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# Beats surrender: how headphones became the must-have accessory this Christmas

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I've figured out what Christmas 2015 is about: headphones. This has been staring you in the face for weeks now, by the way. Literally, I mean: there is no 2015 gift guide that does not star a pair of ludicrously expensive headphones as Perfect Gift. Headphones as an accessory, rather than a gadget, began with footballers, who wear the brightly-coloured Beats ones as religiously as nuns wear crucifixes. Because this was quickly picked up by teens, headphones have been the go-to gift for teenagers for several years. Which makes perfect sense, because no one knows what to buy teenagers and no one knows what to talk to them about either, so it's a gift that kills two birds with one stone.

The difference this year is that headphones, like Taylor Swift and The Hunger Games, have broken out of teen culture and joined the grownups table. There are headphones for dad, and headphones for mum. The tan leather Master & Dynamic headphones with their microphone-style silver mesh detailing have a His Masters Voice aesthetic which is clearly aimed at a man who would never ever wear Beats (too teenage, too footballer), who may have or have had a fashionable beard at

some point, a man who still doesn't wear a suit to work but has recently switched from trainers to brogues. Friends headphones, meanwhile, are delicate and light, with jewellery-slender rose-gold stems and chic black ear pads, and come in a pouch that will tuck into a small handbag, so I'm guessing it's fair to say those are aimed at women. I'm not going to tell you how much any of these cost as it will only make you cross.

This is the part when I launch into a rant about how the elevation of a gadget whose function is to cut its wearer off from the rest of society to the top of our wish lists is a symptom of all that is wrong with the modern world; about how wrong it is to fetishise and glamorise a product that turns us all into Matt Damon in *The Martian*, going slowly insane in futuristic isolation. And all of this is, of course, true. If everyone is wearing their new headphones, you won't ever get that moment when *All I Want For Christmas Is You* comes on the kitchen radio, and you all sing along like mad people, and Christmas really would not be Christmas without Mariah.

But, you know what? Christmas gifts are always pretty silly. I'm not sure headphones are any more inherently pointless than a Slinky in the 1970s or a Cabbage Patch Doll in the 1980s, or a Philippe Starck lemon squeezer in the 1990s. That noughties thing when we all bought goats does, it's true, trump a pair of gold-plated headphones in warm-hearted intention. But, let's be honest, it didn't exactly change the world, did it? The status symbols of any era are a clumsy attempt to be like the heroes of the age. Perhaps the worst thing that headphones say about us is that instead of wanting to be more like Nigella (Bundt pans, 2003, the year of *How to Be a Domestic Goddess*) we now take our aesthetic cues from footballers. Also, that those little white ear buds don't cut it any more: Apple White is the magnolia of a new generation, and we're getting restless. (See also: Moschino novelty phone covers.)

