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Audio Musings

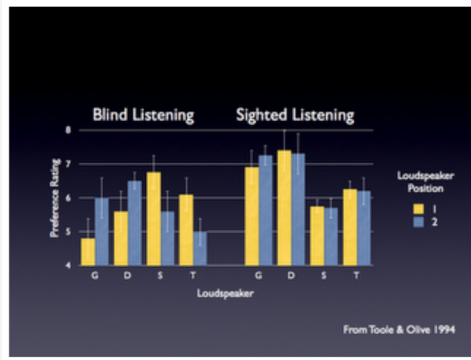
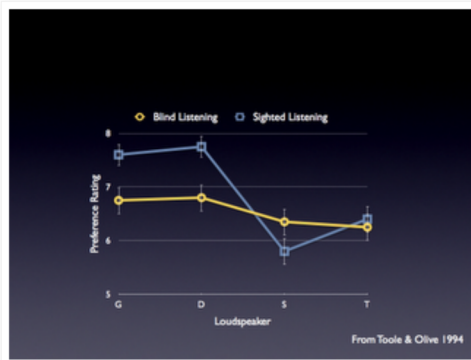
By Sean Olive



THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2009

The Dishonesty of Sighted Listening Tests

An ongoing controversy within the high-end audio community is the efficacy of blind versus sighted audio product listening tests. In a blind listening test, the listener has no specific knowledge of what products are being tested, thereby removing the psychological influence that the product's brand, design, price and reputation have on the listeners' impression of its sound quality. While double-blind protocols are standard practice in all fields of science - including consumer testing of food and wine - the audio industry remains stuck in the dark ages in this regard. The vast majority of audio equipment manufacturers and reviewers continue to rely on sighted listening to make important decisions about the products' sound quality.



An important question is whether sighted audio product evaluations produce honest and reliable judgments of how the product truly sounds.

A Blind Versus Sighted Loudspeaker Experiment

This question was tested in 1994, shortly after I joined Harman International as Manager of Subjective Evaluation [1]. My mission was to introduce formalized, double-blind product testing at Harman. To my surprise, this mandate met rather strong opposition from some of the more entrenched marketing, sales and engineering staff who felt that, as trained audio professionals, they were immune from the influence of sighted biases. Unfortunately, at that time there were no published scientific studies in the audio literature to either support or refute their claims, so a listening experiment was designed to directly test this hypothesis. The details of this test are described in references 1 and 2.

A total of 40 Harman employees participated in these tests, giving preference ratings to four loudspeakers that covered a wide range of size and price. The test was conducted under both sighted and blind conditions using four different music selections.

The mean loudspeaker ratings and 95% confidence intervals are plotted in Figure 1 for both sighted and blind tests. The sighted tests produced a significant increase in preference ratings for the larger, more expensive loudspeakers G and D. (note: *G and D were identical loudspeakers except with different cross-overs, voiced ostensibly for differences in German and Northern European tastes, respectively. The negligible perceptual differences between loudspeakers G and D found in this test resulted in the creation of a single loudspeaker SKU for all of Europe, and the demise of an engineer who specialized in the lost art of German speaker voicing*).

Brand biases and employee loyalty to Harman products were also a factor in the sighted tests, since three of the four products (G,D, and S) were Harman branded. Loudspeaker T was a large, expensive (\$3.6k) competitor's speaker

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ABOUT ME



Dr. Sean Olive
Valley Village,
California, United
States

Sean Olive is Director of Acoustic Research

for Harman International, a major manufacturer of audio products for consumer, professional and automotive spaces. He directs the Corporate R&D group, and oversees the subjective evaluation of new audio products including Harman's OEM automotive audio systems. Prior to 1993, he was a research scientist at the National Research Council of Canada where his research focused on the perception and measurement of loudspeakers, listening rooms, and microphones. Sean received a Bachelors degree in Music from the University of Toronto, and his Masters and Ph.D. degrees in Sound Recording from McGill University in Montreal. His Ph.D. research was on room acoustic adaptation and the acoustical interaction between loudspeakers and rooms. Dr. Olive

that had received critical acclaim in the audiophile press for its sound quality. However, not even Harman brand loyalty could overpower listeners' prejudices associated with the relatively small size, low price, and plastic materials of loudspeaker S; in the sighted test, it was less preferred to Loudspeaker T, in contrast to the blind test where it was slightly preferred over loudspeaker T.

Loudspeaker positional effects were also a factor since these tests were conducted prior to the construction of the [Multichannel Listening Lab](#) with its automated speaker shuffler. The positional effects on loudspeaker preference rating are plotted in [Figure 2](#) for both blind and sighted tests. The positional effects on preference are clearly visible in the blind tests, yet, the effects are almost completely absent in the sighted tests where the visual biases and cognitive factors dominated listeners' judgment of the auditory stimuli. Listeners were also less responsive to loudspeaker-program effects in the sighted tests as compared to the blind test conditions. Finally, the tests found that experienced and inexperienced listeners (both male and female) tended to prefer the same loudspeakers, which has been confirmed in a more recent, larger [study](#). The experienced listeners were simply more consistent in their responses. As it turned out, the experienced listeners were no more or no less immune to the effects of visual biases than inexperienced listeners.

In summary, the sighted and blind loudspeaker listening tests in this study produced significantly different sound quality ratings. The psychological biases in the sighted tests were sufficiently strong that listeners were largely unresponsive to real changes in sound quality caused by acoustical interactions between the loudspeaker, its position in the room, and the program material. In other words, if you want to obtain an accurate and reliable measure of how the audio product truly sounds, the listening test must be done blind. It's time the audio industry grow up and acknowledge this fact, if it wants to retain the trust and respect of consumers. It may already be too late according to Stereophile magazine founder, Gordon Holt, who lamented in a recent [interview](#):

“Audio as a hobby is dying, largely by its own hand. As far as the real world is concerned, high-end audio lost its credibility during the 1980s, when it flatly refused to submit to the kind of basic honesty controls (double-blind testing, for example) that had legitimized every other serious scientific endeavor since Pascal. [This refusal] is a source of endless derisive amusement among rational people and of perpetual embarrassment for me..”

References

- [1] Floyd Toole and Sean Olive, "Hearing is Believing vs. Believing is Hearing: Blind vs. Sighted Listening Tests, and Other Interesting Things," presented at the 97th AES Convention, preprint 3894 (1994). Download [here](#).
- [2] Floyd Toole, [Sound Reproduction: The Acoustics and Psychoacoustics of Loudspeakers and Rooms](#), Focal Press, 2008.

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Posted by Dr. Sean Olive

Labels: [blind versus sighted listening tests](#), [Floyd Toole](#), [Gordon Holt](#), [Harman International](#), [listening tests](#), [loudspeakers](#), [Sean Olive](#), [Stereophile](#)

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35 comments:



Olive Tree Guitar Ensemble said...

Hi, it's a very great blog. I could tell how much efforts you've taken on it. Keep doing!

April 9, 2009 6:17 PM

has written over 30 research papers on the perception and measurement of audio for which he was awarded the Audio Engineering Society (AES) Fellowship Award in 1996, and two Publication Awards (1990 and 1995). Sean is the current Vice President for the AES Western US-Canada region. Sean has two wonderful children Conor (11) and Mariah (9).

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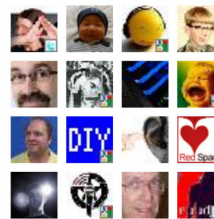
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Sean E. Olive said...

Thanks. I like the name of your blog!

[April 9, 2009 7:02 PM](#)

Anonymous said...

Sean,

You keep coming up with great articles. I nominate you audio guy of the year! Thanks for taking the time.

Randy Bessinger

P.S. It is amazing to me how hard some audiophiles cling to their idea of bias being everyone else's problem.

[April 10, 2009 7:48 AM](#)

Ethan Winer said...

Great article Sean! I added a link to this from my Articles page. I'll be sure to post the link in Stereophile's forum too.

[April 10, 2009 10:13 AM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Hi Randy,

Thanks. It's OK for audiophiles to have biases (I have my own), as long as they acknowledge that these biases often get in the way of the truth -- as this study has shown. If we want to determine the true sound quality of a component, the listening test must be blind.

[April 10, 2009 12:47 PM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Ethan,

Thanks for the link on your page. You put me right above "Acoustic Treatment Exposed". How do you expect me to ever compete with that? - :)

Cheers

Sean

[April 10, 2009 1:53 PM](#)

Anonymous said...

Sean,

Some food for thought -

There are several reasons why the audio community is hesitant about blind preference tests. You may have heard them already:

- 1) Context is very important for perception and judgment. This may lead to biases in a sighted test. However, in a blind test, removing the context, reduces your ability to judge altogether. Differences that you clearly heard before diminish. That sighted tests are wrong doesn't mean blind tests are right. This is a brain problem.
- 2) There is no reference/ anker in a preference test. Who knows how the chosen material is supposed to sound exactly? Listeners who have heard it too many times think it should sound like as they heard it with their so far preferred loudspeaker. Listeners who hear the material the first time don't know at all. The least preferred loudspeaker in the test might just have revealed faithfully how distorted and bad the mix was.
- 3) In short-term preference tests, timbral attributes are usually dominant. Small differences in loudness or low-Q resonances influence your judgment most, whereas in a long-term "relationship" with the product other attributes such as low-level transparency (distortion), dynamic range (the ability to reproduce transients), stereo imaging, become more important for relaxed listening to music than timbre. You can easily adjust your preferred level, and get accustomed to low-Q resonances.

Let's have a nice discussion!

Ulrich Horbach

[April 12, 2009 8:02 PM](#)

April Tucker said...

What an interesting test! My husband and I (both trained/experienced listeners) noticed this effect recently when we swapped out our tv for one with better resolution. We both perceived that our audio system sounded better than before, even knowing that nothing in the system had changed. I may have to experiment with a little "choice architecture" with my clients (like reviewing mixes against compressed Quicktimes versus a color-corrected master!)

[April 13, 2009 3:00 PM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Dear April,

As you well know, there have been scientific studies that confirm that the quality and size of picture influences the perceived quality of sound. The bi-modal sensory interactions work both way although the video's influence the perception audio on is much stronger than vice versa. I used this argument to convince my wife we needed a new large HD video display since the 28 inch CRT was making my surround audio system sound thin, not enveloping, with low level granular distortion and noise....

Another (albeit more risky) approach towards making your customers believe your mixes sound better is to start charging them more. They may not think your mixes sound as good as they do, simply because they are not paying enough for them :)

Sorry, I'm in a particularly cynical mood today..

Cheers
Sean

[April 15, 2009 5:25 AM](#)

DrLex said...

Gordon Holt may be right. I believe some people nowadays buy crappy audio systems on purpose, to distantiate themselves from the preposterosity that has become associated with audiophiles.

[April 15, 2009 6:01 AM](#)

Anonymous said...

Dear Sean, thanks for your very interesting blog. Being a scientist (I am a MD directing clinical trials in a major pharmaceutical company) and a musich enthusiast at the same time, I have always been surprised by the cohesistence in the same hobby of a strong scientific background and a "magic" approach.

I personally started to understand the influence of the "sight" when I listened in my "very audiophile" system a 200\$ CD-DVD player thinking that a 10,000\$ CD player was plugged in.

By trying to support a more scientific approach to music reproduction (and at least a blind evaluation of "snake oils") I have been banned by an "audiophilic" forum so I started my own (Il Galileo Audiofilo, I am Italian).

Ciao,

Gualtiero.

malde@3718@yahoo.it

[April 15, 2009 7:27 AM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Hi Gualtiero,

I have argued that many of the same reasons for conducting blind drug trials apply to conducting a blind listening test over a sighted one. As a rational person, would you rather choose a drug that had been passed by the FDA based on open or double-blind clinical trials, and why? Apparently my analogy between the two is not relevant according to some audiophiles on the Sterophile thread about my blog article (see <http://forum.stereophile.com/forum/showflat.php?Cat=0&Number=64883&page=0&fpart=all&vc=1&nt=21>) I would be interested in hearing your comments on this topic since you an MD doing clinical drug trials, as well as audiophile.

Cheers
Sean

[April 15, 2009 8:56 AM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Hi DrLex,

I hope that audio consumers don't throw in the towel just because there is a negative image associated with the term "audiophile." If the industry cannot give consumers reliable subjective data - we could at least give them perceptually-relevant objective measurements and product specifications, so consumers can make more intelligent purchase decisions as I discuss here: <http://seanolive.blogspot.com/2009/01/what-loudspeaker-specifications-are.html>

Cheers
Sean

[April 15, 2009 9:12 AM](#)

Rich Sulin said...

Hi Sean, I would agree with your conclusion.

I think we evolved to make quick assumptions by fusing all sensory input to enhance survival. There are trade-offs in our sensing & cognition (cf: perceptual coding, optical illusions, magic tricks, etc.). In modern life, focusing on some cerebral issue, we often fool ourselves, thinking we can make an expert assessment without subjectivity or bias.

With loudspeakers, even more than physical appearance, the 'purchase price' is big confounder. A poor correlate with performance.

- Rich Sulin

[April 15, 2009 9:23 AM](#)

Alan Sircom said...

Dear Sean,

As the new editor of Hi-Fi+ in the UK (perhaps one of the most 'out there' of audiophile magazines), I guess I am the Loyal Opposition. As such, I respectfully disagree with your suggestion of dishonesty in sighted tests.

The word 'dishonesty' implies some kind of deceit in the actions of the reviewer. Although I cannot speak for all subjective reviewers at all times, I suspect most would view their actions as being principally honest, but holding to a different set of values to yours. There's an obvious analogy here: a conservative might be fundamentally opposed to the viewpoint of a liberal (or vice versa), and may even express incredulity at those who support such a position, but still respect the integrity of that stance. Or at least, that used to be the case, but I suspect "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" is passé now.

For my part, I maintain that sighted tests can reflect the real-world conditions in which people choose and use their products. For example, because blind tests are inherently level-matched in design, they do not take into account the way products are evaluated by listeners in reality.

Here's an interesting test to explain what I mean: run a blind test a group of products under level-matched conditions. Then run the same test (still blind), allowing the users to set the volume to their own personal taste for each loudspeaker under test. From my (admittedly dated and anecdotal) testing on this, the level-matched group will go for the one with the flattest frequency response, as will those who turn the volume 'down', but those who turn the dial the other way often choose the loudspeaker with the biggest peak at around 1kHz, saying how 'dynamic' it sounds. I wrote on the topic in the early to mid-1990s (I believe it was in Hi-Fi Choice magazine, but the magazine's back-catalog is long gone now).

Unlike some of my colleagues, I am not opposed to blind-testing, in part because my of my previous work with Hi-Fi Choice in the UK (which does still - at least partially - continue to run blind tests). However, I am keen to explore all potential avenues to see if audiophiles are hearing things, or hearing things. As such, I think there might be something other than double-blind ABX that has some degree of scientific credibility, and which might be able to answer this... such as longitudinal testing.

I welcome your comments on the subject.

Kind Regards

Alan Sircom
Editor, Hi-Fi Plus magazine
[April 16, 2009 4:34 PM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Dear Alan,

Thank you for your response. I appreciate your feedback, and I am sorry if I caused you offense.

It was not my intent to single out audio reviewers for not doing blind tests. Indeed, most audio manufacturers don't do controlled listening tests as part of the product validation and testing. If they have comprehensive perceptually relevant objective measurements in place, then listening may be less important.

I don't think I implied reviewers are intentionally deceitful and dishonest. The word "dishonest" was used to describe the sighted test methodology itself. It fails in measuring the true sound quality of the product due to the influence of listeners' psychological biases. The listener may not even be conscious of these biases, in which case, they could hardly be accused of being "dishonest" or "deceitful." I can hardly be blamed as deceitful if I choose the red speaker over the light green loudspeaker, because it sounds louder and more powerful (like a red Ferrari).

Most audio reviewers I've met are decent, honest, intelligent people trying to do the best job they can given the limited time, budget and resources at their disposal. Most reviewers who visit Harman, tell me they would love to have access our listening facilities or have something like it for reviewing products. Given the choice, I think most reviewers would use a combination of blind and sighted tests.

I agree that sighted tests have a purpose, particularly to determine the influence of the visual factors (brand, price, design, advertising) on consumers' perception. This allows audio companies to optimize the right balance of sound quality versus other important design/marketing variables (industrial design, advertising, etc) and predict consumer acceptance in the marketplace. Also, it doesn't require a blind test to establish that a speaker sounds unacceptable due to audible rub and buzz.

Your example of having listeners adjust the level of different speakers to their preferred taste, to me, correlates with how much non-linear distortion or power compression the speakers have. Listeners will tend to increase the volume until the speaker and/or their ears begin to produce high-order distortion. Be careful: If the loudspeaker is a JBL Everest - you may find yourself listening at dangerously high SPL levels (>110 dB peak) before you realize it!

Cheers
Sean
[April 17, 2009 4:51 AM](#)

Alan Sircom said...

Dear Sean,

No offense taken at all, and from what I gather, I would be one of the envious of your facility.

My goal in writing here is arguably the same as I hold for the magazine; that there needs to be some kind of rapprochement between the objective and subjective sides of the business. This is a long-term goal, I need to build a foo-broom with a longer handle first :)

Kind Regards

Alan
[April 17, 2009 5:09 AM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Dear Ulrich:

1) I agree that context is a factor when judging the quality of audio, wine, food, etc. Wine reviewers argue that they would rate a French Bordeaux from a well-established producer differently in a sighted test knowing its track record of how it historically ages over time. Still, I think a combination of blind and sighted tests can best deal with that. Many consumers aren't interested in aging their wine and want to know how it tastes today.

Your 2nd and 3rd points are not specifically related to blind tests but apply to all listening tests in general.

2) There is nothing to prevent an experimenter from putting anchors in preference tests to help anchor and calibrate the scale. Anchors are recommended in ITU-R MUSHRA standard. Training listeners leads to more consistent use and interpretation of the scale, and familiarizes them with the program material. It's true that listeners never truly know how the recording should sound unless they were in the recording control room at the time when it was mixed and mastered. That doesn't seem to be much of an obstacle for trained listeners, who can listen to several different programs, and separate the distortions in the programs (which are constant among speakers) from those in the speakers. Clearly careful selection of neutral sounding recordings helps out here. We tend to use recordings made by recording engineers with a track record of making excellent recordings - like George Massenburg.

3) I am not aware of any studies that support the claims you make. In fact, in some cases, I would argue the opposite: Over long term, listening to a speaker in isolation, I suspect people, up to certain point, adapt to problems loudspeakers that are clearly audible and more objectionable in comparative blind tests. Also, there is nothing to prevent people from doing extended double-blind tests to see if your speculations are true or not. If people are not reporting distortion/spatial differences in listening tests over short periods of time, then the test probably hasn't been designed to focus listeners' attention on these differences. This can be addressed by training listeners to be sensitive to these differences and designing tests that require listeners to rate the test objects on spatial and distortion scales. Distortion is often not a factor for larger loudspeakers until the playback levels get rather high.

[April 22, 2009 11:45 AM](#)

Andrei said...

Great article! Having read reviews (or to be precise sheer lunacy) of power cords and interconnects for \$20000/m I really enjoy knowledgeable blog!

Regards, Andrei (aka MacGuru)

[May 31, 2009 4:08 AM](#)

Anonymous said...

Dear Sean,

being an author/reviewer for a hifi magazine myself, I enjoyed your article about double blind listening tests very much. However, as it's a German magazine (Image Hifi), your mentioning of a "... lost art of German speaker voicing" caught my attention. Would you mind elaborating on this?

Thanks,
Michael Vrzal

[June 13, 2009 12:15 PM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Dear Michael,

Thanks. I am happy you enjoyed my article on blind tests. The remark about the lost art of German speaker voicing" was mostly stated as sarcasm -- since there is no scientific evidence that Germans like different sounding loudspeakers than the rest of the world.

Harman used to employ a speaker designer in Germany who would re-voice cross-over networks for Harman loudspeakers sold in the rest of Europe so that they fulfilled the distinctively different German taste in sound quality. Such a claim was never validated -- but the practice led to 2 different SKU's being released for Europe: one for Germany and 1 for the rest of Europe.

When we performed the blind versus sighted tests it included two otherwise identical speakers with different crossover networks (one voiced by the German designer and one voiced by someone else for the rest of Europe). There were slight measurable differences in frequency response, but the blind listening tests showed that neither Germans nor the other listeners could reliably formulate a preference between the two. We stopped making a separate SKU for Germany based on the belief that Germans like the same high-quality accurate loudspeakers as preferred by the the rest of the world. To my knowledge, no loudspeaker company do "country" or "culturally-specific" loudspeakers. The same model is sold in all markets. If you know of any examples, I would be very interested in hearing about it.

Cheers
Sean

[June 13, 2009 1:34 PM](#)

Anonymous said...

Dear Sean,

thanks for the quick and detailed response. Very interesting!

Germans do like the sound of loudspeakers from all over the world now, but things were different in the 70's and early 80's, when German music lovers suffered from the "Taunus sound", i.e. loudspeakers voiced to have something like a built in loudness effect, with lots of bass and super analytical treble. This sound was named after the mountain area where many (West-)German loudspeaker manufacturers resided (near Frankfurt).

The Taunus sound made Brit-Fi big in Germany, since many listeners flew its acoustical harassment and turned to brands like Mission, Naim, Linn or Celestion instead for their mid-emphasizing, "musical" sound; or they converted to the tube-friendly, "lyrical" sound of french brands; or chose the powerful, muscle-loaded sound of US made amps and speakers, which were designed to match the wooden houses with their bass absorbing walls ...

The times, they are a'changing, today Germans develop loudspeakers for British brands ... But IIRC, a former German distributor of Martin Logan loudspeakers modified their crossovers, changing some components for "better" ones.

I would be very interested in learning more about the "German voicing" you mentioned. I wouldn't mind if you contacted me by mail on "my first name""at""my last name".de.

Greetings,
Michael Vrzal

[June 13, 2009 4:00 PM](#)

Tim said...

Hello Sean -

It makes sense that listeners would prefer accurate / neutral speakers for well recorded / "balanced" recordings, but there is such a wide range of recording quality out there that I wonder how this is taken into account in your testing?

For instance, if a consumer likes to listen mainly to Pop recordings (which I find tend to be too bright through an accurate speaker), wouldn't the consumer gravitate towards speakers with rolled off treble to compensate for the brightness in the recording?

How do you select the recordings you use for testing?

- Tim

[July 14, 2009 12:58 PM](#)

Sean E. Olive said...

Hi Tim,

Thank you for your comment. You make a good point: program material is a significant nuisance variable in loudspeaker tests due to the lack of standardization in the recording industry in terms of the loudspeaker monitors and rooms used to make recordings. As a result, the sound quality of recordings is quite variable, and your opinion of the loudspeakers may vary depending on the quality of the recording itself. Harman makes loudspeakers for both recording engineers (JBL LSR) and consumers, and the performance targets are exactly the same. In this way, there is a greater chance that consumers have a better chance to hear what the artist intended.

We deal with loudspeaker-program interactions by choosing programs that are neutral and revealing of loudspeaker problems based on statistical analysis of listener training data and results from product tests. If the program is "too bright" or "too dull" this will show up in the statistical analysis of the data and we can correlate this to acoustical measurements of the loudspeaker.

Also, since we use trained listeners they become intimately familiar with the programs and their sound quality idiosyncrasies, and to a certain extent learn and compensate for recordings that are slightly "bright/dull", "thin/ full" etc.

[July 16, 2009 11:21 AM](#)

nico said...

Hi Sean,

2+2 short questions:

- (1) Were the differences for the blind listenings across the 4 loudspeakers statistically significant ?
- (2) What suprised me were the large differences for the two speaker positions (for blind listening). Especially the more expensive HK speakers fall behind. Can you give some more detail on the speaker placements (e.g. was one of them an "extreme" one, like close to a wall)
- (3) I cannot access the full papers through my University (UMD.edu). Would you mind sending me the papers to nico(at)cs.umd.edu. I am interested in how you controlled the order of your participant groups.
- (4) Few years ago I was motivated myself to do such experiments and to publish online: <http://hifixperiments.blogspot.com>
(well it turned out to be too much work to do besides my PhD in Computer Science (and recruiting enough study subjects is hard) - still the empirical component is the same and lots of the issues in the fields are the same - maybe Empirical Software Engineering is some years ahead in convincing people to validate results with the proper studies)

Thanks,
Nico

[July 21, 2009 9:24 AM](#)

Anonymous said...

From a perceptual perspective, if one feels a better looking set of speakers sounds better than a worse looking set, does the buyer really care???

Similar results from experiments with wine and food colorings - white wine colored red tastes like red wine!

(see <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/scienceshow/stories/2009/2735481.htm>)

I find most amusing that the auditory assessment of a hifi system usually assesses a synthetic experience totally created at the mixing desk. So there is no clear reference to reality, but only a perception of an artificial reality compared to a notion of an imagined reality.

Having recently been to a few live orchestral performances, I think I prefer the recording to the real thing, since the real thing only sounds really good where the conductor's head is and I can't sit there!

[November 28, 2009 7:36 AM](#)

Anonymous said...

When an audiophile fails to recognize a difference between tweaks in a properly conducted test, it always seems that it is the test that fails, not his fallible senses.

[January 2, 2010 8:42 AM](#)

Anonymous said...

I am a software development manager with a Computer Science and Elec. Engg degree and a audiophile for more than a decade. I am not averse to either sighted listening or blind testing. My main opinion is that the review should be done over a long period of time (say 3 or 4 months). I think it is not possible to do double-blind testing over long periods and that is why reviewers resort to sighted testing. I do not have high-priced equipment but I do think that there are some technologies and sciences that have deemed "beyond human levels of detection" without proper studies. I have found many audiophile products do make a difference, I only wonder why they cost so much.

- kiru

[March 26, 2010 8:51 PM](#)

Anonymous said...

Sean wrote: "An important question is whether sighted audio product evaluations produce honest and reliable judgments of how the product truly sounds."
Great article overall, very revealing (no pun intended). Puzzled/troubled by use of the word "honest", which implies some form of or "dishonesty" in sited evaluations. Dishonesty implies lying or willful disregard for truth. Do you stand by this characterization? I'm sorry to say that your choice of this word seems consistent with a rather odd and unreasonable bias on the author's part; a desire to attach a more negative opinion than is called for on the sited evaluation.

[April 6, 2010 4:10 PM](#)

Dr. Sean Olive said...

Hi Anonymous,

Thanks for your comments. In retrospect, my choice of the word "Dishonest" in the title was perhaps too strong and sensational. Sighted evaluations have their use (I use them sometimes myself), and doing one doesn't necessarily imply willful disregard for the truth. However, people who do sighted listening tests should be aware of their limitations and potential biases, as demonstrated in this article. Unfortunately, many people in our industry routinely report results from sighted listening evaluations without regard to or acknowledgment of these biases or limitations. Some even go as far to argue that sighted tests are more accurate and less biased than blind tests. Call that whatever term you feel is most appropriate: unprofessional, lack of journalistic integrity, _____

My opinion as stated in the article is that the true sound quality of a component can only be reliably measured via a blind test. Anything less than that may be a willful or unwillful distortion of the truth.

[April 6, 2010 7:28 PM](#)

post said...

Great article! Having read reviews (or to be precise sheer lunacy) of power cords and interconnects for \$20000/m I really enjoy knowledgeable blog!

good brother

[November 9, 2010 12:14 PM](#)

Silver MLM said...

Is there any legal ramifications of selling a strictly audio product?

[March 21, 2011 10:16 AM](#)

Dr. Sean Olive said...

Silver MLM:

<> I don't understand your question. But if I do understand correctly, the answer is "no".

Cheers

Sean

[March 27, 2011 2:00 PM](#)

peskypesky said...

i was banned from a number of guitar forums for advancing the same ideas. it seems like most people on the guitar forums believe that sound quality always goes up with price, and in direct proportion. and they are EXTREMELY resistant to the concept of blind tests.

one guy actually recorded identical clips with 2 Fender guitars (one was several times the price of the other) and had people try to pick the better-sounding guitar. 60% of the people chose the cheap guitar.

[April 22, 2011 2:51 PM](#)

peskypesky said...

<http://emusician.com/tutorials/showdown-clubhouse-amp-software/index.html>

[April 22, 2011 4:00 PM](#)

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