

The Social Dynamics of Shared Music:

Politics, Economics, and Intellect

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I boast a musical library that includes African tribal chant, Spanish guitar, French rap, Celtic rock, screamo, folk music, techno, classical, new age, and a collection of oldies held steady by more than 230 songs from The Beatles. I house nearly 7,500 tracks between my hard drive and CDs. With the combined resources of my parents and myself, I have access to nearly 12,000 songs, recordings, audio books, cover booklets, music videos, and concerts. Routinely, my laptop can detect more than 38,000 unique audio files within the immediate network of my dormitory. From musicals in every language (*Rent* in German—something you won't believe until you hear it) to Australian reggae-reformists playing intricate chords on a twelve-string guitar and bass violin (a personal favorite, The John Butler Trio), music is a permanent fixture within my household and everyday life. This wonderfully diverse view of the musical world can be traced back to a single source: shared music.

The Issue at Stake

Here it is argued that shared music—music downloaded illegally by person-to-person file sharing software—is in fact healthy for our nation politically, intellectually, and economically and should be viewed as a test case for emerging subcultures and other markets in need of modernization. New technologies and ideas about file sharing have advanced the capabilities and expectations of everyday consumers with as simple a task

as purchasing and selecting music. Also examined is the opposition of this test case by the music industry's corporate consortium: the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and its emphasis on lost business ventures over copyright infringement.

An in-depth look will prove this institution as a leveling tool for consumer America, turning the new online marketplace into a healthy, two-way street with a high standard of excellence in what we listen to as well as a place of social responsibility for the monetary well-being and intellectual property of the talented many who entertain the ears of America.

Song:.....Ode to the Sun
Artist:.....Dredg
Comments:.....A band discovered at a Coheed & Cambria concert. Their sound was uniquely electronic for a live performance and piqued my interest. The lyrics are all about the lead singer's experiences with insomnia and sleep paralysis. The CD insert features some haunting letters from fans about similar experiences.
Time Stamp:.....12:23 AM

A certain route must be taken to see the full breadth of this issue. First will be a delving into the process. Next, the issue will be taken on politically, and during this explication the economic evidence will be covered by association. The reader is asked to assume a level of injustice on the part of the RIAA as it will, assuredly, be supplied in small doses as fits the structure of this examination. Finally will be a look at the intellectual facets of shared music and an ending summation and conclusion.

The Process Demystified

Any issue individual to a certain generation can only be understood when the age gap is first broken. A definition of the process may aid the general readership to connect

with the situation so that the conflict over “stealing music” will have a name, a face, and definitions to an extent that the air quotes and negative connotation may be dropped.

Certain materials are needed to allow the process of music sharing. Packets (the information sent), media (what carries the information and how), receivers, and hosts make up the basic elements. These four elements make sharing happen whether it involves an account of daily happenings by a newspaper or the spread of disease about a village. In the example of daily newspapers, packets can be thought of as the news, while the medium is the paper itself. Those who write, edit, publish, and distribute the paper take the role of the host, and those who read the paper act as the receivers. Besides the technology used, the sharing of music is no different from such an institution as publishing.

The packet in question—music—is most often sent in the form of an *MP3*. This file format is named such because it uses a technology that compresses a typical audio track to a third of the original size. Used also are *AAC*, *M4A*, *WAV*, and many other forms. The distinctions between these file types is nominal to all but a true audiophile—while each serves a slightly different purpose or associates with a different piece of software, these digital formats are the media through which music is exchanged. The host and receiver can vary greatly within this system because modern advances in technology allow so many electronic devices to send and receive digital packets. A human being exists behind each host and receiver, which vary as widely as cell phones, personal computers, PDAs, and portable mp3 players such as Apple’s iPod or Dell’s Pocket DJ.

When all the elements are in place, then comes the act itself. Sharing is accomplished in two ways—downloading music from a server of global peers using special software or networking directly with a single peer. For the aim of this examination, only the first will be considered. The latter option is easier in practice but holds fewer global implications. The relationship between two friends sharing their respective property is a timeless one that can be neither advanced nor abolished by technology.

The software that allows the sharing of music is called person-to-person, or P2P, because it uniquely allocates resources from every computer involved. This makes hosts and receivers one and the same. Software such as this is often referred to as a client, because it does not have a dedicated server or central location—it exists as a technology among millions of computers and servers the world over.

<p>Song:.....The General Artist:.....Dispatch Comments:.....An all-acoustic jam band, Dispatch had plenty of national airtime despite never signing a record contract. The band actively supported shared music until they stopped performing a few years ago. The members were all close and together decided that their friendships were worth more than selling CDs. Time Stamp:..... 1:09 AM, world's nice and quiet</p>

Users launch the P2P client of choice and search for the desired material. A list of the results, download speeds, number of peers hosting the file, and other statistics are supplied in return. Once a user downloads a file, it is stored on his or her computer in a location that other users can access to download a copy of the file. Current advancements in P2P technology allow a user to download different segments of the same file from multiple computers at once, shortening the amount of time for a single download. Free

P2P clients such as Limewire, Soul Search, BearShare, and WinMX are most commonly used.

Transferring music from one computer to another has been so streamlined and simplified by pioneers of the technology that the challenge lies elsewhere: getting music onto the electronic device of choice. Portable digital music players include software for converting a consumer's purchased CDs into an MP3 or other format and transferring these converted music files onto the player. This software can also be used to transfer downloaded files. Sometimes a small program is needed to trick transfer software into processing downloaded music as if it is purchased music. For every file format and electronic device, there is a different set of tools.

A few possible workflows exist: a user downloads a favorite opera on Limewire, converts the file as needed with Winamp Studio, and burns it to a CD for his car with Nero BurningROM. After attending a punk concert, a fan finds a live version of her favorite song on BearShare. The song is imported into iTunes and uploaded to the user's iPod. With this cross-generational understanding of the process, technology, and terminology, the readership may now address this issue face first.

Political Theory and (Surprisingly) the French Revolution

The economic evidence in favor of shared music is easy to find, but to look at this question objectively, the issue of copyright infringement must be discussed. A political analysis of the social contract, public justification, and collective action will show copyright infringement as ancillary to a larger conflict.

In Plato's *Crito*, Aristotle makes a longwinded argument before the Athenian jury that he must face his death sentence instead of fleeing to another city (Kemerling, 2005). Aristotle claims that responsible citizens make a decision to stay within a given political unit based on their acceptance of that unit's laws, and he views this choice as an invisible and unspoken contract with society (Friend, 2005). This social contract is later discussed and advanced by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Modern works by Rawls and Gauthier suggest that the social contract can be used as a contemporary political tool to help understand emerging social patterns, an idea Rawls has positioned as "public justification" (D'agostino, 2005).

A combination of theories by Rawls and Locke can explain shared music as an application of the social contract. Public justification states that no regime is legitimate unless it is reasonable from every individual's point of view (D'agostino, 2005). A burden of proof this dependent upon political units is obviously unrealistic, but the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* helps put things in perspective: "the notion of legitimacy is a *practical* notion in the sense that it is meant to inform our decision to acquiesce in or (try to) resist the demands of the political regime of which we are citizens" (D'agostino, 2005). These two halves—theory and practice—can be put together: every member of a society has a right to hold institutions to a standard that seems best for all. If these institutions cannot perform to said standard, individuals will feel empowered to band together for change. While everyone will and does have a different view of what is legitimate, as Rousseau discusses, a general consensus emerges based simply on the principle of majority (1997, Bk IV, ch 1, sec 6).

Next is Locke and his view of the social contract. Locke states that not only does this contract inherently exist alongside our indivisible rights, but also that “justification of the authority of the executive component of government is the protection of the people’s property and well-being, so when such protection is no longer present, or when the king becomes a tyrant and acts against the interests of the people, they have a right, if not an outright obligation, to resist his authority” (as cited in Friend, 2005).

The only change from these accepted theories for our current purpose is a shift in application—from politics to business. National and transnational corporations in key markets encompass more power and influence on American politics than do some nations. Public corporations that sell stock enable consumers to play a role in ownership. Very few economic decisions are made in a day that do not somehow profit or alter a large corporation. While the effect of a single transaction by a single person is nominal, millions of repeated transactions add large-scale effects to the system. If institutions such as government that don’t seek profit are held to the standards of legitimacy under the social contract and public justification, should a profit-seeking institution not be held to the same standard or even higher?

Song:.....Wishes Of Happiness Et Prosperity
Artist:.....Yeha-Noha
Comments:.....Can’t go wrong with African tribal chant set to cello and a synthesized drum beat. I found this on a random compilation my parents bought and never listened to. The lyrics are a tribal hymn used in times of poor harvests to ensure that the next one is prosperous.
Time Stamp:.....1:51 AM

The RIAA—a major consortium of firms within a multibillion-dollar market—needs to be viewed as legitimate by its consumers to maintain healthy profits and normative control upon its industry. For the first time this legitimacy can be actively questioned by the public through the use of global networking and brotherhood amongst consumers. When structure, prices, and policies within the RIAA are deemed

unacceptable—in the current situation, evidence is forthcoming—these consumers stop buying and start sharing. Just within the last few years the recording industry has been held to a normative standard merely to maintain a market share. Shared music is a resistance to the unequal authority of major record labels in an intelligent, effective, and technologically advanced manner.

Every battle is different in its scope and purpose. Under observation are consumers fighting corporate mentality with the few tools they have. The French Revolution pitted the masses against the absolute monarchy. Letters from combatants of the Revolution documented inner turmoil caused by the bloodshed: while soldiers found their actions in the field to be inhumane, the result of their actions was deemed to be necessary (Olsen, 2005). Indeed, any good human being knows that killing is wrong, but the oppression of the French people made taking another person's life comparatively justified in the situation. In an almost infantile fashion, these conflicts come down to error versus larger error. One may see this equation as the essence of Rawls' public justification in times of dispute.

<p>Song:..... This Side Artist:..... Nickel Creek Comments:.....As hard as I tried for it not to happen, bluegrass started to grow on me. A good friend was a loyal fan and started me along. In turn, I've converted my parents into fans. The three lead singers, two males and a female, harmonize perfectly. With wholesome lyrics and an easy sound, Nickel Creek is a guilty pleasure. Time Stamp:..... 2:44 AM, time for some caffeine</p>
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Like the French Revolution's bloodshed on a less severe level, one can see that copyright infringement is obviously wrong. An artist going unpaid or unrecognized for his or her hard work is an unfortunate externality that is difficult to overlook. However,

this action is seen as justified by consumers opposing an industry that pays only a few cents of the price of each album to the artist and files suit, as it has done, against a twelve-year-old boy and a 74-year-old grandfather (Battenberg, 2003). The inherent public relations nightmare associated with such moves is yet another victory for the sharing community.

The Library Paradox

Breaking from politics, here it seems appropriate to introduce an important comparison: that of file sharing being much the same as browsing a public library. There are users and abusers. Some people will check out a book, read the book, be thankful that it is available at no cost, and return it. Indeed, however, there are those who will abuse the institution: the few who photocopy, steal, rip, and plagiarize the provided materials.

In fact, any and all public institutions are privy to abuse. But as with Rodney King's case against the Los Angeles Police, the institution of public protection did not become outlawed; instead, the abuse sparked a healthy debate over needed checks and balances within law enforcement. Likewise, Enron Employees watched as their 401(k) and retirement plans slipped away, all because of a greedy executive and creative accounting. Yet company stock is still widely allocated as a retirement asset. Financial gurus preach diversified portfolios and canceling unique risk, not the demise of the practice itself.

Corruption in small, cyclical doses is both inherent and unavoidable within social institutions whether financial, public, or technological. Some sociologists even argue that

this corruption sparks social evolution and awareness. Shared music and capitalist western society, then, must assimilate to the presence of one another.

Collective Action and Corporate Structure

Collective action is the collaboration of two or more individuals in pursuit or aligned consumption of a public good. This economic phenomenon takes place when market failures occur because consumer rationality and a firm's profit-seeking mentality inhibit efficiency within a system ("Collective Action," 2005). File sharing can also be viewed as a collective action against the recording industry. The required market failure takes the form of consumer America desiring music that it collectively feels incapable of purchasing. The public good, simply, becomes the act of sharing itself. The sheer number of transactions a large corporation deals with—as mentioned above—enables collective action, meaning the action of an individual would, by itself, be minute.

Economist Todd Sandler defines a pure public good as a good that is both "non-rival" and "non-excludable" (2004, p. 17). This definition means that the consumption of a good's benefit cannot detract from another user's ability to also consume and that it would be both impractical and undesirable to keep others from sharing in the benefits (Sandler, 2004, p. 17). Classic examples of a public good include national security, clean air, and the deterrence of global warming. The developers of P2P sharing software and the dedicated many who helped advance networking capabilities have no incentives or intentions to disenfranchise a certain few from using this technology. While those outside the sharing community see P2P networking as greedy, those within the community see it as greed-free because it includes anyone who wishes to join. There is

no application process, payment plan, or secret handshake of sorts. One simply downloads a program and starts sharing. Use of this public good increases its strength; as soon as music is downloaded, the user's computer becomes another host for even more receivers. The process is self-perpetuating and limits free-riding because of this full-circle architecture, making hosts and receivers one and the same. Sandler explains free-riding, receiving benefits without contributing, as one of the largest complications within problems involving collective action. With this complication minimized, music sharers have created a rather efficient solution to a market failure.

Non-rivalry within the system can be harder to observe as it requires a degree of separation. Yes, on the surface this public good discourages profits for artists because the music can be downloaded instead of bought. But this short-term disadvantage opens many long-term opportunities for making money. Concerts and merchandise constitute the majority of an artist's salary. When a user discovers a new artist and likes what is heard, there is a large likelihood he or she will be enticed to purchase merchandise, special CDs or DVDs, and concert tickets. Casual fans will continue as casual sharers, and true audiophiles as large-scale sharers *and consumers*. This process allows for equilibrium closely resembling the music industry as is. Also, this situation points to the fact that free-riding as a casual listener is much easier than free-riding as a casual downloader.

<p>Song:..... The Rain Must Fall Artist:... London Symphony Orchestra w/ guest conductor, Yanni Comments:...The most moving piece of modern classical I've heard. Recorded live at the Acropolis in Greece, this piece features a violin solo that must be heard directly to do it justice. A</p>
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rarified bass guitar solo adds rattling depth. This piece makes me truly halt what I'm doing, close my eyes, and just listen.
Time Stamp:..... 3:17 AM

When an artist records an album, the record label funds the large capital requirement, based on the assumption that the produced material will bring in enough money to make a profit. Those fronting the capital lose money on casual fans who only listen to the radio and make the majority of their money on loyal fans who buy the album. Listening to the radio can be seen as a form of accepted free-riding. Radio stations are able to operate by running advertisements. Because these advertisements profit the radio station, music is then offered to the public free of charge. Casual fans can free-ride off the market structure between radio stations and released music. Thus, a casual fan of radio and a casual fan of shared music have statistically the same effect on the market. But with music file sharing, a loyal fan to a band will likely become even more of a fan because of the capabilities of the technology. Live and alternative versions of an artist's work can be obtained that will tempt a user to spend money on concert tickets and merchandise. These items directly profit the artist, instead of a corporate record label.

As mentioned previously, very little money of a purchased album goes to the artist. Typically, the record label absorbs the full price of an album and the artist is paid royalties that can be as little as a few cents per unit. Giving up these direct profits is a condition of most recording contracts, allowing an artist full access to a professional studio, marketing, and financial support. Independent artists, those lacking label sponsorship, are structured in an opposite fashion. While all profits go directly to the artist, this money is then doled back out in payments to the rented recording space as well as for publishing fees.

Song:.....Falling into Place
Artist:.....Go for Broke
Comments:.....After a rocky relationship with the lead singer's sister, I doubt these guys even care whether I'm still a fan. This local ska band (punk, rock, and brass) went national until the bassist quit, lacking time to write his senior thesis at Boston University. While still on good terms with the band, I was given a promotional CD.
Time Stamp:.....3:38 AM

New or independent artists can greatly benefit from shared music as it serves as free marketing, distribution, and an initial sampling for an audience. A local group can spend very little money recording a few tracks, and instead of passing out CDs to local audiences, the group can now effortlessly distribute their work to a broader audience. In this situation, simple statistics help explain the effect. A larger distribution among a market will in turn create a larger fan base and more capital from performances with higher attendance. This capital gain allows the group to accumulate the needed resources to record a professional-sounding album much faster and in a more streamlined fashion than in the past. With proper development of sharing technology, the characterization of the “starving artist” could be all but erased. The independent artist has no greater gift than file sharing.

The implications of the casual downloader versus the casual listener have helped to create a higher standard of excellence within the music industry. Most contemporary popular artists go through a pattern after attaining celebrity status. The quality of the music diminishes, a behavior enabled by American consumers. When a popular artist releases a new album, the masses run to the record store to purchase it, often after only hearing one or two songs. Artists subconsciously know this and may not put as much effort into a second or third album. While substandard production isn't purposeful, this

pattern reveals a mix of social dynamics and psychology by both the consumer and supplier. Record labels are the main beneficiaries of this act, resulting in less work for them and more direct profit. Self-expression, lack of pressure from a record label, and the basic need for food on the table create the chemistry of an artist's early releases. Critics looking back at an artist's career often regard these initial releases as the highest of quality.

Song:..... Something to Live For
Artist:..... Grey Eye Glances
Comments:.....My father's favorite musical group. The lead vocalist has the voice of an angel. The group mixes classic Celtic structure with modern alternative rock. Imagine a folk music version of U2 with a female lead singer.
Time Stamp:.....3:59 AM, just a little bit more and I'll call it a night.

Now, a casual fan who wants access to a song doesn't need to buy the entire album. An album can be sampled by downloading. If worth purchasing, the casual fan can buy the music, merchandise, and concert tickets or get more users interested in the artist. This means that while some interested users do not purchase the music itself, they will most definitely expose other users to the music. Statistically, these actions will sell more albums.

Some artists are addicted to this pattern of diminishing quality and assumed sales. The mass purchasing of an album that is *horrible* happens all the time while great artists struggle for airtime in traditional media environments. But the manufactured pop artists and boy bands of the 80's and 90's cannot survive for long in this online environment. The boy-band era is over because Americans are stepping into a higher standard of excellence for the music we buy.

The Economics of Adaptation

Artists, and record labels especially, can deal with new standard or suffer just like many other companies in many other markets have been forced to. The invention of e-mail was a huge threat to subsidized paper communications—the United States Postal Service (USPS), for example. Externally, this competition was healthy. Rapid growth for privately-owned physical delivery services such as FedEx and UPS came with the end of the Postal Service’s reign. Extensive use of e-mail meant increased online sales and an increased need for package delivery. Although technology has made the world a smaller place for interactions between businesses and consumers, the physical distance over which a product must be delivered is still the same. While the Postal Service was still licking its wounds, the rest of the industry expanded delivery services and boomed. FedEx, as a result, has grown enough to acquire Kinko’s and form an all-inclusive printing, editing, and delivery service (Kawamoto, 2005). USPS has learned a lesson from the situation at hand and is actively adapting to the market. Postal Service market-share has drastically bounced back from its position of only a few years prior. All three major services are now in a healthy, competitive market with a healthy, competitive equilibrium. Market structure evolution is healthy and normal within a society. There are countless other examples of this competitive adaptation—the mainstreaming of automobiles, the change to unleaded fuel, even stricter emissions levels. Every instance of social evolution sparked by business ventures has been good for some and bad for others.

The RIAA had its turn, but wheels have been set in motion that would take massive amounts of policy change, advocacy, and technological restraint to slow down.

The recording industry has no right to hide behind the legality of copyright infringement, as the actions of the average file sharer are caring and respectful of an artist's work.

Profits are beginning to come to members of the music industry from alternative sources, and this development is great for all but large businesses dependent on record contracts.

Ranks of professionals pushed the government to make e-mail a fee-based, subsidized form of communications. Imagine the drastic effect on technology and delivery services.

Next, consider the effect of such regulations upon file sharing. Every market is linked in the American economy. Drastic changes beyond natural shifts in consumer versus firm power can quickly cause market failures.

The "Slow Motion" Mystery

On November 23rd, 1999, Third Eye Blind released the highly anticipated album *Blue*. Only weeks before the album's release, rumors emerged on Internet blogs and fan websites about a brilliant and haunting track called "Slow Motion" that dared to challenge the urban existence of inner-city untouchables forgotten by society. Upon the release of the album, fans were shocked by the true content of "Slow Motion." The lyrics were far from the controversial subject matter suggested by many sources. The most dedicated of fans did some digging, and to the surprise of all *a second version* of the song showed its face on P2P clients. A second version—encompassing all that the original was intended and hoped to be—included haunting, no-holds-barred lyrics and a distorted electric guitar pensively chirping chords:

Ms. Jones taught me English, but I think I just shot her son / Cause he owed me
money, with a bullet in the chest you cannot run / Now he's bleeding in a vacant lot /

The one in the summer where we used to smoke pot / I guess I didn't mean it, / But man you shoulda seen it / His flesh explode / ... / Slow motion / See me let go / We tend to die young / ... / Now the cops will get me / But girl, if you would let me / I'll take your pants off / I got a little bit of blow / We could both get off / Later bathing in the afterglow / Two lines of coke I'd cut with Drano / And her nose starts to bleed / A most beautiful ruby red / ... / Slow motion / See me let go / We'll remember these days.... ("Slow Motion," 2005)

So what happened? Why did this brutal and yet honest, shocking and yet wonderfully composed track turn up on hard drives and not an album? Witness a microcosm of corporate America's bloodiest enterprise—the buyout.

Third Eye Blind's label, Elektra Records, provides the following history about its beginnings and growth:

[Elektra was started] in 1950 by Jac Holzman and Paul Rickholt, who both invested \$300. It was acquired by Kinney National Company in 1970, along with Holzman's Nonesuch Records, for \$10 million. Soon afterwards Kinney consolidated their label holdings under the Warner Communications umbrella. Holzman remained in charge until 1972, when Asylum Records and Elektra were combined" (Elektra Records, 2005).

Business continued under normal terms until the mid 1990s, when Warner Communications' higher-ups began to see the Warner Music Group (WMTG) as more problem than profit. Warner Communications began looking for a buyer to take the WMTG off the shareholders' hands. However, there were a few problems with this deal-in-the-making. Smaller labels owned under WMTG such as Elektra Records and Atlantic

Records carried some artists with controversial material that the eventual buyer—a group of private investors—found questionable for reputation and sales. Third Eye Blind, ready to release a new album, was pressured into changing content for the sake of the record label. WMG and its affiliated holdings were finally sold in February of 2004 (Elektra Records, 2005). Many artists were dropped from Elektra during the messy act of restructuring.

Third Eye Blind was not one of the artists dropped. But if not for file sharing and a few fans with investigative intuition, the original “Slow Motion” may never have been released. Similar situations of censorship and record label pressure point towards a corporate monopoly on art. Music is indeed a form of self-expression shared with others, just as is any art form. Yet our modern society has turned this beautiful thing into a cut-throat market where shareholders reign supreme. Visitors are not charged admission fees to wander the halls of the National Gallery of Art and be awe-struck at the creativity and artistic depth found there. Indeed, many nationally and internationally recognized art museums charge on a voluntary basis only. But culturally, there may be a shift away from artistry, as seen with film; often movies with the lowest ratings from critics achieve the largest box-office profits. In music, a popular artist can get on the radio, lip sync at an award show, and sell millions off albums based off publicity alone. When many people begin to regard music as disposable, mindless entertainment, American music is no longer viewed as art.

Fortunately, the growing idea of a higher standard for music and the purchase of music, mentioned earlier, enable college-age sharers to more actively appreciate music and art. Music is seen as an instrumental part of many teenagers’ lives. The number of

high school and college students who write, dance, compose music, sing, and play instruments is not only growing, but something wonderful is happening: they are *telling each other about it* and sharing their creations. Shared music is leading the way in the effort to once again make music something more than twenty dollars' worth of profit.

Song:..... The Nothing Song
Artist:..... Sigur Rós
Comments:.....A somber live recording from Edinburgh. This Icelandic emo band sings nothing in English, but the sounds are just as beautiful as any lyrics I've ever heard. My personal favorite of their work, this live version was taped by a fan, and every time I listen I feel as if I'm there in person. A great feeling.
Time Stamp:..... 4:24 AM

One of the fastest growing sites on the Internet, Myspace.com—an interactive community in which each user creates a personal page listing favorite movies, music, and books that friends can view and post responses to—has become Rupert Murdoch's latest acquisition. The owner of News Corporation paid 580 million dollars for the website (Miller, 2005). Murdoch's media empire already includes Fox News, the *New York Post*, and more than a dozen other companies. Jason Lee Miller, editor at *Web Pro News*, points out some disheartening effects of Myspace.com being bought out:

In less than two years, MySpace.com has morphed from unadvertised haven for young bards to share their musical talents to a youth-oriented social networking phenomenon with upwards of 32 million registered hipster members. The insight into the young mind has never been so accessible....MySpace.com has replaced the shopping mall, the CD store, the local Subway, as a hangout. The current generation of young people is turning to computer screens, cell phones, instant messaging, and online social networking for support and sharing common

interests. In fact, it is reflective of a culture that doesn't trust big media, big business, or authority. The youngsters throwing themselves into this online culture, simply put, trust each other. (Miller, 2005)

A new age, technology-based community has been bought by one of the world's most powerful conservatives. Distrust in big business and big media spurred an interesting social institution that was eventually put back in place by the very thing it feared. The monopoly on creative thought and expression needs to stop. Shared music is so global and so open-source that it might be the only way left to stand against big-business, corporate music.

There is no direct evidence as to who leaked the original version of "Slow Motion." If the party responsible ever comes forward, the sharing community will offer nothing but warm welcome.

The Intellect of Sharing

"Social dynamics means the ability of a society to react to inner and outer changes and deals with its regulation mechanisms," says *Wikipedia's Free Internet Encyclopedia* ("Social" 2005). In fact, this encyclopedia itself can be a testament to social dynamics. Only a few decades ago an encyclopedia was one of only a few options available for comprehensive, searchable knowledge. They were bulky, hardbound, and prohibitively expensive. Now, one can access an unlimited quantity and quality of information from the comfort of the home, office, and even PDA. The *Free Encyclopedia* is more than just free: scholars and users alike can join the Wikipedia community to update articles and post new strands of information. Yet very few articles seem tampered with or falsified.

How can so many students and scholars be comfortable with using information open to public altering?

The answer is much the same for file sharing: the rules. Not laws, but rules. There is, in fact, a large difference. A federal law regulates that interstate highways have a restrictive speed limit. Depending on the state, county, and driving conditions, a leeway in this restriction becomes acceptable. This rule is developed by interacting social forces: law enforcement and a mobile citizenship. With any new institution, there are socially accepted rules that emerge as the users of that system experience failures. Before posted speed limits and regulations, there were many accidents and many deaths until drivers began to develop spoken and unspoken rules for the efficiency of the system and safety of its users. As one of these new institutions breaks into mainstream culture, there is typically a codification of the rules into written, publicly enforced laws.

<p>Song:..... Alone in December Artist:..... UnderOATH Comments:.....Repeating guitar chords and a background of classical violin set the stage for distorted, yet even, singing. This post-hardcore group suddenly breaks out into screaming for the duration of the song. An interesting mix of Christian lyrics, raged singing, and pure energy make this a favorite. Time Stamp:..... 4:47 AM</p>
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Examples can be as simple or as complex as desired. The Federal Aviation Administration's commercial sector developed when air travel became economical and available to the public. Basketball evolved from an urban pastime to an Olympic sport and multibillion-dollar enterprise with strict regulations on drafting, contracting, doping, and marketing.

The Internet—sparking shared music and P2P clients—began as a very specialized subculture because of technological restraints and a high learning curve. As

computer technology advanced, dropped in price, and became more intellectually accessible for the average American, it broke into mainstream culture. Those dedicated and loyal users from the technology's inception took great pride in their online culture, and their own version of the aforementioned rules emerged. Wikipedia's success is a direct result of these unspoken, social rules. Trust: no one is to falsely change an article. Proof: a post is not made if it cannot be proven. Editing: changing an article is only done at the authorization of the author.

File sharing is no different. The sharer who pirates and sells CDs is shunned from the community and cut off. Those who take also give. The online community is much more than websites and wires—it's friends, emotions, ideas, and courtesies. Just as a gentleman walking into a restaurant holds the door for those behind him, a user on an instant messaging client tells his or her friends when leaving. Those who refer to file sharers as "a bunch of greedy techies" are denying social evolution. Such denial at the inception of any somewhat controversial institution would make our society a very different place—lacking many services, technologies, and freedoms.

The Internet subculture has sparked the file-sharing subculture. There is an interesting complication: while music sharers battle the recording industry, the Internet has quickly broken into the mainstream. Television reality shows have viewers log online to cast votes. Craig's List, "a web site used each month by millions of people to exchange goods, services and points of view," has become so popular that eBay flat-out purchased a fourth of the entire enterprise (Richtel, 2005). Teenagers are shunned for not having a cell phone or an instant messenger screen name. This mainstreaming of the Internet subculture into the wider culture means that file sharing can't be far behind.

Beyond legality, morality, and the business mentality is the unavoidable factor of *culture*. America needs to suspend belief, sit back, and watch as social evolution takes place. Let us see where this takes things.

Good for the Soul and Good for the Scores

Some positive effects of music sharing are already taking shape. Today's youth can be found searching through their parents' records and window-shopping at vintage music stores. The breadth of music that America's younger generations listen to is astounding. They are graced with an ever-growing appreciation for all types of music and art. This eclecticism carries over into every facet of life. The new generation is more open, more expressive, and more likely to consider someone else's opinion than past generations, as a person accustomed to sharing, sampling, and tolerating different types of music is more likely to carry this acceptance into all aspects of life, whether those be music, art, opinions, people, or ideas. Children of the digital revolution have their ears and eyes open to everything around them.

Yet another positive effect of this new-age social institution can be observed with a short background into music education. The Children's Musical Workshop, a performing arts online coalition backed by the research of M.A. Rees, points out music's multiple benefits:

It has been shown that high school music students have higher grade point averages than non-music students in the same school. At Mission Viejo High School in Southern California in 1981, the overall grade point average of music students was 3.59 and for non-music students the overall grade point average was 2.91. This same

study also found that 16% of the music students had a 4.0 overall grade point average and only 5% of the non-music students had a 4.0 overall grade point average. A study of graduates of the New York City School of Performing Arts found that 90% of them go on to college.

Rees also feels involvement in high school music programs helps students develop the skills necessary for a variety of occupations. She states [that] successful music students tend to possess the qualities and skills that are generally considered essential to employers in business, education and service organizations. She also recognizes that music education assists students in improving their writing, communication skills and does improve analytical skills. Rees further states that to be successful in music, takes a great deal of self-discipline and notes that music majors have the highest SAT scores in all areas. (Mickela, 2005)

The positive effects of music education quickly extend into shared music. Imagine youth orchestras composed of members living in different continents. The world's best musicians could effortlessly play together from across the world. Uploading, sharing, and editing have never before been so easy and socially acceptable. Students and enthusiasts can easily obtain the pieces they wish to study—any and all kinds of music. Shared music allows even those with no musical talent to actively join the musical community. The children of file sharing are musical, technological, equitable, and *smart*. Higher SAT scores and GPA stand as solid support. While there is yet to be direct statistical evidence that shared music has the same effect, it follows logically. Playing an instrument allows an individual to be active in the mentality, critique, and examination of music. Many dedicated fans of sharing music become so

involved in the process that they develop the same active characteristics through the music they so greatly enjoy.

Putting It All Together

Shared music is, in fact, healthy for our society. Whether broken down politically, economically, or intellectually, the advantages of this institution make it a subject worth watching in coming years. As the RIAA takes action and its subsequent lawsuits take shape, this subculture may break into the mainstream. With rules, jargon, and a social structure independent of the outside world, the Internet stands with more potential for changing society than anything predating it. Shared music is simply a test case for any consumer market in which intelligent, selfless users wish to leave behind the corporate mentality. The ability and scope of file sharing is so global that to truly stop this institution would take an ungodly amount of political and technological power. File sharing is here to stay, and the Internet will serve as a check and balance for any institution in such need. Laws prohibit copyright infringement, and yet taking advantage of those who create art is perfectly legal. To these wonderful souls, the sharing community offers a solution: the rules. Sit back, America, and watch as social evolution happens right before our eyes; watch as the consumer replaces the Murdochs of modern society. Give it, and music sharing along with it, a chance.

<p>Song:Come Downstairs and Say Hello (Live) Artist:Guster Comments:.....For these guys, I'll always be a fan. Two guitars, a set of bongos and a random flute, saxophone, horn, or whatever else they can throw in. I first heard Guster while randomly downloading music and fell in love with the laid-back sound and mature lyrics. This song is off a CD I bought after seeing them live. Time Stamp:5:16 AM, time for some sleep</p>

Afterword

This assignment took more out of me than any other piece of academia I have thus experienced. Over a period of close to a month, I wrote this paper only in the most stereotypically of fashions, and purposely so: in short bursts every night, between one and four AM—the intellectual creeping hour of college students. Not once did I work on this paper without my prized possessions: my large gray headphones. The loudest volume setting on this precious purchase can fill an entire room with sound, and yet it was contained to only my ears while I sat at my desk in the dark listening to rapture as I wrote.

The arguments, research, and reflections presented here are the result of an audiophile—one who at times has to skip certain songs because the resulting bliss is distracting. Headphones blaring and caffeine flowing, this is my generation, and this is what we do. The greediest thing the average music sharer will ever do with such power is don his or her headphones and keep everyone else in the room from possibly hearing something new. While reading, you have been periodically informed of what I was listening to and what it means to me. This is my world. What do you listen to? I know what I like: everything. And I know why—sharing is good; sharing is healthy.

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