from scratches or other kinds of mishandling is still a serious threat...proper handling, including appropriate storage containers for CDs, is a vital contributor to CD longevity" (Scratches Top and Bottom section, para. 3). The fragility of the CD places distance between the user and the music – there is a carefulness that must be employed as one holds it between thumb and index finger, wary of potential scratches. The gingerness with which one must deal with a CD contrasts sharply with the familiar abandon with which one throws a cassette around.. In Moore's introduction (2004), he mentions that at the end of one of his tours, "there must have been hundreds of tapes strewn about the van, with plastic cases stomped and cracked" (p. 12). This is not a lack of care – rather, it is an excess thereof, an intimacy special to the cassette. The weight of a cassette in one's hand feels full, gritty, even clunky – but most of all, it feels secure. This security is a familiarity that again brings the giver and the receive together with one unwieldy, scrawled-on hunk of plastic.

We have established that the higher tactile value of a cassette tape results not only in a deeper meaning to the recipient when gifted, but also an intimacy between the user and the cassette itself. Both the deeper meaning and the intimacy are lost in the digital translation of music, and through the gifting of a digital music format. Now, we move to explore the ease of production in both cassette tapes and digital formats, and analyze how this separates the two. In this discussion, ease of production refers to the difficulty in producing the music format to be shared. We will see that the third characteristic, personalization, is thoroughly intertwined with ease of production, and so the two will be analyzed in parallel. These two characteristics will soon be seen to be tied to two types of investment: physical and emotional.

The process of creating an analog cassette mixtape was a careful and thorough process. Michele Catalano (2010) described this painstaking process:

"There was a certain ritual to making a perfect mix tape, one that could take hours to finish. Maybe even days...It was about so much more than grouping some tunes together. They had to segue. They had to flow into one another. Each song needed to be a continuation of the one before it... There would be painful minutes spent starting and stopping and restarting a song in an attempt to hit the record button at just the right time so as to eliminate the clunks and hisses..." (para. 4-5).

In creating mixtapes for friends, users physically invested their time and effort to create a special gift. FemaleFirst (2012), an online lifestyle magazine, recently wrote an article discussing Christmas gifts for parents: "a whopping half of us like to receive these gifts and nearly half said that they keep handmade or personalised presents longer than shop-bought ones too – proving we’re a nation who loves presents with sentimental value" (para. 3). This shows that gifts requiring effort and time to create are valued higher than low-effort ones. This higher value again proves the cassette to be a culture product, an item special to the giver and receiver and highlighting the connection between the two.

Creating a digital music gift is a low-effort action. As Catalano (2010) describes, "There’s no love or passion involved in moving digital songs from one folder to another.  Those 'mixes' are just playlists held prison inside an iPod. There’s no blood, sweat and tears involved in making them" (para. 3). The effort it takes to drag a few files around and click a few times is insignificant compared to the tedious process of starting and stopping, listening and recording. Although digital files must be burned onto a CD to create the physical container, this burning process is still quick and digitally-based. The physical investment of the giver into these digital music formats is near negligible. As a result, sending a friend a music playlist through the Internet, or even burning them a CD, loses that special meaning that arose from the time and care put into a cassette gift.

Closely tied in with this physical investment is an emotional investment. Embodied in the idea of personalization, emotional investment is perhaps the most important and defining characteristic of the cassette mixtape. In his paper, Hampton-Sosa claims that culture products "are distinguished from other types of products by the extent to which they are imbued with symbolism and values that can be widely shared" (2011, p. 53).

When a user creates a mixtape, he puts part of himself into it. As Matias Viegener described "My taste as a mixer tells you even more about me than my taste as a consumer already does" (as cited in Moore, 2004, p. 35). By creating his own mix of songs, in his designated order, with his specific timing, the creator and giver tells the listener who he is and what he represents. In Leah Singer's depiction of a special mixtape, she describes it as "one of the first tapes Lee gave [her]. [They] were just getting to know each other, a good time to exchange mixed tapes because it's such a powerful way to reveal who you are" (as cited in Moore, 2004, p. 45). Revealing part of yourself to another person establishes a special bond between the giver and the receiver, one that contributes to this special culture of gifting. The process of "staring at the tape while you tried to come up with a brilliant title, one that at once spoke of both the awesome music contained in the cassette and the feeling you were trying to convey" (Catalano, 2010, p. 6) points to the effort invested in personalizing the gift, in making it truly yours, only for the purpose of giving it away. The cassette was, as Allison Anders describes, "truly a window into a person's soul...the great humanizer" (as cited in Moore, 2004, p. 63). This humanizing aspect is the crux of what makes analog music formats true culture products – they embody shared values and help foster the bonds between people.

As a special study on emotional investment in cassette mixtapes, we can delve deeper into the idea of a cassette as a vessel for romance. The idea of sending one's love through a personalized cassette is one that has permeated mixtape culture. Jim O'Rourke recounted: "There was a mix tape I made when I was 15, I believe in order to get a girl to like me, because that is generally why you make mix tapes when you're 15" (as cited in Moore, 2004, p. 44). Songs such as "I've Been Loved", "Woman", and You Are the One" made up O'Rourke's love mixtape, and one can almost feel the trepidation in the young teenage boy as he hands the girl of his dreams that piece of black plastic. This might be his one chance to woo her. Suddenly, that hunk of plastic takes on even more meaning – the enormous emotional investment of putting yourself out there for someone to love is one special to the analog format. Sending a girl an mp3 file simply doesn't mean the same thing.

Today, nearly all exchanging of music files occurs through illegal, anonymous downloads over music-sharing services, rather than friends sharing music through CDs or locally transferring files. In an article comparing iTunes sales with illegal music services, Devin Grant (2005) reported that "the most popular digital music service in March was WinMX, which was used by 2.1 million households to download music" (2005, p. F10). It is impossible to obtain a statistic on the exact number of music files locally exchanged from one friend to another in a given month, but given that most local sharing takes the second "linking" form of mentioned above, we can conclude that the majority of actual music exchange takes place over unauthorized peer-to-peer networks. Those who obtain music through a file-sharing service do it for a rather obvious, practical reason – if there is free music to be had, most people will choose not to pay for it. Those who distribute music through a file-sharing service, however, do it for a more complex reason. According to Jan Becker's empirical analysis of peer-to-peer user behavior (2006), there are two main types of file sharers: "heavy users" and "medium sharers" (the third type, "free riders", does not actually contribute to the collection of available music files). Medium users "are more willing to share files if they expect reciprocal acts" (p. 25), while "the more a [heavy] user believes it is 'cool' to be identified as a sharer the more files she offers" (p. 24). The average music user no longer shares music to send a message, to share himself. In this new, detached sharing culture, free riders merely take without giving. This idea contrasts with a reciprocity previously existent in the cassette culture, embodied by the phrase "you make an awesome mix, you get an awesome mix" (Anderson, 2010, p. 2). Heavy users share for a motivation unassociated with sharing the self – for the sake of being cool. As a result, the overwhelming majority of motivation behind both obtaining and sharing music in a digital form possesses no form of the emotional investment carried with analog formats. Acquiring a music file from an anonymous, online source also results in a lack of personalization, a component we observed to be extremely important to the gifting culture of analog formats.

It is now apparent that sharing in digital music formats no longer embodies the gifting culture of the analog cassette mixtape. With little tactile value, personalization, or difficulty in production, sharing music has lost its gifting power in the transition to digital mediums. Sharing music simply no longer means what it did before. Returning to the theory the argument operated on, we recall that Hampton-Sosa's culture product was one that embodied values and brought people together. While his paper examined music as a digital culture product, the lack of a gifting culture in digital formats leads to the conclusion that music, in the context examined above, cannot be considered a culture product. The technology of CDs and peer-to-peer networks has weakened the ability of music to be a gift, to connect one person to another. Perhaps the "exposure" format discussed in defining sharing allows music to be considered a culture product in that context – after all, sharing music at its core brings people together. The digital methods that actually involve a transfer of possession (peer-to-peer networks, for example, however, have a significantly weakened gifting power, and consequently, should be discounted from the culture product category.

Why is the cassette tape so dear to us? Writer "T.M." in Moore's compilation (2004) offers this explanation for the inherent attachment to analog formats:

If you really need to transfer it to CDR, go for it, but remember: you're turning it into a digital format and therefore your ear-heart will tire. Huh? Yeh, you're[sic] ear-heart...With digital, your brain hears all the information in its numeric perfection. Analog has the mystery arc where cosmos exist, which digital has not reined in. We used to listen to records over and over....each time they would offer something new because the ear-heart would respond to new resonations not previously detected. It was like each kiss had a new sensation.

Looking at this explanation, the culture of the cassette generation had an almost fetishistic admiration for the cassette tape. Moreover, one of the most iconic music groups of this generation, the Beatles, did not make their music available for digital download until November of 2010 (Schroeder, 2010). Their third single "From Me to You" (1963) contains the chorus:

If there's anything that you want,

If there's anything I can do,  
Just call on me and I'll send it along  
With love from me to you.

The language is indicative of the same sharing values embodied in the mixtape culture. The time period of the Beatles was one of giving and sharing oneself, and of what Molly Folse (2008) describes as "love, generosity, sincerity, true chemistry with a fellow human being" (para. 1). The direction of sharing music that we are headed in, however, symbolizes the neutralization of all these positive concepts. This new direction offers an explanation for society's increasing disenchantment with sharing music, and offers another example of the dangers of rapid technological advancement.

This paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

*Eddie Zhou*

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