“Show me your playlist and I tell you who you are”
An investigation of the social psychological foundation of musical playlists

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ABSTRACT

In the age of social networking and music streaming, playlists are a common tool for organizing, sharing or exchanging music in the digital realm. Most research, however, emphasizes mainly political, legal, and ethical constraints of music sharing practices yet, neglects their social impact. Thus, this paper investigates the social-psychological foundation of the playlist and analyses its functionality in establishing social relations and communication. Following the theories of Cooley, Mead, Simmel and Solomon, I conducted and analysed interviews with young Swedish men and women, in which they talked about their experiences and attitudes towards playlists. Moreover, all participants compiled their own personal playlist, based on certain personality traits, which were aimed to be recognized by the others during the focus group discussion. The analysis of the data yields the following conclusions: The playlist is a social object, facilitating new forms of communication. The social nature of the playlist is based on the transformation from objective- into subjective culture. By internalizing new technologies, such as the playlist, objects gain social value, thus mere musical content becomes a social form. It is through sharing and exchanging musical compilations that the playlist, as a social form, serves as a vehicle or medium, facilitating new forms of sociation and communication. The communicative function of the playlist is due to its construction through emotions as uniquely subjective judgements, based on the “I” as an emotional self-feeling. Thus, musical compilations take part in the self-construction process, and can serve as a tool for the symbolic expression of the self.

Moreover, the analysis points out that there are differences in how well certain parts of the self can be communicated by a playlist. Emotional expressions of the self are translated into particular universal music patterns most successfully. Furthermore, the analysis shows that some people like to browse through the playlists of others and judge them thereupon, which results in some type of musical voyeurism, termed “playlistism.” In conclusion, I argue that the musical playlist is both, socially implicated and socially implicating, and facilitates communication not only between Swedish youth but across cultural boarders.
What makes music special – what makes it special for identity – is that it defines a space without boundaries (a game without frontiers).

Music is thus the cultural form best able to cross borders –
sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans,
across classes, races and nations –
and to define places in clubs, scenes and raves,
listening on headphones, radio and in the concert hall,
we are only where the music takes us.

(Frith, 1996)
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and the question of issue

„Our music catalogue contains millions and millions of tracks and albums. It’s so enormous, in fact, that it’d take you 34 years of non-stop listening just to get through it. And that’s not counting the 10,000 new tracks we’re adding every day. “
(Spotify Homepage, 2010)

Weather Spotify, Myspace, Last.fm, Grooveshark, Pandora or Rhapsody, the variety of music streaming services is impressive. Even more overwhelming is the tremendous amount of music that those digital libraries make available to the individual at any time. Through the distribution of MP3-players and Smartphones it became apparent, that the entire music library can nowadays be put into one’s pocket. However, even though musical interaction became simpler, it became more complex in its social consequences at the same time.

Profound changes in music have occurred over the past years, which have revolutionized music itself, and made it a far more specialised activity in modern times. Due to technological innovations, music can now be experienced by more people, for more of the time than ever before. The mass availability has given individuals unprecedented control over their own sound environment. However, it has also confronted them with the simultaneous availability of countless genres of music, in which they have to orient themselves. People start filtering out, collating and organizing their digital libraries – like they used to do with their physical music collection – however, with the difference that the choice is within their own discretion. Without being restricted to the limited repertoire of music-distributors, nor being guided by the local radio program as a ‘pre-selector‘ of the latest hits, the individual actively has to choose and determine his or her musical preferences. The search for the right song is thus associated with considerable effort.

Due to the massive volume of content available, the first wave of peer-to-peer file sharing technologies¹ (e.g. Napster, Gnutella and KaZaA) tended to anonymise music sharing interactions (Brown et al. 2001), making the individual secondary to the explicit search for a specific music file (Voida, Grinter, Duchenaut 2005). By the same token, these early peer-to-peer applications were criticized, arguing that much of the sociality had been stripped away by massive-scale online music sharing (ibid.).

However, spurred by the advancement of the digital technology, the searching- organizing- and sharing of music has soon been brought to a whole new level. New digital music services, such as the aforementioned Spotify, Grooveshark etc., enable users to arrange and systematize their music collections according to personal preferences and specifications. By assembling different tracks from their digital music libraries and arranging them in a favoured sequence, the individual creates a personal compilation, similar to the ever-popular mix-tape, but in digital form: the musical playlist.

Yet, unlike the mix-tape, the playlist can be accessed and listened to by different people at the same time, even if they are in geographically separate locations. This “non-rivalrous” (Nicholson 2010) nature of the playlist facilitated the sharing and exchanging of personal compilations, and the playlist soon became a popular tool of communicative social exchange.

¹ For more information about peer-to-peer file sharing technologies, see Voida et al. (2006), Ebane (2004) and Oram
In April 2010, Spotify announced a “major revolution.” Personal playlists can now be published and are thus accessible to other users at any time. By connecting Spotify to one’s Facebook account, playlists can be exchanged easily and become an active part of the social networking activity. All of a sudden individuals could listen to and examine not only their own music collection but those of anyone using the same subnet. Browsing through other people’s playlists is today as common as analysing their ‘favourite books’ or ‘favourite movies’ in the ‘real world’ or in cyberspace. This phenomenon has even reached a point, where media reports talk about “a new social type of music voyeurism termed playlistism” (Voida, Grinter, Duchenaut 2005).

Clearly, these changes are not only taking place on a technological level but go hand in hand with changes in the social structure. Recent discussions have thematised playlists in a political, legal, and ethical context however, neglect their social and social psychological nature. Why do more and more people compose, share and exchange playlists? What do people get out of it? Is there a social benefit behind it?

The present paper aims to answer those questions by investigating the social psychological foundation of the musical playlist and its communicative functionality. Using the theories of Cooley, Mead, Simmel and Solomon, I aim to analyse how young Swedish men and women utilize musical playlists in the social interaction with others. In order to pursue this investigation, I will conduct interviews and focus group discussions, emphasizing the participants’ experiences and attitudes towards playlists.

The following study will be divided into two main parts of which the first part discusses the theoretical framework needed for the analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions. The theoretical part will first provide an overview of Cooley and Mead’s theories, focusing on their definition of the self. Thereafter, I will introduce the main key concepts underlying the phenomenon of musical playlists, such as “the self,” “the concept of medium,” “musical preferences,” and “the concept of the playlist” itself. Following the theoretical part will be a brief passage on the material of the study and the method used in order to analyse the data. The second part of the paper comprises the analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions, which will be followed by a concluding discussion on those results.

1.2 Prior Research - what is music sociology and why is it important?

“If the significance of music is irrevocably linked to the patternings of individual minds, then it must likewise be linked to the fluid, dynamic and abstract patterning of the social world that lies behind the creation and construction of those minds.”

(Vulliamy, Sheperd 1984:60)

For most people, music is to a greater or lesser extend, part of their lives. But it is only in advanced industrial societies, that music became a pervasive medium and thus a major element of the culture (Martin 1995:1). In pre-electronic times, music captured a much smaller part of most people’s experience, however it is this contrast that may serve to arouse sociological curiosity (ibid.). Instead of taking music for granted, it seems to be appropriate to ask why it has come to obtain such a prominent place in the modern world. In western societies the concept of 'music' is generally defined as “some sort of pattern of organised sounds, deliberately created in order to produce certain effects” (ibid.:14). Nevertheless, this concept does not necessarily translate into other cultures. “The Musical Scale is not one, not 'natural', nor even founded necessarily on the laws of the constitution of musical sound … but very diverse, very artificial, and very capricious” (Ellis 1885:526). The various ways, patterns of sound are organised in different societies, is thus the outcome of cultural processes. However, the present paper will refer only to the western understanding of music and the social context of its consumption. What is central for (music-
sociologists in western societies are thus such matters as why do people create music, use it and respond to it in the ways that they do? According to Blumer (1969:2), people 'respond' toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them, thus, claims, statements or ideas people express about music are not barely objective descriptions but an indication of their attitude towards it. These claims and ideas must be investigated in order to understand the underlying structure of human action. Therefore the sociologist of music will not be concerned to establish the 'true' meaning of one musical piece, but will scrutinize what people believe it to mean, since it is these meanings, that will influence their responses to it (Martin 1995:30). To be exact, the sociology of music “concerns the production of musical culture and how this relates to social organizations and conventions” (North and Hargreaves 2008:3).

Over the last two decades there has been an explosive increase of interest in the sociological- and social-psychological basis of musical thinking. The most notable exponent of the early music sociology was Adorno (1949, 1973). For Adorno, music was associated with cognitive habits, modes of consciousness and historical developments. His work represents the most essential development in the twentieth century of the notion that music is a 'force' in social life, a “building material of consciousness and social structure”(DeNora 2000:2). However, in contrast to Adorno's macro-sociological perspective there has been an increasing number of micro-sociological approaches with the focus on interactional processes (ibid.). DeNora's (1999, 2000, 2003) ethnographic investigations of music as a resource for structuring everyday experience are notable recent examples. She points to music as “dynamic material, a medium for making, sustaining and changing social worlds and social activities” (DeNora 2000:x). According to DeNora, music is a cultural resource, mobilized by actors for their “on-going work of self-construction.” The individual musical use is therefore “part and parcel of the cultural constitution of subjectivity (DeNora 1999). Based upon Giddens notion of the self as a reflexive project (DeNora 1999; Giddens 1991), DeNora employs ethnographic interview data in order to present music “in action as a device for ordering the self as an agent, and as an object known and accountable to oneself and others (…). Music is a material that actors use to elaborate, to fill out and fill in, to themselves and to others, modes of aesthetic agency and, with it, subjective stances and identities.” (DeNora 2000:73f.)

Self-identity, for DeNora is thus not a fixed, inner essence but a production of the continuing activity of individuals and music is the “technology for spinning the apparently 'continuous' tale of who one 'is’” (DeNora 1999). By the same token, Frith (1996) regards music as a signifier for identity formation. Music: “seems to make possible a new kind of self-recognition, to free us from the everyday routines, from the social expectations with which we are encumbered (…). Music constructs our sense of identity through the experiences it offers of the body, time, and sociability” (Frith 1996:275).

According to Frith, it is the interplay between personal absorption into music, and the sense of it being a public cultural object, “what makes music important in the cultural localization of the individual in the social” (Frith 2004:139). He emphasizes how music creates an aesthetic experience that can only be understood by taking on both a subjective and a collective identity (Frith 1996). Moreover, Frith argues, that music is not only an aesthetic but also an ethical experience, since it is through the concepts of 'good' and 'bad' music, that we “establish our place in various music worlds and use music as a source of identity” (Frith 1996:72).

Certainly there is a growing body of research concerning music preferences, starting with Burt's (1939) early work, considering whether Eysenck's typology might underlie people's preferences for both, music and paintings. Furthermore, Payne (1967) conducted research concerning musical preference in relation to personality and found, that extroverts prefer music with human emotional overtones whereas introverts preferred music with a formal structure (see also Daoussis and

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2 Eysenck developed a model of personality, based on traits that he believed were highly heritable and had a likely psychophysiological foundation. The three main traits according to Eysenck were: extraversion – introversion (E), neuroticism-emotional stability (N), and psychoticism (P) (Larsen & Buss, 2005: 75)
McKelvie 1986). In this respect, music is compensating for aspects of personality (North and Hargreaves, 2008:115). However, in their study concerning rock and punk music preferences, Hansen and Hansen (1991) offered three contrasting theories; first of all, that people's preferences mostly reflect their personalities. “People are drawn towards particular music styles conforming to their self-concepts and their perception of social reality” (ibid). Secondly, Hansen and Hansen (1991) suggest, that listening to different types of music facilitates the shaping of people's attitudes and personality. Finally, this causal link is reciprocal and hence functions two-way. Therefore, musical tastes and preferences can form an important “statement of our values and attitudes” and music functions increasingly “as a means by which we formulate and express our individual identities.” (Hargreaves, Miell and McDonald 2002:1).

Further research has been conducted by Bensimon and Gilboa (2010), who examined the impact of personal music choice concerning one's sense of purpose in life. The study is based on the process of Musical Presentation – a therapeutic tool, in which people in a group setting “present themselves through musical pieces of their choice and subsequently receive feedback from their peers” (Bensimon and Gilboa, 2010). Conclusively the study illustrates, that Musical Presentation can help people to get in touch with their identity through music and that it increases a persons sense of purpose in life.

Finally, in the last decade a growing body of research has identified the implications around music sharing technologies. These new technological developments have paved the way for the increasing digital proliferation of music file sharing. Thus a wide range of digital modes for distributing music such as peer-to-peer sharing applications, mobile sharing or music streaming services, arouse interest in several academic disciplines.

However, the main research focus comprised mainly constraints of legal, ethical and political considerations (e.g. Brown, Sellen and Geelhoed 2001; Kasaras 2002; Ebane 2004; Voids, Grienter and Ducheneaut 2006; Fitzpatrick 2008; Bassoli 2006, Andersson and Liu 2009). These concerns – digital rights management laws, in particular – have led to a nearly exclusive research focus on those very issues. There is, however, a gap in the research, emphasizing the social-psychological nature of those new technologies, the musical playlist respectively.

It is for this reason that I have chosen to investigate the significance of the playlist as a social phenomenon, analysing its function in establishing social relations and communication.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 George H. Mead and Charles H. Cooley

Social constructionists represent the idea that the world is socially manufactured through human thought and language. In fact, society is unlike Durkheimian ideas, not viewed as a pre-existent domain, but rather as the product of individuals engaging with one another. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), the relationship between human beings and the social world is a dialectical one. “That is, man (not, of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer” (Berger and Luckmann 1967:61). Externalization, objectification and internalization are the three dialectical moments in which the individual participates in the social reality.

Moreover, constructionists suggest, that our understanding of the social world is culturally and historically determined. Thus, the meaning of events is dependent upon the concrete context in which they appear (Garfinkel 1984). Furthermore, constructionism argues against the notion of essential structures within society and thus the individual. Instead, the observer is summoned to
emphasize the relativistic and subjective nature of the social world, where all knowledge is perspectival and contingent (Lyotard 1984).

These underpinning facets can be subdivided into two main perspectives: on the one hand, emphasis is put on the role of human agency in the construction of the social world (Giddens 1991, Mead 1962, Cooley 1902); on the other hand, the concept of discourse takes centre stage in the process of shaping experience (Foucault 1972). For the purpose of this paper, the former perspective, represented by Cooley and Mead, is of main importance and will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

George Herbert Mead published rather little during his lifetime, however, after his death his lectures were published in book form, *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (1936), *The Philosophy of the Act* (1938), and his work reached a broader audience. Mead aimed to investigate the genesis of the self both in terms of its practical social experience (its external aspects), as well as its experience as consciousness (its inner aspects) (Swingewood 2000:167).

“Human society, as we know it could not exist without minds and selves, since all of its most characteristic features presuppose the possession of minds and selves by its individual members.” (Mead 1964:227)

According to Mead, it is through the mind and the self that humanity has the capacity to reason and to reflect. The self, however, exists only in relation to social groups, since “the individual himself belongs to a social structure, a social order” (ibid.:1f). Mind and self, consciousness and action, were therefore cooperative not individual phenomena involving social relations, roles and social institutions (Swingewood 2000:168).

Mead was concerned with developing a concept of symbolically mediated interaction, beginning with “an objective social process” and working inward “through the importation of the social process of communication into the individual by the medium of the vocal gesture” (Mead 1934:xxii).

According to Mead the complete self is conceived as being an “I” and a “me”. The “I” is the active agent and principle of individual impulse, which is able to change the social structure. It is the “response of the organism to the attitudes of the others.” Whereas the “me” is the “organized set of attitudes of others which one assumes.” Mead's emphasis on the role of language in the development of the self suggests, that the “me” arises out of dialogic communication between individuals and the 'inner flow of speech’ (Swingewood 2000:168).

The intellectual influences on Mead's approach were abundant and diverse: the philosophy of pragmatism (Dewey, James), Darwinian evolutionism, nineteenth-century romanticism, German idealism and the ideas of Charles Cooley (ibid.). Mead however, criticised Cooley for a too subjectivist notion of the self. By rejecting the dualism of individual and society, Cooley argued that they both constituted 'collective' and 'distributive' aspects of the same phenomenon. The self emerges out of a process of communication with others and society as a whole (Swingewood 2000:167). It is a society where each individual is reflective or a “looking-glass self,” which consists of “the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (Cooley 1902:184). Moreover, Cooley introduces the concept of a group-self or “we” which is an “I” including other individuals. If the “I” is the self, the “we” is the larger community, a group which one identifies himself in a social situation. By defining the self in terms of the ideas, which others composed of it, Cooley established a rather psychological perspective in his conception of society. He discusses suggestibility and choice, excitement and habit as predisposed factors to each individual in the relation of social mind to the organic structure and the process of socialization.

As this paper aims to analyse the social psychological underpinnings of musical playlists and their utilization in the social interaction of individuals, Cooley's approach will be vital for the analysis of the interviews and focus group discussion. However, it is through the understanding of Mead and the viewpoint of social constructionism, that it becomes clear how the self, responsible for the
compiler of musical playlists, is constructed. It is an “I” as described by Charles Horton Cooley - an emotional self-feeling.

2.2 Key concepts

2.2.1 The concept of self

“In today's world, deciding what music to listen to is a significant part of deciding and announcing to people not just who you want to be' ... but who you are.” (Cook 1998:5)

Since there is a considerable amount of current research on diverse aspects of the self and its development, the following chapter aims to clarify some of the current terminology in this field. However, the present paper will be limited to the social psychological underpinnings of the self, emphasizing social constructionist and interactionist perspectives.

William James (1890) was perhaps one of the first theorists who tried to comprehend the self – which he referred to as “the most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal.” (see Hargreaves, Miell, MacDonald 2002:7). In the past century, this puzzle has stimulated a fair bit of effort to comprehend and explain the meanings of self and identity.

First and foremost the self-system is based on various self-concepts, or images, which are different ways in which an individual sees himself (ibid.). The various self-concepts intertwine and form an overall view of oneself – the self-identity, a “vast domain of meanings attached to the self and comprising the content and organization of self-concepts” (Gecas 1982). Identities locate an individual in social space by virtue of the relationships that these identities imply. Moreover, they are themselves symbols whose meanings alter across situations and actors (Howard 2000). Hence it can be stated that identities are “strategic social constructions created through interaction, with social and material consequences” (Howard 2000).

But how is the self actually “constructed”? Based on interactionist literature, the self is created through language, both directly in interaction, and discursively, through different kinds of media (McAdams 1995). It is through the process of communication with others and with society as a whole, that the self arises (Cooley 1902). According to Cooley, society is an organic whole, where each individual is reflective or a “looking-glass self”, which means that one imagines one’s self through the perspective of the other and internalizes a self-feeling which arises from the imagined judgement of the other.

“We are ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one, and so on. We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgements of the other mind.” (ibid.:185)

Thus the individual constantly internalizes judgements of the others directed towards the self, which explains the instrumental character of the other in the socialization process of the self.

“As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it.” (ibid.:184)

For Cooley, the empirical self, named “I”, means primarily self-feeling, and is “simply an idea, or system of ideas, drawn from the communicative life, that the mind cherishes as its own” (ibid.:179). It is regarded as an instinctive function, defined and developed by experience, incorporated with any kind of sensations, perceptions, apperceptions and personal ideas which “undergoes
differentiation and refinement just as any other sort of crude innate feeling” (ibid.:171). Hence, for Cooley the self is essentially a reflexive process of social interaction.

Issues of self and identity are complex and multi-faceted, thus drawing distinctions is inevitable and has heuristic value. A common distinction is between social and personal identity. The former refers to the social categories to which an individual belongs, strives to belong or shares important values with. The latter represents an individual’s unique attributes and values and reflects his or her personal history (North, Hargreaves 1998:71). When considering personal identity, it can be further distinguished between the private and the public self. The private self is “the self that only you know, your own desire, aspirations, and beliefs about yourself, that you may or may not wish to communicate with others” (ibid.). The public self refers to the person one presents to others, the enacted self, which correlates closely to Goffman’s (1959, 1963), and Mead's conceptualization of the self.

According to Mead, the self and the whole universe are social. “The social character of the universe we find in the situation in which the novel event is in both the old order and the new with is advent heralds” (Mead 1932:49). Organisms do not only affect one another from without, but also stimulate itself and the other and thus assume the role of the other. Thereby conversation is possible and the individual can control himself by the sense of his effect upon others. “This is the important thing to learn, and it is the lesson of becoming human, of developing a self that is also social” (ibid.). Therefore it is in the cooperation with others, that the public self is created.

However, the self as referred to in this paper equals Cooley's, or the private self, addressing the personal identity of an individual. It constitutes a self-feeling, driven by its own imagination and dependent on its judgement of the attitude of others towards itself. Based on Cooley's definition of the self, I want to argue that musical playlists function as symbolic expressions of the “I” and thus partake in the process of self-construction.

### 2.2.2 The concept of medium

> “Implicit to the concept of media is the dialogue that takes place between the delivery technology and the people who are using it.”
> (Nicholson 2010)

The word “media” is widely used in conversation and present literature, often signifying different things to different people. In the present paper, media will be considered as the combination of specific technology and, “the complex set of exchanges that occur between users of technology and the technology itself” (Nicholson 2010). According to Henry Jenkins, there are two levels that constitute a medium. On the first level, it is a “technology that enables communication” whereas on the second, a medium is “a set of associated 'protocols' or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology” (Jenkins 2006:13f.). Thus a medium is not only a technological but also a social phenomenon. As stated by Simmel (1971:24), any given social phenomenon consists of two inseparable factors, namely content and societal form. The content is

> “the materials, so to speak – of sociation everything that is present in individuals (…) - drive, interest, purpose, inclination, psychic state, movement – everything that is present in them in such a way as to engender or mediate effects upon others or to receive such effect” (ibid.).

However, these motivations are not social yet. “Strictly speaking, neither hunger nor love, work nor religiosity, technology nor the functions and results of intelligence, are social” (ibid.). It is through the transformation of the isolated individuals into “specific forms of being with and for one another” (ibid.) that content attains social reality. Thus interactions are the underlying concept of sociation, since it is because of them “that the individuals, in whom these driving impulses and
purposes are lodged, form a unity, that is, a society” (ibid.:23). This unity, or sociation can be of quite different degrees, based on the type and the intimacy of interaction, which it accomplishes. Moreover, the content is realized by “using quite dissimilar forms of sociation as its medium or vehicle” whereas the forms, in which the interests are realized, remain identical, however diverse the interests are that initially give rise to the sociations. According to Simmel, life produces certain forms in which “it expresses and realizes itself; works of art, religions, sciences, technologies, laws, and innumerable others” (ibid.: 375). These forms are frameworks for the creative life and constitute culture. For Simmel, there are two meanings of the concept of culture, namely “objective culture” and “subjective culture” (ibid.).

“The concept of 'objective culture' can be used to designate things in that state of elaboration, development and perfection which leads the psyche to its own fulfillment or indicates the path to be traversed by individuals or collectivities on the way to a heightened existence. By subjective culture I mean the measure of development of persons thus attained” (ibid.).

Therefore, subjective and objective culture, are in no way analogous concepts, but subjective culture is the overarching goal. Its measure is the magnitude to which the psychic life-process utilizes the objective goods and accomplishments. Evidently, subjective culture can only exist with the pre-existence of objective culture.

For the purpose of this paper, I will discuss the playlist as a media form unto itself. Simmel’s concepts about content and form, subjective and objective culture as well as the process of sociation are vital to the investigation of the musical playlist and its social functionality.

2.2.3 The emotional foundation of musical preferences

“Nothing more clearly affirms one's 'class', nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music”

(Bourdieu, 1984:18)

Music listening preferences are expressions of taste and most usefully are defined as “stable, long-term preferences for particular types of music, composers, or performers” (Abeles 1980; Price 1986). However, the sociology of taste, the “master of the analysis of hidden determinants of cultural practices”(Hennion 2004:131), has many origins. In Pierre Bourdieu's classic Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1984), he accomplishes a detailed empirical investigation “into the hierarchies of power that underpin both cultural production and consumption” (Biron 2009:322). He argues that taste, and indeed all consumption behaviour, arises out of the struggles for social recognition and status. Different social classes can thus be identified by the way in which they express their tastes in art, music, style of clothing, preferred food, or home decoration (Seymour 2004:21). In this respect, Hennion (2004) criticizes Bourdieu's viewpoint, since it portrays taste only as “culture's way of masking domination” and is thus “radically unproductive” (Hennion 2004:131). In fact, Hennion suggests to treat the individual more seriously by “conceiving taste as a reflexive activity of amateurs” (Hennion 2001, Frith 1996). Taste is therefore understood as reflexive work, performed on one’s own attachments to music.

“The amateur’s taste is no longer considered an arbitrary election rather, it is a collective technique, whose analysis helps us to understand the ways we make ourselves sensitized, to things, to ourselves, to situations and to moments, while simultaneously controlling how those feelings might be shared and discussed with others.” (Hennion 2007:98)

3 Hennion uses the French word ‘amateur’, because it is “more appropriate and general than ‘enthusiast’ or ‘fan’(...) It is used in a wider sense than the negative English one, of amateur as ‘non-professional’, (...) and it designates any lay-person engaged in a systematic activity, which makes them develop, in various degrees, their sensitivities or abilities in that domain” (Hennion 2007:112).
However, the amateur's musical taste is based on the concept of 'good' and 'bad' music, which implies the marking off of some tracks, genres and artist as 'good' and others as 'bad' in order to “establish our place in various music worlds and use music as a source of identity” (Frith 1996:72). Good and bad are key words, since they suggest that “aesthetic and ethical judgements are tied together: not to like a record is not just a matter of taste; it is also a matter of morality” (ibid.). Thus, musical assessment involves judgement, which again depends “on the articular (changing, irrational) social and psychological circumstances of the person making it” (ibid.). According to Solomon (1993), the self is an essential pole of emotional judgement. Judgements are implicit or explicit evaluations of what happens, involving oneself as well as “whatever else – disputes, cantaloupes, movies”, and therefore music as well (Solomon 1993:126). These objects and judgements constitute our emotions. Thus it can be stated, that an emotion is “a basic judgement about our selves and our place in our world, the projection of the values and ideals, structures and mythologies, according to which we live and through which we experience our lives” (ibid.). Most emotions involve other individuals, not only as their objects, but also intersubjectively, concerning their opinion of one's self, and what others think of them. However, each emotion, as a uniquely subjective judgement, comprises a judgement of both “one's self and his surreality,” therefore it is through our emotions “that we constitute ourselves” (ibid.:128). Moreover, Solomon states, that most judgements happen without any preliminary thought or intention and are sufficiently 'automatic'.

“So, too, we "find ourselves" liking an abstract painting, or a piece of music or a view, without being able to say much of anything about why we like it. We need not even acknowledge that we like it, and yet our behaviour (pausing before the painting and smiling, swaying to the music, gravitating to the landscape) indicates that we do.” (Solomon 2001:23)

By describing the emotional procedure of liking an abstract painting, or a piece of music, Solomon refers clearly to aesthetic judgements such as musical taste. Musical preferences are therefore based on emotions as judgements, distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' music. However, suggesting that one chooses or “makes” the judgement, “may, of course, be an accident of grammar.” Instead it is mainly an unconscious process of evaluation, without “thinking or reflection”, but rather based on “one's beliefs and desires” (ibid.:24).

As mentioned earlier, the self, for Solomon is an “essential pole of emotional judgement” and the “standpoint from which our judgements of our world and of other people begin” (Solomon 1993:128). This viewpoint corresponds closely to Mead's understanding of the ontogeny of the self, which suggests that, “the primal core of human individuality is an emotional self, a self built out of experience of our own actions.” Emotional experiences are thus the core mechanism and oldest part of the self, “the foundation on which the complex selves are constructed” (Gordon Ward and Throop 1992:80). By attributing emotional experience into his definition of the self, Mead however introduced some confusion, since affective experience was only applicable either to the “I” or the “me” and not to the self as a whole. Hochschild (1983:212) speculates, “Had Mead developed a theory of emotion, he would have begun by elaborating his idea of the “I””. Since the “I” is the basis of spontaneity, it is also the source of emotional experience, however, according to Hochschild, these attributes are inseparable from the “me” and thus the self as a whole. It is in the work of Cooley that the self, constituted out of opinions, purposes, desires or claims, is equal to any other “pronouns of the first person singular, “I,” “me,” “my,” “mine” and “myself””(Cooley 1902:168). There is no “I” without its “correlative sense of you, he or they” (ibid.:182).

Cooley's definition of the “I” as a reflective self-feeling is crucial to the understanding of Solomon's statement about emotions as judgements, and hence the following investigation of musical compilations. It is on the basis of emotions as uniquely subjective judgements, that the individual distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' music and creates musical playlists thereupon.
2.2.4 From mix-tape to playlists

“Common uses of the mix tape involve some form of social exchange; mixers use their mix tapes to communicate to theoretical listeners while mixceivers look to recognize relationships and meaning in the mix tape’s songs.”

(Nicholson 2010)

Musical recordings have a relatively short history, however, their developing physical forms have affected our interactions with them continually. Influenced by the current radio charts, and restricted to the limited repertoire of the music distributors, the first musical compilations were based on readily comprehensible conditions. Nevertheless, occasions and motivations for which a mix-tape was made were numerous, reaching from showing one's love interest to exposing a friend to music, travelling, or entertainment there was “always a reason to make one” (Sheffield 2007:17ff.). A 'good' mix tape thus corresponded certain standards and was based on an “organizing principle,” a prevailing theme that intended to “tell a story, share a mood, or give a perspective into the individual songs” (Cunningham 2006:2). Therefore, a 'good' mix tape was not only a way to personalize one’s music collection, moreover it had to be able to communicate its 'story' to the listeners, and was thus an expressive social gesture.

Nevertheless, the mix-tape has not only existed as an actual cassette tape, but also as a CD-R, both of which are referred to as “delivery technologies” by media scholars (Jenkins 2006:13). In the last decade, however, delivery technologies have faded from the spotlight and music has largely moved from the shelf to the hard drive. Instead of stacks of CDs, many youths have stockpiles of music files in their digital music libraries. According to Ito et al (2008), it is the “young people’s use of digital media and communication technologies” which “defines this generation as distinct from their elders” (Ito 2008:4). For this generation, the digital libraries are nothing more than the birthplace of mix-tapes, thus in the form of the musical playlist. Technically spoken, the playlist is a “sequence of digitally-encoded songs that is represented symbolically on a digital device in list form” (Nicholson 2010). Effectively, it is rather similar to the initial mix-tape as it is a compilation of songs, however, digitally-encoded and represented symbolically on a digital device in list form. Nevertheless, whereas the cassette mix-tape allowed for two contiguous halves of up to 24 and 45 minutes per side respectively, playlists can be an 'endless' succession of songs, saved on one's hard drive, or an iPod, which “can store up to ten thousand songs in a gleaming white box smaller than a pack of cigarettes” (ibid.:249).

New technological developments have shifted the organization and presentation of individuals’ music collection to a whole new level. The collection, arranged as a compilation of digital files, has rapidly amplified into a vast repertoire, readily available to the individual at any place and time. In this respect, the collection of digital music represents a “ocean of possibilities in which daily life gets a different kind of soundtrack, endlessly mutable and instantly reconfigurable” (ibid.:250). Via digital music services such as iTunes, Spotify or Lastfm, the listener today has access to an ubiquitous quantity of artists and music from any genre he or she can think of. Without being restricted to the limited repertoire of music-distributors, nor being necessarily guided by the local radio program as a 'pre-selector' of the latest hits, the individual actively has to choose and determine his or her preferences. As a result, playlists become idiosyncratic compilations (Dijck 2006), customized in conjunction with a certain event, theme or emotional state, and composed from the personal digital music collection of the creator himself. Displaying and sharing self-generated playlists is thus a manifestation of an individual’s musical preferences, which, in turn, is a part of his or her self-concept (Brown et al. 2001). Therefore mix-tape and playlist are perhaps different in their appearance, yet similar in their social function. A 'good' playlist is not only a way to personalize one’s music collection, it also communicates a story to the listeners, and is thus an expressive social gesture.
3. METHOD

3.1 The gathering of data

As mentioned above, the research question of this paper is strongly linked with the social psychological approaches of Cooley and Mead in several ways. According to Mead, human experience (Mind, Self and Society) is based on a reflexive social process. Mead's ideas describe the foundation of human interaction – which in the case of the present study, is provided by semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. Cooley's definition of the self as an instinctive function, based on experience and personal ideas, is fundamental to the following analysis of the data. In choosing a qualitative approach, I aim to “investigate the meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves” (Malterud 2001:398).

Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions will provide the required flexibility, in order to encourage the respondents to communicate “underlying attitudes, beliefs and values” (Gilbert 2008:249) and draw conclusions about personal characteristics, their utilization of playlists, and their way of self-expression.

Complementary to the interviews, I will employ focus groups in order to explore the participants' views and experiences about playlists in-depth (ibid.:228). The focus group discussions will differ from the individual interview in that they are dependent upon the interaction between participants. “It is this interaction that is the 'hallmark' of the focus group” (Morgan 1997).

In addition to Mead and Cooley's theories as a basis for the analysis of the interviews, I will also follow some of the basic principles of conversation analysis as laid out by Sacks (1974, 1995) and Schegloff (1974, 2007). The connection between Mead and Cooly's theories and conversation analysis can be illustrated by their resembling interpretation of (social) interaction. For Mead the meaning of a gesture lies in the subsequent action of the other person. Accordingly, in conversation analysis, talk is not “simply seen as the product of two speakers to attempt to exchange information or convey messages to each other.” Participants in conversations are rather seen as “mutually orienting to and collaborating in order to achieve orderly, and meaningful communication” (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008: 2). Similar to Cooley and Mead's approach, conversation analysis does not only comprise linguistic aspects but also non-verbal communication (Silverman 1998: 172ff.). The fact that “in all conversations of gestures within the social process (...) the individual's consciousness of the content and flow of meaning involved depends on his thus taking the attitude of the other toward his own gestures” (Mead 1956:159), means, that the individual can anticipate the responses of others and can thus consciously and intentionally make gestures that will bring out appropriate responses in others. Therefore, certain principles of conversation analysis, such as techniques for transcribing interviews including pauses in speech, symbols denoting intonation etc. will be valuable when analysing the collected data of the present study.

The study comprises four semi-structured interviews (see Kvale 1996:124) ranging from about 30 to 60 minutes and four focus group discussions of approximately one hour each. The interviews as well as the focus group discussions were audiotaped in order to facilitate the later analysis. The respondents were informed about the audiotaping in advance, and approved the recording. Since focus groups yield qualitative data from “relatively small numbers of respondents who interact with one another,” (Steward and Shamdasami 1990:17) the number of four participants is sufficient in order to achieve a valuable result. However, in order to identify a population of interest and “develop a systematic way of selecting cases that is not based on advanced knowledge of how the outcomes would appear,” (Cohen and Crabtree 2006) I used purposeful random sampling. By identifying a small sample, credibility can be increased, (ibid.) thus my participants were all Swedish students, aged between 20 and 30, however not from the same circle of friends. Therefore the respondents did not know each other beforehand, which was a vital criterion in order to identify
each other's personalities only on basis of their personal playlists. Moreover I chose a mixed-gender group (two male and two female) in order to ensure heterogeneity.

3.2 Limitations
Several limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. At first, the research was conducted in English, which is the second language for both, the interviewer (German) and the interviewees (Swedish). Although they speak English fluently, enunciation and the mode of expression might differ from their native way of speaking, which can hamper the understanding and thus impinge on the result of the study.

Second, the respondents were students exclusively, since they provide the required expertise with the technology and most probably spend quite some time on musical interaction. However, these pre-conditions, affect the heterogeneity of the data.

Moreover, the expressions comprising the precast list of personality traits underlying the focus group discussion are limited. There are several aspects of personality that are not subsumed within the Big Five. Thus the respondents were restricted to certain adjectives, which affected their freedom of choice and limited the way of expressing their self-concept.

Furthermore, the participants might have been biased by the visual appearance of the others. Clothing style, hair colour as well as manner of speech and gesticulation could be factors that impinge on the course of the focus group discussions and the subsequent results.

Finally, the present study focuses on investigating the musical playlist from a micro-perspective. More research is needed in order to fully comprehend the phenomenon of playlists, and their communicative nature beyond the individual – across boarders and cultures.

The present research should not be seen as an attempt to provide categorical 'truths' about the utilization of musical playlists in general. However, it is an attempt to draw valuable conclusions by looking at a small group in detail, which will lend to a broader, more generalizable study in the future.

4. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Analysing the playlist
Musical playlists in form of 'radio charts', mix-tapes or mix-CDs are familiar phenomena, although not quite the state of the art in the 21st century. In the contemporary digital age, digitally encoded audio files have made the transportation and storage of music more efficient and moved the personal music libraries from the shelves to the hard drive of the listeners. Although the Internet has long supported the posting of text, hosting music content became a popular music sharing activity rather recently, and hence the playlist evolved into a common social object. It is through the transformation of music (content) into a playlist (social form, or mode of interaction among individuals), that the mere content attains social reality, and the musical playlist becomes a social phenomenon (see Simmel 1971:24ff.). New technologies are first of all forms of objective culture till such time as “the psychic life-process makes use of those objective goods and accomplishments” (ibid.). It is then through the incorporation of cultivated objects, that subjective culture arises and mere musical content develops into a social form, a musical playlist, partaking in the subjective life of an individual. While sharing or exchanging playlists, new forms of interaction
emerge. Hence the playlist functions as a “medium or vehicle” (ibid.) facilitating new forms of sociaion and thereby new forms of communication. Through the reciprocal influence between individuals i.e. “when one individual has an effect, immediate or mediate, upon another”, mere “spatial aggregation or temporal succession” will be transformed into society (ibid.:25). Thus, musical playlists engender or mediate effects upon others and give rise to new forms of socaion. This complex relation between content and form as well as subjective and objective culture does not only explain the social nature of playlists but also illustrates its appearance as a medium, facilitating new forms of communication.

However, in order to fully understand the underlying structure of the playlist as a social object, it is inevitable to examine its construction. The process of composing a musical playlist is based on uniquely subjective judgements, distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' music. It is through emotions as judgements (Solomon 1993, 2001) that the individual orientates himself in a proliferating music repertoire, creating not only the basis for musical playlists but parts of the self. “Every emotion, as a uniquely subjective judgement, involves a judgement of both one's Self and his surreality” (Solomon 1993:128).

According to Cooley (1902) the “I” is an instinctive self-feeling, defined and developed by experience, thus constantly evolving and adjusting. Thus, it is not through the cooperation with others or taking roles (Mead, Goffman) that the “I” arises, but through its own imagination and the judgement of the attitudes of others towards itself (see Cooley 1902). By creating a personal playlist, the private self or 'self-feeling' is the leading light, arranging a sequence of favoured songs and simultaneously arranging its self-concept. Therefore a playlist can be considered as a symbolic expression of the self. The individual judgements, and thus all songs comprising a playlist, are not expressions of a certain 'role' but based on the true desires and beliefs of the private self (Solomon 2001:24). This self-creative process occurs mainly unconscious. Although the private self actively selects certain songs, the emotional attachment adhering a personal playlist emerges impulsively, in a rather creative manner. It is the “I”, the empirical self, “known to our experience primarily as a feeling or as a feeling-ingredient in our ideas,” (Cooley 1902:172) which is the creator of emotions as evaluative judgements and thus creator of the individual playlists. Since, for Cooley self-feeling arises from the imagined judgement of others, the listener does not merely judge 'good' and 'bad' music and creates his playlist thereupon, but imagines the judgement of others towards himself and adjusts his self-feeling. It is in this moment, when the individual playlist becomes a medium of communication and facilitates new forms of socaion.

The following data analysis aims to underpin the theoretical assumptions presented above. Investigating interview excerpts of young Swedish men and women concerning their experiences and attitudes towards playlists, and evaluating the supplementary focus group discussions, the ensuing part will shed light on the social nature of musical playlists, and illustrate their utilization as a tool for self-expression.

4.2 The process of data analysis

The excerpts analysed in the following were taken from four interviews, which focused on the participants' attitudes towards the compilation of their own personal playlist. Moreover four focus group interviews, discussing each participant’s playlist, contributed to the data collection.

During the interview questions were asked such as how the interviewee uses playlists in general and how he or she usually composes them (if there is any underlying structure, topic or motivation). Regarding the playlist for this study, I asked the participants why they chose the particular songs

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4 Each focus group interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.
5 The individual playlists comprised between five to ten songs, which was suggested by the interviewer beforehand in order to limit the scope of the interview and the following focus group discussion.
composing their lists, and how each song relates to their self-concept. The interviews took place either at the interviewer’s or interviewee's home and were held in English. For the focus group discussion all participants assembled in the interviewer's place where the necessary equipment (computer, internet, speakers, digital music service) was provided.

Starting point of each focus group discussion were the personal playlists created by the participants for the purpose of presenting themselves, i.e. parts of their self-concept to the others. In order to examine whether musical playlists can function as symbolic expressions of the self, each song composing the compilation was investigated for its communicative character. Do the songs evoke the by the composer intended reaction in the audience? Can parts of the self be expressed and communicated by music?

Hence each student was instructed to compile a personal playlist comprising five to ten songs before the interview and focus group discussion. Each song was meant to represent certain personality traits of the composer, constituting his or her self-concept. Thus a precast list of personality traits, based on Goldberg’s Five-Factor Model was handed to the participants before selecting their songs, in order to facilitate the self-expression and subsequent recognition process. After separately composing their personal music compilations, each playlist was listened to and discussed by the other participants.

During these focus group discussions three participants listened carefully to each song composing the playlist of the fourth group member, in order toanalyse his or her musical choice. Guided by the Five-Factor Model, the listeners related each song to certain expressions, which they perceived as being communicated through the music. These adjectives were compared with the characteristics (expressions), chosen by the composer of the list in order to present himself to the others.

Goldberg’s ‘Big Five’ are five broad domains (personality traits), representing central dimensions of human personality: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and emotional stability. Each dimension consists of two clusters of more specific traits, which correlate together. These traits, referred to as ‘adjectives’ or ‘expressions’, are vital to the present study, since they are the measurement of how well a certain playlist presents one’s self-concept to the others. However, each dimension distinguishes between ‘the trait’ and ‘its opposite’ (extraversion vs. introversion). Therefore, in the present study the adjectives constituting a dimension were divided into two sub-categories of opposite meanings, each containing several expressions (e.g. dimension: extraversion vs. introversion, sub-categories: 1. extraversion 2. introversion, expression: talkative/shy, extraverted/quiet etc.). Based on this subdivision it can be compared how well the expressions, chosen by the composer of the playlist, match the ones suggested by the audience. Hence

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6 Dear participants. Please constitute your personal playlists. The compilation should contain between five to ten songs. Each song is meant to represent parts of your self (like “talkative” “self-confident” “shy” “warm” “optimistic” etc.). Please read the attached list of personality traits carefully. Chose the personality traits you want to communicate with your music. (You can choose the adjectives first and relate them to a certain song which you think communicates these personality traits or you can choose the songs first and then relate them to the corresponding expressions from the list). E.g. “Red Hot Chili Peppers – Wet sand: “moody” “creative” “shy” or “The Strokes – Red light: “talkative” “extraverted” “optimistic” “kind”. The other participants will listen to your songs and based on the precast list of personality traits suggest expressions, which they think are communicated in the song. I will compare their choice with your choice and examine if the songs you chose evoke the reaction in the other participants, which you aimed to communicate.

7 The Five-Factor Model is a five dimensional taxonomy of personality traits, which has received the most attention and support from personality researchers in the past two decades. The big five taxonomy used in this paper is measured on the basis of self-ratings of single-word trait adjectives, such as talkative, warm, organized, moody and imaginative (Goldberg, 1990). “Lewis R. Goldberg has done the most systematic and thorough research on the big five using single-word trait adjectives.” (Larsen and Buss 2005:85). “The Big Five structure was derived from statistical analyses of which traits tend to co-occur in people’s descriptions of themselves or other people. The underlying correlations are probabilistic, and exceptions are possible“ (Srivastava 2010).
Goldberg’s ‘Big Five’ serve as a measure for how well each song communicates certain parts of the self to others, which is in turn an expression for the communicative character of musical playlists. During the focus group discussion the interviewer and three of the four participants, except the one whose playlist was discussed, stayed in one room listening and interpreting each playlist successively. In order to keep a comfortable atmosphere, where all respondents felt free to express their opinion, the person whose playlist was examined, waited in another room.

4.3 The “I”-construction of a playlist
As mentioned above, the understanding of how individuals construct musical playlists is vital to comprehend their appearance as social objects. The process of composing a musical playlist is based on uniquely subjective judgements, which was clearly recognizable during the interviews as well as in the focus group discussion. All four participants have well defined musical preferences although in a wide range of different musical genres. Thus choosing between 'good' and 'bad' music is inevitable for the respondents in order to orientate themselves in a proliferating music repertoire. However, the evaluation occurs mostly unconscious, since it is based on emotions as judgements. Marcus, aged 23, expresses his opinion about musical choice as follows:

Excerpt 1/ interview 2

1. Interviewer: how do you choose the music you are listening to
   (1.2)
2. Marcus: i think nobody choses music directly (1.0) you can't just look at every band (.) go through ALL the music and say yeah (.) that's good (.) that isn't ((...))

By stating that 'nobody' choses music 'directly' while looking at 'all' the music, Marcus emphasizes the general difficulty in keeping track of a proliferating music repertoire. It seems to be a physical impossibility to browse through 'all' the music and base one's judgement thereupon. For Marcus, individual music choice does not occur directly, thus in a rather unconscious manner, which clearly refers to Solomon’s statement about emotions as judgements. However, instead of browsing through all the music, Marcus refers to other sources of decision guidance (see Excerpt 6).

Similarly to Marcus, Emma, aged 27, describes the evaluation of her musical preferences:

Excerpt 2/ interview 3

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8 Names of the respondents were changed. In order to visualize important aspects of prosody such as stress, volume, duration etc., the following description of transcription symbols (taken from ten Have 1999:213ff.) will be used:

(0.0) elapsed time in silence by tenth of seconds;
(.) tiny 'gap' within or between utterances;
word some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude
:: prolongation of the immediately prior sound
. stopping fall in tone
? rising intonation
WORD loud sounds
° quiet sounds
( ) inaudible section
(( )) editorial comment

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1. Emma: 

angry music or sad music (.5) i only listen to it because i think it is beautiful (. ) but i don't really analyse much WHY i like it

Listening to certain kinds of music because they are 'beautiful' is an attitude, which is clearly based on emotions as subjective judgements. It is through the judgements of the "I" - the basis of spontaneity and source of emotional experience that Emma distinguishes between 'beautiful' and 'not beautiful' music. Without "thinking or reflection" ('I don't really analyse WHY') but based on her “beliefs and desires” (Solomon 2001:24), she evaluates certain music and constitutes her playlist thereupon.

By the same token Lisa, a 22-year-old student, composes her personal playlists. Based on the “I” as an instinctive self-feeling, Lisa follows her emotions as uniquely subjective judgements and arranges a sequence of favoured songs which constitute her playlists:

Excerpt 3/ interview 1

1. Lisa: 

at first i put in all the songs ( .) but yeah° (1.0) i kind of sort it by feeling (1.5) so the playlists often start with ( .) kind of a sad part ( .) then it is maybe an aggressive part then maybe a happy part ((( ... )))

Unlike Emma, who indeed bases her musical preferences on emotional evaluations ('because I think it is beautiful'), yet in a clearly unconscious manner ('I don't really analyse WHY'), Lisa is distinctly aware of the underlying emotions affecting her playlist ('I kind of sort it by feeling'). However, it is only after she 'puts in all the songs' that she is conscious of adjusting her choice according to particular feelings – the preliminary development of musical preferences remains unconscious.

Throughout the interviews it becomes clear, that the respondents compose their playlists based on the private self, or 'self-feeling', arranging a sequence of favoured songs and thereby arranging their self-concept. However, it is not only through its own imagination but through the judgement of the attitudes of others toward itself, that the “I” develops. Therefore, musical preferences are based on emotions as judgements while they are simultaneously redefined and adjusted according to the judgements of the others towards the self. This reflexive process is illustrated clearly by the following excerpt:

Excerpt 4/ interview 1

1. Lisa: 

when i was around 15 i met this guy ( .) he was playing a lot of instruments and was listening to very strange bands ( .) and also ( .) he was kind of disrespecting people who were listening to the wrong music ( .) and i got kind of caught up in that thing so i started listening ( .) very seriously to certain bands ( .) trying to find MY music (1.0) i was quite focused on that guy while trying to find MY music (3.0) i got kind of obsessed by what is my kind of music actually ( .) and i got quite judgemental to people who were listening to the WRONG music also (1.2) and i don't know ( .) i feel kind of ashamed by that today because it feels quite (.5) stupid° (2.0) categorizing people ( .) based on their music taste((...))
2. Interviewee: how do you feel about it today? ((judging others by their musical taste))

(1.5)

3. Lisa: m:: (.6) i think some part of me is still judging (.) if someone is **JUST** listening to some kind of genre like ((quotation marks)) (.6) o:: I only listen to house because i think that is the **best** ((quotation marks)) (.) i don't know (.) i think i judge now more by openness for certain kinds of bands

Motivated by the relationship to another person ('this guy'), Lisa focused her attention on the evaluation of music ('started listening like very serious to certain bands') in order to actively establish her musical preferences ('trying to find MY music'. Admitting that she was “kind of focused” on “that guy” while she was elaborating her musical preferences, it becomes clear how she adjusted her musical preferences to the judgement of someone else. However, she simultaneously admits, judging other people based on their music taste. Although Lisa's attitude changed over the years, today she still judges others according to their musical preferences, even though in a more 'accepting' way ('I judge more by openness for certain kinds of bands'). Moreover, the excerpt exemplifies again, how the self creates the concept of 'good' and 'bad' music ('MY kind of music') in order to establish one's place “in various music worlds and use music as a source of identity” (Frith 1996:72).

4.4 The playlist as a medium and social phenomenon

Returning to Jenkins (2006) definition of medium, the playlist works on two levels. On the first, a playlist is a technology that enables communication; on the second, it is a set of associated 'protocols' or social and cultural practices that have grown up around the playlist itself. Thus a playlist is not only a technological but also a social phenomenon. During the interviews it emerged, that although playlists are a rather recent phenomenon, they clearly show social functionality. All four participants were familiar with the compilation and exchange of playlists. Similar to the 'old mix-tape', three out of four respondents sort their compilations according to prevailing themes that intended to “tell a story, share a mood, or give a perspective into the individual songs” (Cunningham 2006:2), which is illustrated by the following excerpt:

Excerpt 4/ interview 4

1. Paul: i have topics (.) like (.4) happy (.) study (.) sleep (.4) wake-up (.) study or party list which i bet is a very common topic (.6) i bet there is a lot of lists called party list

While sorting and organizing his playlists, Paul clearly engages with his digital music collection by incorporating cultivated objects, thus, mere musical content develops into subjective culture. However, the creation of subjective culture is not necessarily a social endeavour. A playlist might be created for accompanying introspective activities, such as Paul's 'study' 'sleep' or 'wake-up’ lists. It is through the social interaction of individuals – the sharing and exchanging of playlists – that subjective culture attainst social functionality. Only then is the playlist a “medium or vehicle” (ibid.) facilitating new forms of sociation and communication. The following excerpts elucidate the difference between playlists as private or public subjective culture:
Excerpt 5/ interview 1

1. Lisa: when i connected my spotify account to my facebook account i realized that i don't want to share any of my playlists (.5) i wanna keep them to myself because i don't want people to judge me because of my playlists (2.0) i didn't want anyone to see my playlists because i felt (.1) like that's (.5) personal°

Excerpt 6/ interview 3

1. Marcus: ((has connected his spotify- with his facebook account)) i think it is great that i have my friends' playlists because then i can listen to them (1.0) some are really great because we have the same music taste (.5) but sometimes when i know people only briefly because (.5) yeah that is facebook° (.5) i look at their playlists and i am more judging (.5) then i go like ((quotation marks)) o:: you are listening to THIS and THAT ((quotation marks)) basically sneaking around in their music taste i guess ((laughs out loud))

Lisa recognizes the communicative nature of playlists, caused by the connection of her facebook- to her Spotify account. For Lisa, subjective culture remains private through 'keeping' the playlists to 'herself' in order to avoid other people's judgement based on her musical preferences ('I don't want people to judge me because of my playlists'). However, although kept in private, it appears rather obvious that the personal playlist indeed functions as symbolic expressions of the self ('I didn't want anyone to see my playlists because I felt like that's kind of personal').

In the case of Marcus, it becomes clear, how the sharing of musical playlists opens up one's subjective culture to the public ('I have my friends playlists (and) can listen to them') and thus creates new forms of sociation and communication. Moreover his statement illustrates, how the private self judges others by their musical taste ('I look at their playlists and I am more judging'), which confirms again, that playlists can be a tool for self-expression. It is through the process of sharing, exchanging or discussing each other's playlists, that individuals interact ('I have my friends playlists (…)'), reflect ('(…) I am more judging') and express parts of their self-concept ('(…)'my playlists (...) that's kind of personal'), which distinguishes the playlist as a medium and social phenomenon.

During the interview with Marcus it came to light, that he composes his playlist based on the influence of different social networks ('I chose music ... depending on the social network I am in') This procedure affirms the reciprocal character of the playlist as medium of communication. It is due to the judgement of certain friends and his active interaction in different social networks, that Marcus develops his musical preferences and creates his playlist thereupon. Again it becomes clear, how playlists engender or mediate effects upon others and therefore give rise to new forms of sociation:

Excerpt 6/ interview 2

1. Marcus: i choose music (.1) like u::h depending on the social network i am in (2.0) a::ll my social networks have different music tastes (1.0) different networks listen
to different music (1.5) the more networks you have (.).
the more music patterns you are listening to (2.0) you
get involved in different social situations (.), so you
get also involved in different music situations (((...))) and
depending on your surrounding (.), you create different
playlists (.), you adjust them to your audience (.), i
guess°

Summarising, several aspects could be observed in the interview data. All respondents were
familiar with composing and sharing playlists. Moreover, they showed a rather firm attitude
towards the new medium, which was reflected by their decisive and clear answers. However, the
participants' awareness towards the playlist as a symbolic expression of the self, and a medium of
communication, differed distinctly. Whereas Emma and Paul approach playlists much rather as
another technological innovation; as one of many exciting tools developed in a constantly
progressing media society, Lisa and Marcus were more reflective concerning the utilization of their
playlists. By observing her own behaviour towards digital compilations (when i first connected my
Spotify account to my facebook account i realized that i don't want to share any of my playlists),
Lisa recognizes the 'personal' character of the medium ('i didn't want anyone to see my playlists
because i felt like that's personal') and thus confirms the self-expressive nature of the playlist as a
new form of sociation. Whereby Marcus admits, that he actively 'investigates' other people's
playlists and judges the creators accordingly. This process clearly justifies the social functionality
of musical playlists, and underlines their role as a tool for self-definition and self-expression.

The differing awareness of the four participants towards the communicative character of playlists,
however, raises the question, if lower awareness restrains the self-expressive functionality
constituting musical playlists? Can playlists still partake in the self-construction process of the
individual? Can the individual self-concept, expressed through a self-composed compilation of
songs, be recognized by others with less awareness towards playlists? Can the self-concept be
communicated by a playlist at all?

These questions were the focal point during the focus group discussion, constituting the second part
of the analysis. The observed data will be illustrated in the following paragraph.

4.5 Interpreting playlists – listening to the sound of the self

In order to investigate if the playlist functions as a medium of communication and symbolic
expressions of the self, each of the participants had to compose a personal playlist before the actual
interview. While choosing certain personality traits and relating them to a certain song of their own
music library, the participants composed their individual playlist, which was then analysed in the
focus groups.

By choosing 'Three Little Birds' from Bob Marley, Marcus chose 'calm,' 'relaxed,' and 'stable' as
corresponding representations of his self-concept. After listening to this song, the other participants
proposed 'self-confident,' 'stable,' 'relaxed,' and 'calm' as those expressions, communicated through
the song. From Marcus' perspective, all personality traits were recognized by the others adding 'self-
confident,' which all together belong to the fourth dimension 'Emotional Stability.' Therefore the
song caused the intended interpretation by its listeners and operated successfully as a tool for self-
expression.

Following this process of 'playlist interpretation,' four focus group discussions were conducted, in
which each playlist was listened to carefully, while investigating its communicative character. Comparing the chosen expressions by the creator with the suggested adjectives from the audience, the following results could be observed:
The five dimensions of personality, addressed by the composer of the playlist, were correctly identified in 83% of all cases. Thus the audience clearly recognizes the broad factors, underlying the composer’s self-concept. Considering the correct dimensions, the participants furthermore hit the right sub-categories in 85%. Among the matching sub-categories, the expressions chosen by the composers, compared with the suggested adjectives of the audience attained a hit ratio of 55% on average. In case of the aforementioned example, ‘Three Little Birds’, the audience elected all of the composer’s chosen expressions (calm, relaxed, stable), which constitute the sub-category “Emotional Stability”. Thus the hit ratio for ‘Three Little Birds’ was 100% in both, dimension, sub-category and expression.

Interpreting the illustrated results it can be stated that the songs constituting each participant’s playlist, clearly mediated its intended ‘message’ to the audience. This fact confirms the communicative nature of the musical playlist. Despite differing awareness of the participants towards the utilization of playlists (see previous interviews), the result yet elucidates the general communicative potential inhering musical playlists. However, each dimension of personality was hit with a different ratio considering the overall experiment. Whereas the dimension “Emotional Stability” was hit in 100% of all cases, “Consciousness” attained a hit ratio of only 57% on average:
The difference between the hit ratio of each dimension is due to the fact that certain expressions are recognized more likely than others. ‘Calm,’ 'relaxed,' 'stable,' 'self-confident’ or ‘impulsive’ are adjectives, which could clearly be mediated by a certain song. Whereas ‘organized,’ ‘neat,’ ‘orderly,’ ‘practical,’ or ‘prompt’ were more difficult to identify for the participants. This imbalance can be based on the varying emotional nature of those specific adjectives. ‘Relaxed,’ or ‘calm’ are emotional expressions of the self, which can be translated into certain universal (music) patterns, such as a slow beat. Clearly, emotions play a vital role concerning musical playlists- not only during the creation (see the emotional foundation of preferences, chapter 2.2.3) but also in its social functionality. When expressing parts of the self that constitute Emotional Stability, the playlists will most likely mediate the ‘message’ effectively to its audience. This might explain the success of the ever-popular romantic mix-tape, communicating feelings to another person, which one was actually too shy to admit. However, it can also be an indication of the popularity of the 21st century mix-tape: the musical playlist.

Summarizing it can be stated, that the result of the focus group discussion confirms the social nature of the playlist, and its utilization as a symbolic expression of the self. Despite different awareness of the four participants towards the communicative character of playlists, the compilations can still function as a tool for self-expression. However, due to slight differences in the matching of the five dimensions, it can be stated that certain parts of the self can be communicated more successfully than others by a musical playlist. Consequently, certain songs are more suitable in order to function as a tool for self-expression than others. ‘Sympathy For The Devil’ by the Rolling Stones or ‘Easy’ by Faith No More are examples, which communicated the by the composer intended expressions of his self-concept rapidly to the audience. Songs, which clearly related to one dimension – at best Emotional Stability or Extraversion – successfully mediated certain parts of the composer’s self-concept to the others.

Although this ‘playlist-interpretation’ might appear rather mechanical, the focus group discussions provided plenty of personal statements and insights into the complex relation between playlist and individual. However, to discuss each participant individually, would be beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, the present result elucidates that the experiment was more than mere ‘word-guessing’ since it indeed facilitated insight into various selves, by means of their personal playlists.
5. CONCLUSION

„A need is not a need for a particular object as much as it is a “need” for difference (the desire for social meaning).“
(Baudrillard 1988)

The aim of this paper was to investigate the social-psychological foundation of the playlist, analysing its functionality in establishing social relations and communication. For this purpose I first provided a theoretical discussion, emphasizing the theories of Mead, Cooley, Solomon and Simmel. Moreover I pointed out that current research on playlists has identified the implications around music sharing technologies, yet with the main focus on the constraints of legal, ethical and political considerations. Technological changes, however, go hand in hand with changes in the social structure hence research concerning the social nature of musical playlists is vital.

Weather Spotify, Myspace, Grooveshark or Pandora – if one looks closely enough it becomes clear, that not only the number of music streaming services increases, but also the number of official members. More and more people use music sharing applications in their extensive functionality – including the compilation, sharing and exchanging of musical playlists. During the process of analysing theories about the self and the emotional foundation of preferences, I developed the argument that the playlist is a social object, facilitating new forms of communication. The social nature of the playlist is based on the transformation from objective- into subjective culture. By internalizing new technologies, such as the playlist, objects gain social value, thus mere musical content becomes a social form. It is through sharing and exchanging musical compilations that the playlist, as a social form, serves as a vehicle or medium, facilitating new forms of sociation and communication. The communicative function of the playlist is due to its construction through emotions as uniquely subjective judgements, based on the “I” as an emotional self-feeling. Thus, musical compilations take part in the self-construction process, and can serve as a tool for the symbolic expression of the self.

These statements could be confirmed by the interviews and focus group discussion analysed in the second part of this study. All participants were familiar with the phenomenon of compiling and exchanging playlists. Hence, the self-generated playlists signified the participant’s musical- and personal preferences and functioned as a tool for self-expression and construction. In this respect, the playlist functioned as medium, facilitating new ways of communication and sociation. However, two further conclusions can be drawn from the analysis.

Firstly, individuals show differences in their awareness towards musical playlists. Whereas some perceive them mainly as another exciting tool, introduced by a progressing media environment, other individuals actively utilize the playlist in order to “sneak around in (one’s) music taste” (Marcus). This behaviour was previously referred to as a type of musical voyeurism, also termed “playlistism.” The ability to see and subsequently judge others’ playlists constitutes a new form of sociation, facilitated through the playlist as a medium.

The second conclusion, drawn from the analysis of the focus group discussion, is the fact that there are differences in how well certain parts of the self can be communicated by a playlist. Although the analysis clearly confirms that the playlist can function as a channel for externalizing personal qualities, some characteristics are mediated more clearly than others. Therefore it becomes apparent, that the playlist can serve as a tool for the symbolic expression of the self, yet some parts of the individual will even for the playlist remain private.

Conclusively it can be stated that the musical playlist is both, socially implicated and socially implicating and thus demands further attention of social and social psychological investigations.

In a social landscape, which is increasingly Internet-based, modes of communication that require no physical proximity are becoming more and more conventional, especially for those who grow up
with the Internet. This is the case not only for countries such as Sweden or Germany but for the whole Western world. In a world that is torn by social differences, communication appears very improbable, yet the playlist facilitates and insures understanding and the overcoming of cultural boarders. Thus, despite different origins, language or customs, you might still just show me your playlist and I tell you who you are.
6. REFERENCES


7. APPENDIX

7.1 Interview guide

Background

Tell me about your relation to music
- How much do you listen to music?
- How (computer? Mp3?, radio? TV?)
- Which program? (iTunes, Spotify, Lastfm, Myspace, Youtube)
- When?
  - favourite style?
- active in music scene?

Playlists

What meaning do playlists have for you?
- do you have any?
- How many?
- Specific topics/structure in organizing them?
- Do you share them? / Music in any way?
- How do you use them? (private/public/sharing/ipod/computer)
- Why do you make them?

Your personal playlist

Describe how you chose your songs
- How many did you choose?
- Why did you choose the song X?
- How long did it take you to make the playlist?
- Was it difficult?

Describe how you related the adjectives to each song.
- Do you think the adjectives were helpful? (Too many? Too less?)
- Why did you chose expression X and related it to song X?
- What do you think the other participants will think about your playlist?
7.2 The Big Five personality traits

1. Extraversion vs. Introversion

- talkative vs. shy
- extraverted vs. quiet
- assertive vs. introverted
- forward vs. bashful
- outspoken vs. inhibited
- enthusiastic vs. apathetic
- energetic vs. lethargic

2. Agreeableness vs. antagonism

- sympathetic vs. unsympathetic
- kind vs. unkind
- warm vs. harsh
- understanding vs. cruel
- sincere

3. Conscientiousness vs. lack of direction

- organized vs. disorganized
- neat vs. disorderly
- orderly vs. careless
- practical vs. sloppy
- prompt vs. impractical

4. Emotional stability

- calm vs. moody
- relaxed vs. anxious
- stable vs. insecure
- self-confident vs. not self-confident
- impulsive vs. not impulsive

5. Openness vs. closeness to experience:

- creative vs. uncreative
- imaginative vs. unimaginative
- intellectual vs. unintellectual
- unconventional vs. normal
7.3 Personal playlists

Emma:

Neubauten – Was ist ist: orderly (3a), neat (3a), practical (3a), energetic (1a), talkative (1a), extroverted (1a)

The Smiths – Ask: understanding (2a), sympathetic (2a), sincere (2a), optimistic (1a), enthusiastic (1a), relaxed (4a)

Dan Andersson – Omkring tiggaren från Loussa: calm (4a), warm (2a), sympathetic (2a), neat (3a), stable (4a), cautious (1b)

Nightmare before Christmas: creative (5a), imaginative (5a), neat (3a), orderly (3a), warm (2a), disorganized (3b), optimistic (1a), enthusiastic (1a)

Tom Waits – Everything you can think: enthusiastic (1a), optimistic (1a), creative (5a), imaginative (5a), warm (2a), calm (4a)

Amon Düül – ArchangelThunderbird: creative (5a), imaginative (5a), warm (2a), energetic (1a), disorganized (3b), relaxed (4a)

Marcus:

Beatles - Blackbird: Calm, Stable, Relaxed

Michael Jackson – Baby be mine: Imaginative, talkative, outspoken

Bob Marley – Waiting in vain: Warm, sympathetic, relaxed, sloppy

Sammy Davis Jr – I’ve got you under my skin: disorganized, optimistic, creative

Jeff Buckley – Satisfied Mind: quiet, calm, understanding

Rolling stones – Sympathy for the devil: Careless, impulsive, creative

Lisa:

Julian Casablancas – 11th dimension: extravered, shy, moody

Anthony – If it be your will: sincere, calm, understandable, moody

Florence & the machine - dog days are over: not-self confide., cautious, warm, moody

Phantom pt 2. – Justice: self-confident, creative, energetic

Aretha Franklin – Don’t play that song: normal, standard, moody stable, outspoken, sympathetic
Paul:

Me And My Monkey – Robbie Williams: talkative, imaginative

Small Town – John Mellencamp: optimistic, warm

Easy – Faith No More: relaxed

Nice Guys Finish Last – Green Day: kind, energetic

Move On – Jet: disorganized

Three Little Birds – Bob Marley: relaxed, stable, optimistic