

Genres, Objects, and the Contemporary Expression of Higher-Status Tastes

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Abstract: Are contemporary higher-status tastes inclusive, exclusive, or both? Recent work suggests that the answer likely is both. And yet, little is known concerning how configurations of such tastes are learned, upheld, and expressed without contradiction. We resolve this puzzle by showing the affordances of different levels of culture (i.e., genres and objects) in the expression of tastes. We rely on original survey data to show that people of higher status taste differently at different levels of culture: more inclusively for genres and more exclusively for objects. Inclusivity at the level of genres is fostered through familial socialization, and exclusivity at the level of objects is fostered through formal schooling. Individuals' taste configurations are mirrored in and presumably reinforce their adult social-structural positions. The results have important implications for understanding the subtle maintenance of status in an increasingly diverse and putatively meritocratic society.

Keywords: culture; taste; genres; cultural objects; status; inequality

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THE stratified nature of cultural tastes has received sustained sociological attention for more than a century (Bourdieu 1984; Peterson and Simkus 1992; Veblen 1899; Weber 1946). Tastes are a topic of general interest to sociologists because they serve as expressions of both social position and group identity (Simmel 1957) while also catalyzing unequal life opportunities and outcomes (Jæger and Breen 2016; Lamont and Fournier 1992). As examples of the latter, high-status tastes are associated with educational achievement (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Dumais 2002; Gaddis 2013; Jæger and Møllegaard 2017) and with positive occupational outcomes for elite (Friedman, Laurison, and Miles 2015; Koppman 2016; Rivera 2016), middle-income (Thomas 2018), and even low-level service-industry jobs (Williams and Connell 2010). In short, tastes are integral to the social construction of group boundaries and hierarchies in a given society (DiMaggio 1987; Douglas and Isherwood 1979:12; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lizardo and Strand 2010).

But what precisely are higher-status tastes in the contemporary United States? The last 30 years of research on higher-status tastes have centered around perspectives in which those tastes are better characterized as being either restrictive and narrow (Bourdieu 1984) or inclusive and broad (Peterson and Kern 1996). Some recent work has sought to resolve this debate by suggesting that status today increases the likelihood of using cultural objects in *both* exclusive and inclusive ways (Jarness and Friedman 2017; Ollivier 2008). In the terminology of Johnston and Baumann (2007), those of higher status frame their tastes through the seemingly contradictory principles of democracy and distinction—that is, higher-status individuals draw on discourses that are both inclusive (anti-snobbish, nonhierarchical, cosmopolitan,

etc.) and exclusive (rarified, distinctive, educated, etc.). Thus, higher-status tastes today appear to be a paradoxical mix of inclusivity and exclusivity, leaving many unanswered questions.

Our research is guided by two such questions. First, how are higher-status tastes configured to simultaneously uphold the seemingly contradictory principles of inclusivity and exclusivity? And second, what accounts for the propensity of higher-status individuals to develop and maintain such a taste configuration? In addressing the first question, we argue that higher-status individuals utilize the inherent affordances provided by different levels of culture. By different *levels* of culture, we mean that culture simultaneously operates at the level of categories (such as genres of music, film, or television) and at the more fine-grained level of objects (such as discrete musicians, movies, or shows). By *affordances* we mean that each of these levels of culture affords (but does not determine) a particular way to convey status through tastes. In this framework, culture at the level of categories has an affordance for conveying inclusivity in one's tastes by highlighting one's openness to diverse cultural forms, whereas culture at the level of objects has an affordance for conveying exclusivity in one's tastes by highlighting one's discernment of the right particular object within any given form.

In addressing our second question, we outline and test a model of the socializing antecedents that lead to holding a contemporary higher-status configuration of inclusive tastes at the genre level and exclusive tastes at the object level. We locate the origins of status-based differences in perceiving and utilizing different levels of culture in the differential roles of childhood domestic and scholastic socialization. Domestic socialization (here meaning early familial exposure to the arts) and scholastic socialization (here meaning attainment of higher levels of education) provide individuals with a familiarity, knowledge base, and a set of perceptual and cognitive skills (Bourdieu 1984) that allow them to convey their higher status through tastes in differential ways. We examine these two influences with an eye toward understanding how each contributes uniquely to a higher-status configuration of tastes. In addition, we identify how adult status as a more advantaged social-structural location (i.e., social capital) aligns with inclusive and exclusive tastes through having broad-based social network ties as well as higher-status ties. In short, we propose that a capacity for broad and inclusive tastes can be encouraged in childhood through well-known differences in early socialization practices (Lareau 2003). In turn, narrower, exclusive tastes for consecrated culture tend to be developed through the knowledge and perceptual schemes learned in formal schooling. These tastes are then expressed and made socially meaningful as well as practically useful in adulthood through one's social-structural location (Erickson 1996; Lizardo 2006).

To test these propositions requires data with particular features. First, the data should exist within cultural domains in which taste is commonly studied. Second, the data should contain variation in consecration levels—that is, the extent to which the culture under question is valued in artistic terms. Third, to study the relationship between socially inclusive and exclusive taste configurations, the data should include variation in cultural consecration across multiple levels of culture. Fourth, these variations in consecration levels should be exogenously defined—that

is, not based on the endogenous characteristics of respondents themselves. Fifth, because both the expression of “good taste” and the consecration levels of the culture that is being liked and disliked evolve over time, these data should be contemporary to best capture current patterns. Sixth, rather than focusing on a single cultural domain, as both social inclusion and exclusion are discussed as general orientations to cultural consumption, the data should span multiple domains. Finally, to test the core hypotheses that higher-status individuals will have different configurations of taste, the data should include independent variables gauging various aspects of status pegged to differences in life course.

In this article we rely on original data that contain these features. We find that when higher-status individuals are compared with others, they are at the same time more inclusive in their tastes for genres and more exclusive in their tastes for artists and objects. These findings hold true across tastes for music, film, and television. Whereas familial socialization disproportionately works to foster a democratic and open orientation to cultural genres, extended formal schooling has a ratcheting effect on exclusive tastes at the object level. Higher-status social positions, which involve broad but weak ties across status groups and narrow but strong ties to higher-status groups, co-occur with the expression of this taste configuration in adulthood. These findings point to subtle but potentially fateful mechanisms of social exclusion while also generating new avenues for the study of culture and inequality across a range of social milieus.

Status Positions and Ways to Taste

Are Higher-Status Tastes Inclusive, Exclusive, or Both?

Recent work that builds on the foundations provided by both Bourdieu (1984) and Peterson (Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992) complicates how we understand taste profiles and their combinations.¹ Examples of these advancements include analyses of the historical antecedents of large-scale taste formation (e.g., Lena 2019), how elite tastes have shifted over time (Friedman and Reeves 2020), the relationship between taste and networks (Lewis and Kaufman 2018), and new articulations of the relationship between taste and social status (e.g., Bennett et al. 2009; Lizardo and Skiles 2016a, 2016b). Similarly, studies of taste *discourses*—how individuals explain and justify their aesthetic appreciations or cultural consumption preferences (e.g., Jarness and Friedman 2017; Johnston and Baumann 2009; Sherman 2018)—are collectively offering a way to understand the complex patterns we see in classed tastes. Our reading of this literature is that scholars are moving beyond an analysis of high-status taste as being for *either* narrowly defined consecrated culture *or* omnivorous openness to a range of objects and forms. Instead, these studies are highlighting the need for understanding the conditions under which tastes might be narrower and more exclusive at some points or in some ways and more open, broad, and inclusive in others.

Given the influence of Johnston and Baumann (2009), this seemingly incompatible combining of inclusive and exclusive tastes has most frequently been observed within the domain of food consumption. Whereas an appreciation for French food

used to signal being high status, today's higher-status individuals are open to a wide range of cuisines, provided that they are seen as "authentic" and "exotic" (Johnston and Baumann 2009; see also Hahl, Zuckerman, and Kim 2017). In this instance, an otherwise unconsecrated cuisine like barbecue can be used to signal one's discriminating taste in food, so long as the barbecue being appreciated "is 'real' Texas BBQ" that is "different from other barbecues" (Johnston and Baumann 2009:67). Smith Maguire (2018) observes a similar balancing of these taste logics in discourse around wine, in which elite wines no longer must have an "Old World" *terroir*; an individual can now signal a "taste for the particular" by enjoying the *right* wines independent of their region of origin (P. 3).

Recently, variations on the configuration of inclusive and exclusive tastes among those of higher status have been found across a range of domains, including Israeli weddings (Kaplan 2013), Singaporean street food (Tam 2017), German wine consumption (Rössel, Schenk, and Eppler 2018; Rössel and Pape 2016), the U.S. sharing economy (Schor et al. 2016), and the general discourse around consumer goods in both the United States (Sherman 2018) and the Netherlands (van den Haak and Wilterdink 2019). Echoes of this type of balanced tasting can also be found in Friedman's (2014) study of comedy fans, in which those of higher status don't shy away from liking a generally unconsecrated cultural form like comedy but distinguish themselves among comedy fans by only liking a subset of comparatively "artistic" and high-status comics. Recent work on elites by Friedman and Reeves (2020) also echoes this dynamic, in which over time elites have blended highbrow pursuits with everyday forms of cultural participation, conveying an everyday "ordinary" moral status while at the same time maintaining distinction.

Similar findings also extend beyond cultural consumption to production. Ocejo (2017) finds that highly educated cultural elites have entered into nonelite occupations in barbering, butchery, bartending, and brewing while at the same time creating distinctions within these previously nonconsecrated jobs through the performance of artistry and craftsmanship within them. In turn, this configuration is also found by Bellezza and Berger (2020) in their analysis of 1,309 restaurant menus in New York City, in which high-status restaurants are more likely than middle-status restaurants to incorporate traditionally lowbrow categories of food such as hot dogs, mac 'n' cheese, or fried chicken onto their menus, albeit while offering specific versions of these dishes made with highbrow ingredients such as truffles, lobster, or duck.

Whereas these studies all identify a higher-status cultural orientation as a blend of inclusivity and exclusivity, we observe that this blending occurs within a very particular and previously undiscussed configuration. Across studies, for those of higher status, inclusivity in tastes happens at the level of categories (e.g., types of cuisines, nationalities of wines, sectors of occupations, types of performance, dishes on a menu), and exclusivity in tastes happens *within* those categories. Rather than this configuration of higher-status tastes being incidental, it appears to be both prevalent and consistent across a range of cultural domains. We believe its prevalence and consistency are rooted in the different affordances of different levels of culture.

The Different Affordances of Different Levels of Culture

Objects are “cultural” to the extent that we take a cultural perspective on them—to the extent that we recognize they can embody shared meanings. The focus on cultural objects promoted by Griswold (1987) foregrounds their “multiple, often ambiguous characteristics” (P. 3). Yet rather than just being Rorschach inkblots, different objects also have different *affordances* that better lend themselves to specific interpretations and usages. The affordances perspective has roots in social psychology—a theory of perception and the mind—in which individuals’ needs shape their perceptions of the inherent qualities of objects (Gibson 1979). This work has developed an approach in which cultural objects *as objects* enable and constrain perceptions, judgments, and behaviors, depending on their affordances. As Martin (2003) summarizes, “the cognitive tasks [individuals] carry out are not cultural schemes that independently exist within their psyches, but merely minor completions to what the environment already ‘affords’” (P. 39).

Such a middle path between naïve realism and radical constructivism, which has been widely adopted in science and technology studies (Hutchby 2001), has clear relevance for understanding culture and status. Sociologists have typically looked at the relationship between an object’s affordances and its materiality (Klett 2014; McDonnell 2010, 2016; Rubio 2020; Stoltz and Taylor 2017). Yet within sociology, affordance theory has also been extended to the aesthetic characteristics of cultural objects (DeNora 2000), as well as to the affordances of status itself (McClain and Mears 2012). In an example of the former, some types of music have affordances as ambience for studying (provided one has something to study), whereas others have affordances for dancing (provided one knows how) and others still have affordances for setting the “mood” for a romantic evening (provided one knows someone to do that with). Although he did not draw on affordance theory per se, Bourdieu clearly saw a link between the affordances of cultural objects and their utility in communicating higher-status tastes. Foods, for example, that have little nutritional value and have unusual flavors (e.g., certain fungi) are inherently more capable of expressing privilege due to a lack of practical sustenance and the difficulty of acquiring an appreciation of them (Bourdieu 1984). Likewise, sports that do not require great strength and that are played with periods of rest (e.g., golf) are inherently better at facilitating social ties among those of higher status, especially as they age (Bourdieu 1978). In other words, objects can vary in practical affordances related to their materiality but also in symbolic affordances related to their interpretive capacities and nonmaterial characteristics.

In this line of thought, we consider that culture at the level of genres and culture at the level of objects have different communicative affordances that encourage different uses by high-status people. Regarding culture at the level of cultural categories, a genre is only “a ‘kind’ or ‘type’ of art” (DiMaggio 1987:441); it is a “conceptual tool” (Lena and Peterson 2008:697) that makes up part of a broader “objecting-sorting systems” (Mohr et al. 2020:64). Simply put, the generality of genres—that the assignment of objects into them can come from different locations (e.g., Becker 1982; Lena 2012; Negus 2013), that their boundaries are fuzzy (Mohr et al. 2020; Zerubavel 1993), that what they include may be contested (Airoldi, Beraldo, and Gandini 2016), and that they may contain objects of both high artistic

consecration and wide public disrepute (Rossman and Schilke 2014)—is what gives them an affordance for an “open” or “inclusive” manner of tasting.

In contrast to genres, objects have discrete symbolic and aesthetic characteristics (Lizardo 2019), giving them an affordance for a more “closed” and “exclusive” style of tasting, in which an individual expresses higher status by liking only the “right” cultural objects of higher standing. The affordance from objects comes from the fact that what is and is not the object can be unambiguously identified, and taste for its discrete characteristics can be explained in reference to clear standards of aesthetic worth. Whereas different genres have different aesthetic *conventions*, discrete objects have different aesthetic *properties*. Because of this, just as culture at the level of genres has affordances for inclusive ambiguity and variation, culture at the level of objects has affordances for evaluative specificity, discriminative tastes, and exclusivity.

Yet key to the affordances perspective is that the different affordances of different levels of culture must be perceptible to individuals for them to use them. In this framework, if higher-status tasting is “a capacity or an ability”—which is “already implicit in the literature” (Lizardo and Skiles 2012:266)—from where do individuals develop this ability? This is a particularly thorny question given that, as we propose, higher-status tasting may take seemingly contradictory forms at different levels of culture, such that in practice the ability to have “good taste” requires two very different ways of tasting at once (i.e., both inclusively and exclusively). In the following section we discuss the socializing antecedents in which cultural capital is acquired and then later expressed in these different forms of higher-status tasting.

The Socializing Antecedents and Social Positions of Higher-Status Tastes

The Influence of Family Socialization versus Schooling on Taste Formation

If higher-status tasting involves tasting broadly at one level of culture and narrowly at another, how does this complex configuration of tastes come about within individuals from privileged social locations? Although inherently better for expressing inclusivity, genres may also (albeit more crudely) be used for expressing exclusivity, and the opposite is true for objects and inclusivity. Learning how to use these tools in their optimal manner is a matter of socialization. Two of the most important influences on taste are early family socialization and formal schooling (e.g., Berghman and van Eijck 2009; Dumais 2019; Kraaykamp and van Eijck 2010; Notten, Kraaykamp, and Konig 2012; Verboord and van Rees 2003; Willekens and Lievens 2014). Although there is ambiguity over the roles played by these two different sites of capital accumulation (Lizardo 2018:2), there is agreement that they inculcate the skill (Bourdieu 1984) or “ability” (Peterson 2005:260) to later express the “right” tastes.

How might family socialization differ from formal schooling in their influences on adulthood tastes? As argued by Lizardo (2018), the different effects of these two

sites of capital accumulation are an important, if almost entirely unexplored, insight of Bourdieu's (1984) theorizing in *Distinction*. In this close reading of Bourdieu's theory, Lizardo (2018) outlines how the effects of domestic capital inherited through childhood socialization create a durable aesthetic disposition that can be applied more broadly across an array of cultural objects, some of which have not been given wider institutional consecration. Early family socialization creates a natural ease or facility with aesthetic codes. Thus, individuals with high exposure to the arts in childhood have an increased willingness to see artistic merit in riskier and more novel cultural forms. In other words, higher-status familial socialization may create a broader openness and tastes and an ability to apply an aesthetic disposition to nonconsecrated culture (Bellavance 2008; Rimmer 2011).²

In contrast to familial socialization, the effects of acquired cultural capital through formal schooling are different. The net effect of scholastic cultural capital garnered strictly through the educational system is to refine one's appreciation for consecrated forms of culture—that is, one learns the cultural canon, and how to appreciate it, in the classroom. This argument has found empirical support (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; Katz-Gerro, Raz, and Yaish 2007). Although formal education can also have a democratizing effect on tastes (Fishman and Lizardo 2013; Peterson 2005), Daenekindt and Roose (2015) found that the academic track still centers around highly consecrated culture.³ To be sure, when it comes to the curriculum, consecrated tastes may also have an almost tautological quality, in that whatever is taught in the classroom is more consecrated or is at least on the road to becoming consecrated as “legitimate” culture (Bourdieu 1993).

In explaining the institutional basis through which formal education could have a democratizing effect at the genre level and an exclusionary effect for the “right” objects at the object level, we must also consider that elevating the “right” cultural objects from the “wrong” genres is in itself a powerful twentieth-century higher-status taste affectation (see Lopes [2019] for the production side of this phenomenon and Lena [2019] for the production and reception sides of this phenomenon). From a Pulitzer Prize for the rapper Kendrick Lamar (but not Ja Rule) to college courses on the television crime show *The Wire* (but not *NCIS*) and a mass of fawning critical discourse on the horror film *Get Out* (but not *The Human Centipede*), being culturally open to discrete examples of aesthetic “excellence” within generally unconsecrated cultural forms may have a super-additive effect as a mark of status. Through this lens, formal education could still contribute to cultural openness at the level of genres while ratcheting up distinction for liking only the “right” cultural objects within those genres.

Even beyond examples of specific cultural objects that have been elevated “above” their genres, more crucially, formal education may encourage tastes for consecrated culture by imparting cognitive capacities and schemes of perception that can maximize enjoyment of consecrated cultural forms, or, as argued by DiMaggio (1991), “the role of formal education [is] to inculcate not tastes per se but a capacity for aesthetic adaptation” (P. 144). Formal education is also focused on teaching students how to employ evidence in the process of evaluation, which, as Lamont (2012) notes, is of crucial importance given that evaluations require explanations. This skill is of general use, but it is also a central mode in which consecrated culture

is often appreciated. In this reading of Bourdieu, whereas family socialization will facilitate more inclusive tastes, schooling will facilitate more exclusive tastes.⁴ In essence, the answer to how higher-status individuals learn to taste differently at different levels of culture may be as simple as the independent and combined effects of different locales of socialization.

Social Positions and the Practical Utility of Having Both Inclusive and Exclusive Tastes

Individuals acquire and transmit tastes throughout the life course. If the capital to taste in different ways is initially accumulated through different socializing agents and is then expressed through different modes of tasting at different levels of culture, we would also expect this capital to be related to different configurations of social ties. Regarding the convertibility of both inclusive and exclusive modes of tasting, we note that tastes can be used as both a bridge to other groups and to construct a fence around one's own group (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). With regard to the latter, having high-status tastes is a mechanism of elite reproduction (Bourdieu 1984; Rivera 2016), is associated with educational attainment (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Dumais 2002; Gaddis 2013; Jæger and Møllegaard 2017), and is a useful signal on the job market (Friedman et al. 2015; Koppman 2016; Rivera 2016; Thomas 2018; Williams and Connell 2010).

At the same time, at least being open to a broad range of cultural forms is useful, as it is through cultural tastes that people get to know strangers (Rentfrow and Gosling 2006), make new friends (Edelmann and Vaisey 2014; Lewis and Kaufman 2018), and bridge otherwise disparate social groups (Gamson 1998; Schowalter, Goldberg, and Srivastava 2020). As argued by Schultz and Breiger (2010), a taste for many musical genres (rather than only a few) is particularly useful in traversing social boundaries, and Lizardo (2006:783–84) finds that widely accessible popular culture has “generalized conversion value” that can be used to form weak ties across heterogeneous groups. This is also the core insight of Erickson (1996), who finds that in making connections across social classes “the most widely useful cultural resource is *cultural variety*” (P. 217; emphasis added), which Peterson (1992:255) refers to as the usefulness of having a “passing knowledge” about a wide variety of cultural forms, even if one still holds higher-status tastes. In short, tastes reflect and reinforce group boundaries through both symbolic and structural means.

Whereas tastes are clearly useful in establishing and maintaining social ties, networks are also clearly channels for transferring cultural tastes (for review, see chapter 4 of McLean [2016]). If a contemporary higher-status taste profile is both inclusive at the genre level and exclusive at the object level, then this configuration may have something to do with the particular contemporary configuration of higher-status social ties as being both broad and narrow in a specific way. Social capital scholars in the tradition of Lin (2002) see individuals' network positions as leading to resources that may be actively or passively accessed. Here, we see exposure to a broader set of genre tastes and at once a narrower and more exclusive set of object tastes as potentially being reinforced by ongoing interpersonal influences. In short, we can approach this specific taste profile as an important symbolic resource that

Table 1: Ideal-typical cultural taste configurations

	Inclusive Objects	Exclusive Objects
Inclusive Genres	Undiscerning	Contemporary Configuration
Exclusive Genres	Faux Sophisticated	Snobbish

may be reinforced through both having contact with a wide variety of individuals and also maintaining a stronger set of ties to individuals in higher-status positions.

Hypotheses: The Configuration, Development, and Practice of High-Status Tastes

Differential Tastes for Genres and Objects

Our first hypothesis reflects our core argument about high-status individuals' taste configuration. To clarify our prediction, it is useful to consider alternative taste configurations. Table 1 shows four ideal-typical taste configurations based on combined genres and objects. We predict that higher-status individuals will tend to cluster in the upper right cell, where exclusive object tastes are offset against inclusive genre tastes. We identify this as the contemporary configuration of higher-status tastes. How else might tastes be configured? Those who are inclusive about both genres and objects (upper left corner) could be seen as undiscerning, which does not accomplish the task of cultural distinction. Those who are exclusive about genres and inclusive about objects gain some distinction at the general level (lower left corner), but they may be viewed as lacking real sophistication by those of high status when it comes to specific cultural preferences. Those who are exclusive about genres and about objects (lower right corner) may be seen as operating under an outmoded elite taste configuration and of being overly exclusionary of genres that (despite their lower overall standing in cultural hierarchies) still contain highly consecrated objects. In contrast to outright snobbery, a contemporary configuration of higher-status tastes capitalizes on the affordances of genres by tasting for them in a way that conveys distinction, while simultaneously conveying distinction in taste for objects in a way that objects afford.⁵

Hypothesis 1: Higher-status individuals will tend to have both more inclusive genre tastes and more exclusive object tastes as compared with individuals of lower status.

Note that this hypothesis concerns a global pattern of differences between higher- and lower-status individuals. We also believe that this distinct pattern should emerge *within* the same individuals with respect to their configurations of genre and object tastes—that is, although higher-status individuals may be more exclusive in their overall tastes, they will be *relatively* more inclusive with respect to genres and more exclusive with respect to objects.

The Formation and Practice of High-Status Tastes

Our next two hypotheses look to the socializing antecedents of this contemporary configuration of higher-status tastes. Building on Lizardo's (2018) interpretation of Bourdieu and our theorization of the affordances of genres and objects, we would predict that familial socialization and schooling will contribute differently in creating the configuration of inclusive and exclusive tastes. Specifically, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 2a: Higher-status familial socialization will be the strongest predictor of inclusive taste at the genre level.

Hypothesis 2b: Education will be the strongest predictor of exclusive taste at the object level.

In our last set of hypotheses, we propose how the contemporary configuration of higher-status tastes should be mirrored in adult social networks. As discussed above, tastes can facilitate both within-class relations (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Rivera 2012) and between-class relations (Erickson 1996). For this reason, to the extent that higher-status individuals tend to connect both broadly and narrowly in social space, cultural tastes should also reflect ongoing social influences and act as a mechanism for establishing and maintaining social ties (McLean 2016). Put most simply, should our hypothesizing so far be correct, we should see inclusivity at a broader, more general level of culture and exclusivity at a narrower, more specific level of culture also reflected in the relationship between tastes and social networks. Inspired by Lizardo's (2006) analysis of inclusive and exclusive tastes in music at the genre level, our framework—which takes into account the different affordances of different levels of culture—should also be reflected in the *types* of network ties held by individuals. We can therefore project differential associations of forms of social ties (strong vs. weak and broad vs. narrow) with tastes for genres and objects. This leads to our final set of hypotheses, which we see as both a confirmation of our general framework and an elaboration on it:

Hypothesis 3a: Weak ties to individuals in a wider variety of status positions will most strongly associate with inclusive tastes in genres.

Hypothesis 3b: Strong ties to individuals in higher-status positions will most strongly associate with exclusive tastes in objects.

Data and Methods

To test our hypotheses, we collected data in three steps, discussed in detail below.

Step One: Exogenously Defining the Statuses of Genres and Objects

An ongoing challenge in the study of hierarchies in tastes is that researchers typically either rely on commonsensical definitions of “high” and “low” or define high-status culture through its proportional appreciation by high-status people, a potentially

tautological measurement strategy.⁶ As a first step in exogenously defining cultural consecration levels, we ran several rounds of surveys on Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which (as discussed below) we also triangulated across different sources. To be sure, MTurk respondents do not constitute a random sample of the U.S. population, although the platform compares in quality to other frequently used sources of data in the social sciences (Gaddis 2017a, 2017b), and for gender, age (slightly younger), education (slightly higher), and income (slightly lower) our respondents were not widely divergent from the general U.S. population. More importantly, despite variation in cultural likes and dislikes, there is general consensus across populations about cultural standing, meaning where cultural objects fall within a perceived hierarchy of objects (van den Haak 2020).

Whereas surveys on cultural tastes (e.g., the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts) routinely ask respondents how much they personally like and dislike different cultural categories (e.g., music genres), we instead asked 500 MTurk respondents a third-order inference question to get a better measure of status distinctions between items (Correll et al. 2017; Ridgeway and Correll 2006). This question was “On a seven-point scale from ‘very disrespected’ to ‘very respected’, how artistically respected are each of the following [music/movie/television] genres?”⁷ Respondents also had the option to mark that they were unfamiliar with the genre or to decline to give an answer. Identically worded questions were used to assess the perceived artistic consecration of 20 music genres and 13 movie and television genres (Table 2).

Step Two: Selecting Genres and Objects

Within each domain, we selected artists and objects for testing across five genres, shown in boldface in Table 2. Across each domain, we selected these genres for two reasons. First, as we are ultimately interested in capturing not only tastes across genres of different artistic consecration levels but also *artists and objects of different consecration levels within genres of different consecration levels*, we avoided testing artists or objects within genres having fewer widely known artists or objects (e.g., New Age music, foreign films, tech and gaming television shows) and, likely in result, an even smaller population of widely known artists or objects across levels of consecration. Second, although our measures do not depend on this, the genres we selected were also somewhat distributed across a range of artistic consecration (i.e., not all clustered as low consecration or high consecration genres). By selecting genres that can be broadly characterized as popular culture, we maintain the framework and basic measurements for how tastes for genres are generally studied while also circumventing cottage definitions of what constitutes a distinct genre versus a subgenre, and so on.

Using scores from Metacritic.com and data on award wins and nominations, across the five genres in each domain we selected 116 total musicians and bands, 117 movies, and 127 television shows for testing. Although artists and objects can of course span multiple genres, we used both critics and awards to assign artists into genres; the key for us was not whether something spans genres (many things do) but that it can be reasonably considered as not being definitively outside of its defined genre, which we also confirmed in our initial testing and by always signaling to

Table 2: Genre consecration

Music		Movies		Television	
Genre	Mean	Genre	Mean	Genre	Mean
Heavy Metal	3.69 (1.71)	Horror	4.07 (1.81)	Reality Shows	3.03 (1.89)
Rap/Hip-Hop	3.94 (1.86)	Comedy	4.66 (1.63)	Game Shows	3.71 (1.78)
New Age	4.31 (1.52)	Romance	4.81 (1.50)	Talk Shows	3.91 (1.78)
Easy Listening	4.42 (1.66)	Thriller	4.97 (1.49)	Tech and Gaming	3.99 (1.59)
Reggae	4.47 (1.50)	Action/Adventure	5.06 (1.55)	Horror	4.32 (1.65)
Latin/Salsa	4.52 (1.45)	Crime	5.11 (1.32)	Sports	4.43 (1.85)
Contemporary Pop	4.53 (1.62)	Science Fiction/Fantasy	5.20 (1.41)	News	4.65 (1.69)
Bluegrass	4.66 (1.51)	Animation	5.39 (1.37)	Lifestyle	4.80 (1.58)
Gospel	4.66 (1.69)	Musical	5.49 (1.34)	Comedy	5.02 (1.43)
Country/Western	4.77 (1.66)	International/Foreign	5.50 (1.49)	Action/Adventure	5.16 (1.39)
Folk	4.87 (1.39)	Documentary	5.82 (1.34)	Science Fiction/Fantasy	5.19 (1.42)
Contemporary Rock	4.90 (1.34)	Drama	5.93 (1.14)	Drama	5.87 (1.15)
Big Band/Swing	5.04 (1.43)	Classic Cinema	6.00 (1.29)	Documentary	5.92 (1.26)
Oldies	5.38 (1.32)				
Musicals/Showtunes	5.41 (1.39)				
Blues/Rhythm and Blues	5.43 (1.28)				
Classic Rock	5.49 (1.30)				
Jazz	5.8 (1.32)				
Opera	5.92 (1.47)				
Classical/Symphony	6.25 (1.23)				

Note: $N = 500$. Genres for which specific objects were selected are in boldface. Values in parentheses are standard deviations.

respondents in boldface the genre assignments of the objects they were evaluating. In this second round of testing with MTurk respondents, as was the case with genres, we did not ask respondents how much they liked each of these artists, movies, or shows but rather asked the same third-order inference question of how artistically consecrated they believed them to be: “We’re now going to ask you about [(**genre**) +

(musicians/movies/shows)]. On a scale from ‘very disrespected’ to ‘very respected’, how artistically respected are each of the following [musicians/movies/shows]?” By wording the question this way (and putting the genre assignment in boldface within the question), we primed our respondents to consider artists within the framework of their defined genre. Respondents also had the option to mark that they were unfamiliar with the artist, movie, or show or to decline to answer. From these pretested artists, movies, and shows, for our final survey we selected within each genre three artists, movies, or shows of low consecration levels, one near the median consecration level, and three of high consecration level, for a total of 35 artists, 35 movies, and 35 television shows. These are listed in Table 3.

Following Bourdieu (1993), artistic consecration may be conferred onto artists, objects, or genres by (1) general audiences, (2) peers, or (3) critics (see also Dowd et al. 2019). In defining consecration levels, we triangulate across these three by calculating within-domain z-scores from our pretesting of 116 music artists, 117 movies, and 127 shows (general audiences); Grammy, Academy Award, and Emmy nominations and wins (peers); and Metacritic.com scores (critics). These external validation measures are presented in Table 4.

Step Three: Final Survey and Variables

The final phase of our data collection was the administration of a survey to measure all our variables of interest for 1,821 Americans. Data were collected from the adult U.S. population in January 2018 using an online panel recruited through the research firm Qualtrics. Quotas were used to ensure that the sample reflected U.S. Census parameters for gender, education, race, and age. Although not perfectly nationally representative due to the online nature of the panel, Qualtrics panel data have been used in survey research published in top journals in sociology (e.g., O’Brien 2017; Pedulla 2016; Quadlin 2018) and across the social sciences (e.g., Bhargava, Loewenstein, and Sydnor 2017; Djupe, Neiheisel, and Sokhey 2018; Long, Bendersky, and Morrill 2011). Furthermore, among online survey platforms frequently used for survey research, Qualtrics is atypically representative of the U.S. population along a range of indices (Boas, Christenson, and Glick 2020). Rather than the third-order inference questions asked in the pretest surveys, in the final survey respondents were asked how much they like different genres of music, movies, and television, as well as different music artists, movies, and shows.

From the responses to these questions, we created two series of measures that capture the two ways taste patterns are most often operationalized in the literature: *volume* and *composition* (for review, see Peterson [2005]). In keeping with the literature, the volume measures are based on simple count data of the number of genres or artists/objects liked, indicated by responses reflecting varying degrees of “liking”—that is, values 5 (somewhat like) through 7 (very much like) on a seven-point scale. In total, six volume measures were constructed, one each for the music, movie, and television genres and one each for specific musicians, movies, and shows. The composition measures, rather than reflecting the number of items liked, provide a measure of the consecration or status composition of respondents’ tastes across broad and specific levels of different domains. To construct these

Table 3: Artist and object consecration across domains and genres

	High Consecration	Medium Consecration	Low Consecration
Music			
Rap	Kendrick Lamar Lauryn Hill Tupac Shakur	Sean "Puffy" Combs	Insane Clown Posse Ja Rule Flo Rida
Contemporary Pop	Adele Beyoncé Pharrell Williams	Katy Perry	Justin Bieber Britney Spears One Direction
Country/Western	Johnny Cash Willie Nelson Patsy Cline	Carrie Underwood	Florida Georgia Line Sugarland Rascal Flatts
Contemporary Rock	Foo Fighters U2 Red Hot Chili Peppers	Coldplay	Nickelback Limp Bizkit Kid Rock
Classic Rock	Bob Dylan Pink Floyd Rolling Stones	AC/DC	KISS Lynyrd Skynyrd Mötley Crüe
Movies			
Horror	<i>Get Out</i> <i>The Sixth Sense</i> <i>The Shining</i>	<i>The Blair Witch Project</i>	<i>The Human Centipede</i> <i>I Know What You Did Last Summer</i> <i>Final Destination</i>
Comedy	<i>The Grand Budapest Hotel</i> <i>Annie Hall</i> <i>Being John Malkovich</i>	<i>The Hangover</i>	<i>Paul Blart: Mall Cop</i> <i>Joe Dirt</i> <i>Scary Movie</i>
Action/Adventure	<i>True Grit</i> (2010) <i>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</i> <i>Saving Private Ryan</i>	<i>Air Force One</i>	<i>Suicide Squad</i> <i>Olympus Has Fallen</i> <i>Gone in 60 Seconds</i>
SciFi/Fantasy	<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982) <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> <i>E.T.</i>	<i>The Martian</i>	<i>The Last Airbender</i> <i>Twilight</i> <i>Transformers</i>
Drama	<i>No Country for Old Men</i> <i>12 Years a Slave</i> <i>The Godfather</i>	<i>The Notebook</i>	<i>Tyler Perry's Good Deeds</i> <i>Pearl Harbor</i> <i>I Am Sam</i>
Television			
Reality	<i>Amazing Race</i> <i>Top Chef</i> <i>Antiques Roadshow</i>	<i>Hell's Kitchen</i>	<i>Real Housewives</i> <i>The Bachelor</i> <i>Pawn Stars</i>
Talk Shows	<i>The Ellen DeGeneres Show</i> <i>Late Show with David Letterman</i> <i>The Oprah Winfrey Show</i>	<i>Jimmy Kimmel Live</i>	<i>The Jerry Springer Show</i> <i>The View</i> <i>Dr. Phil</i>
Comedy	<i>Orange Is the New Black</i> <i>Curb Your Enthusiasm</i> <i>The Office</i> (U.S.)	<i>How I Met Your Mother</i>	<i>2 Broke Girls</i> <i>Two and a Half Men</i> <i>The King of Queens</i>
Science Fiction/Fantasy	<i>Stranger Things</i> <i>The X-Files</i> (1993–2002) <i>Game of Thrones</i>	<i>Supernatural</i>	<i>Supergirl</i> <i>The Ghost Whisperer</i> <i>Grimm</i>
Drama	<i>Mad Men</i> <i>Downton Abbey</i> <i>The Sopranos</i>	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	<i>Gossip Girl</i> <i>One Tree Hill</i> <i>Bones</i>

Table 4: External consecration measures by level of consecration

Category	Level	Z-Score	Critics	Awards	
				Nominations	Wins
Music	Low	-1.204	54.6	3.5	0.2
	Mid	0.007	66.6	15.2	3.6
	High	0.610	75.4	26.3	9.3
Movies	Low	-1.193	41.3	0.6	0.1
	Mid	-0.092	69.6	1.8	0
	High	0.694	84.5	6.7	2.2
Shows	Low	-0.806	56.7	15.7	2.7
	Mid	0.047	61.3	18.4	3.4
	High	0.562	77.6	67.4	17.9

Note: Critic scores are from Metacritic.com; award nominations and wins are for Grammys for music, Academy Awards for movies, and Emmys for shows.

variables, we first constructed binary like/do not like measures relying on the same procedure as the volume measures. Second, the number of less artistically respected items was subtracted from the number of more artistically respected items (out of 5 for music, movie, and television genres and out of 15 for music artists, movies, and television shows, as listed in Tables 2 and 3). This resulted in composition measures ranging from -5 to 5 for music, movie, and television genres and from -15 to 15 for music artists, movies, and television shows. In all cases, negative values signal a preference for less consecrated items, positive values signal a preference for more consecrated items, and zero represents an equal liking across levels of consecration (Warde and Gayo-Cal 2009:124). For the analyses, all volume and composition measures were standardized (mean = 0, standard deviation = 1) to convert them to the same scale.⁸

As motivated by our hypotheses, our focal independent variables are higher-status familial socialization—measured here as the frequency of *childhood arts exposure* (seven-point scale)—and level of *education* (seven-point scale). For social capital measures, we employ a social position generator (Lin, Fu, and Hsung 2017). This instrument asks respondents to identify ties among their family, friends, and acquaintances to 30 different occupational titles across a wide socioeconomic status range. We take acquaintances as an indicator of one's *weak tie network* and family/friends as an indicator of one's *strong tie network*. We use the number of positions in these networks to gauge the overall *variety* of one's social ties. We then take the average *socioeconomic status* score from occupational titles linked in the General Social Survey for all the positions in one's weak and strong tie networks. We use this as an indicator of the overall depth of one's ties to status positions in social space.

We include *gender*, *age*, *income*, *race*, and *urban/rural residency* variables in the models as controls to better isolate the independent effects of these focal variables. For models predicting status composition, we include an additional control for the

overall volume of tastes. Descriptive statistics and ranges can be found in the online supplement.

Hypothesis Tests

We construct a data set in which each respondent has one observation for each general and each specific cultural domain (music, movies, television). Due to the nonindependence of having three observations per individual, we analyze these data sets using hierarchical linear models (HLMs) with random intercept terms (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002).⁹ Models predict the volume or composition of tastes in genres and objects for each individual i and each cultural domain j (music, television, film) as a linear function of covariates, summarized with two equations:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}C_{ij} + \beta_{2j}E_{ij} + S_{ij}\beta_{3j} + Z_{ij}\beta_{4j} + r_{ij}, \quad (1a)$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + U_{0j}, \quad (1b)$$

where β_{0j} is an intercept for cultural domain j , C_{ij} is individual i 's childhood exposure to the arts, E_{ij} is individual i 's education level, S_{ij} contains social capital measures, Z_{ij} contains controls, γ_{00} is an overall mean intercept, and U_{0j} represents random effects of cultural domain j on the intercept.

We estimate two sets of two models. The first set examines between-individual variation to examine whether higher-status individuals on average have more inclusive tastes for genres and more exclusive tastes for objects. Thus, we estimate separate models for genres and objects. The second set of models pools genre and object tastes within individuals—that is, each individual has six observations with genres and objects for music, television, and movies. Again, we estimate two models. However, we include an additional variable indicating the *level of culture* (genre or object), and we then interact this variable with key predictors. Thus, this second set of models examines within-person variation in relative inclusivity and exclusivity with respect to both genres and objects.¹⁰

Results

Higher-Status Taste Configurations

To test the prediction in Hypothesis 1—namely, that higher-status individuals will tend to have more inclusive genre tastes and more exclusive object tastes than individuals of lower status—we begin by estimating two HLMs: one examining broad-based appreciation of genres and the other examining the status of artists or objects within those genres, as a function of childhood arts exposure, schooling, social ties, and controls. Here, we focus strictly on omnibus effects of an individual's higher status, defined as having more childhood arts exposure, more education, and broad-based weak ties, as well as strong ties narrowly linked to higher-status positions. Afterward, we drill down into the relative contributions of independent variables as predicted in Hypotheses 2 and 3.

The overall pattern of results in Table 5 offers support for Hypothesis 1. Several of the status measures are significant in the directions predicted. In short, higher-status individuals tend to have a distinct configuration of inclusive and exclusive tastes: they are both relatively more inclusive at the genre level and more exclusive at the object level than lower-status individuals. Figure 1 shows the statistically significant coefficients from the two models by plotting taste positions within a two-dimensional space characterized by inclusivity with respect to genres and exclusivity with respect to objects within those genres. Individuals are deemed to be higher status when they have the following characteristics: a high level of childhood exposure to the arts, a graduate degree, one standard deviation above the mean for broad-based weak social ties, and one standard deviation above the mean for narrow strong social ties to higher-status positions. Middle-status individuals have some childhood exposure to the arts, some college (but no degree), and the mean on remaining status variables. Lower-status individuals have no childhood exposure to the arts, a high school degree only, and one standard deviation below the mean on the remaining status indicators. The figure clearly illustrates that lower-status individuals tend to have tastes for fewer genres as well as less-consecrated objects within those genres. Middle-status individuals are placed almost precisely at the origin in this space. Note that no mechanical relation exists between the individual status measures and the dependent variables. Thus, these results strongly support the overall view of a homology in social space and tastes: middle-status individuals are average with respect to their inclusivity toward genres and exclusivity toward objects. In stark contrast, higher-status individuals are at once considerably more inclusive with respect to genres and more exclusive with respect to objects.

To more fully investigate our first hypothesis, we can examine status-based within-individual variation in inclusive/exclusive taste configurations across genres and objects. Table 6 presents the results from pooled models in which each individual has six observations. These models include interaction terms to test the hypothesis that genres afford greater inclusivity and objects afford greater exclusivity for those of higher status, who have a proclivity to taste for genres and objects in these ways. Figure 2 plots several significant coefficients from these models to predict the taste configurations of higher-, middle-, and lower-status individuals. We use the same status characteristics outlined above and used in Figure 1. Results demonstrate a clear difference in the overall taste configurations characteristic of higher-status individuals. Lower-status individuals have tastes concentrated in fewer genres, and they like relatively fewer objects within those genres. Lower-status individuals are also clearly more exclusive in their tastes for genres than their tastes for objects, which tend to lean considerably toward the unconsecrated. Middle-status individuals show few differences with respect to their configuration of tastes across genres and objects, although they also tend to lean somewhat more toward less-consecrated objects. Once again, in stark contrast, higher-status individuals have a distinct taste configuration. Higher-status individuals have much more broadly inclusive tastes, especially for genres, and relatively fewer exclusive tastes for genres than for the objects within those genres. Higher status is therefore clearly associated with the distinctive contemporary configuration of higher-status tastes identified in Table 1 and predicted in Hypothesis 1.¹¹

Table 5: Hierarchical linear models predicting volume of genre tastes and status composition of object tastes in music, television, and movies

	Genre Volume/ Inclusivity		Object Status Composition/ Exclusivity	
Childhood arts exposure	0.12 [†]	(0.012)	0.09 [†]	(0.011)
Education	0.01	(0.016)	0.08 [†]	(0.014)
Strong tie variety	0.02 [†]	(0.003)	−0.00	(0.003)
Weak tie variety	0.02 [†]	(0.005)	0.00	(0.005)
Strong tie status	−0.00	(0.001)	0.004 [†]	(0.001)
Weak tie status	−0.00	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)
Controls				
Income	0.00	(0.007)	0.02 [†]	(0.006)
Age	−0.004 [†]	(0.001)	0.02 [†]	(0.001)
Female	−0.05	(0.041)	−0.13 [†]	(0.036)
Race (white = 0)				
Black	0.26 [†]	(0.064)	0.05	(0.056)
Hispanic	0.02	(0.066)	0.16 [†]	(0.057)
Asian	0.15	(0.093)	0.07	(0.081)
Other	−0.21 [*]	(0.099)	0.05	(0.086)
Urban/suburban/rural	−0.10 [†]	(0.028)	−0.06 [*]	(0.024)
Volume of tastes			−0.05 [†]	(0.016)
Constant	−0.17	(0.119)	−1.53 [†]	(0.103)
Number of observations	4,779		4,779	

† $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Two-tailed tests. Values in parentheses are standard deviations.

Familial Socialization versus Schooling Effects

Results also offer support for our hypotheses concerning the socializing antecedents of contemporary higher-status taste configurations. Hypothesis 2a predicted that higher-status familial socialization will be the strongest predictor of inclusive tastes at the genre level. Looking to coefficients in the first models in both Tables 5 and 6 supports this prediction. Whereas childhood arts exposure intensifies the tendency to like a wider range of genres, schooling does not. Thus, these results point to the tendency for higher-status individuals to learn in childhood to hold a broad, democratic cultural orientation, expressed as an openness to general cultural categories.

In support of Hypothesis 2b, schooling plays the strongest role in shaping more exclusive tastes, especially at the object level. Results in the second models of Tables 5 and 6 show that increased years of education has a narrowing effect on tastes. Individuals with more education tend to like fewer objects, and specifically those objects with greater consecration. Consistent with Lizardo's (2018) reading of Bourdieu, education has its strongest effects on forming more exclusive tastes. We add to this picture by showing that exclusivity is expressed most clearly at the level of specific objects—in short, schooling ratchets up the tendency toward exclusivity. Thus, an individual with more education but little childhood arts exposure is more

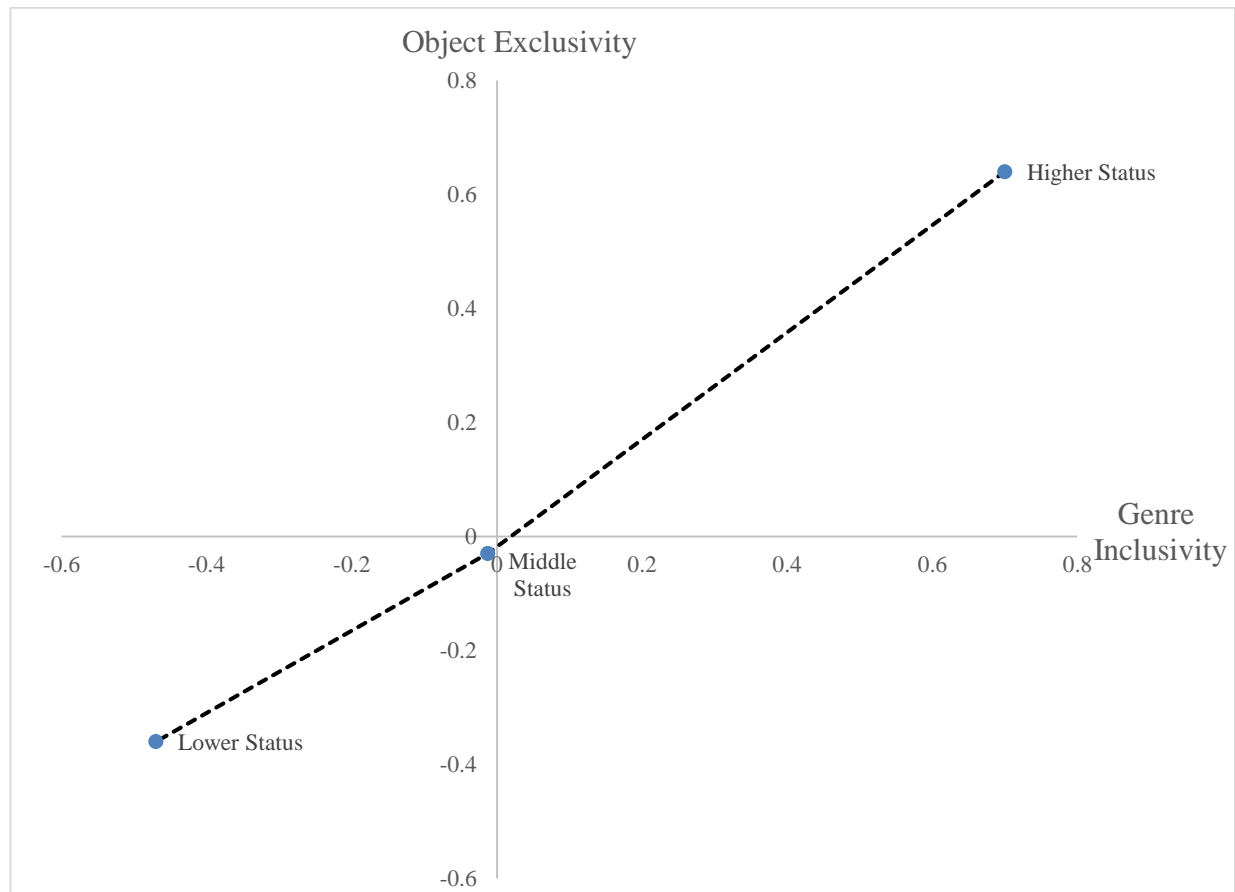


Figure 1: Status positions and taste configurations. Points represent predicted z-scores from models in Table 5. *Note:* Dashed line connecting points is added to emphasize the linear trend predicting in Hypothesis 1.

likely to display exclusive taste configurations that are overtly snobbish, rather than a contemporary configuration of higher-status tastes that includes openness to genres. Childhood arts exposure also leads to more exclusive tastes in genres and objects, demonstrating that genre tastes may also express some exclusivity, in relative terms; thus, early aesthetic socialization can contribute to a somewhat exclusive taste configuration. In short, genres and objects do not solely afford inclusivity or exclusivity. High-status individuals, though, have clear tendencies in their tastes for objects versus their tastes for genres, and these tendencies are connected to specific socializing antecedents.

Social Ties and Taste Configurations

Hypotheses 3a and 3b predicted that taste configurations are mirrored in one's adult social networks. Results in Table 6 offer strong support for the prediction in Hypothesis 3a that individuals with weak social ties to individuals in a wider variety of positions have more inclusive cultural tastes in genres. Here, we see that

Table 6: Hierarchical linear models predicting genre and object level differences in volume and composition of cultural tastes in music, television, and movies

	Volume/ Inclusivity		Status Composition/ Exclusivity	
Object level	0.22 [†]	(0.055)	-0.32 [†]	(0.071)
Childhood arts exposure	0.11 [†]	(0.012)	0.04 [†]	(0.010)
× Object level	-0.01	(0.008)	0.05 [†]	(0.011)
Education	0.02	(0.016)	0.07 [†]	(0.012)
× Object level	-0.03 [†]	(0.010)	0.01	(0.013)
Strong tie variety	0.02 [†]	(0.003)	-0.00	(0.003)
× Object level	0.01 [†]	(0.002)	0.00	(0.003)
Weak tie variety	0.02 [†]	(0.005)	0.00	(0.004)
× Object level	-0.00	(0.004)	-0.01	(0.005)
Strong tie status	-0.00	(0.001)	0.002*	(0.001)
× Object level	-0.003 [†]	(0.001)	0.002	(0.001)
Weak tie status	-0.00	(0.001)	0.00	(0.001)
× Object level	0.00	(0.001)	0.00	(0.001)
Controls				
Income	0.00	(0.006)	0.01*	(0.004)
Age	-0.01 [†]	(0.001)	0.02 [†]	(0.001)
Female	-0.08	(0.039)	-0.06*	(0.027)
Race (white = 0)				
Black	0.25 [†]	(0.060)	-0.02	(0.042)
Hispanic	-0.04	(0.062)	0.10*	(0.044)
Asian	0.08	(0.087)	0.10	(0.062)
Other	-0.20*	(0.093)	0.01	(0.065)
Urban/suburban/rural	-0.09 [†]	(0.026)	-0.03	(0.019)
Cultural domain (music = 0)				
Television	-0.02	(0.017)	0.02	(0.021)
Movies	-0.01	(0.017)	0.01	(0.021)
Volume of tastes			-0.02	(0.011)
Constant	-0.00	(0.115)	-1.37 [†]	(0.087)
Number of observations	9,558		9,558	

† $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Two-tailed tests. Values in parentheses are standard deviations.

having weak ties to a wider variety of occupational positions is strongly associated with liking more genres but not strongly associated with liking more objects. Based on these coefficients, an individual with many weak ties to different social-structural positions (defined as one standard deviation above the mean, holding all other variables at their mean levels) would be 0.22 standard deviations above the mean for number of genres liked. Being more broadly but weakly connected is associated with liking more genres.

Results also offer some support for Hypothesis 3b. Having strong ties that are primarily to higher-status individuals associates with liking fewer objects—a finding that can be interpreted as an indication of being more exclusive in terms of

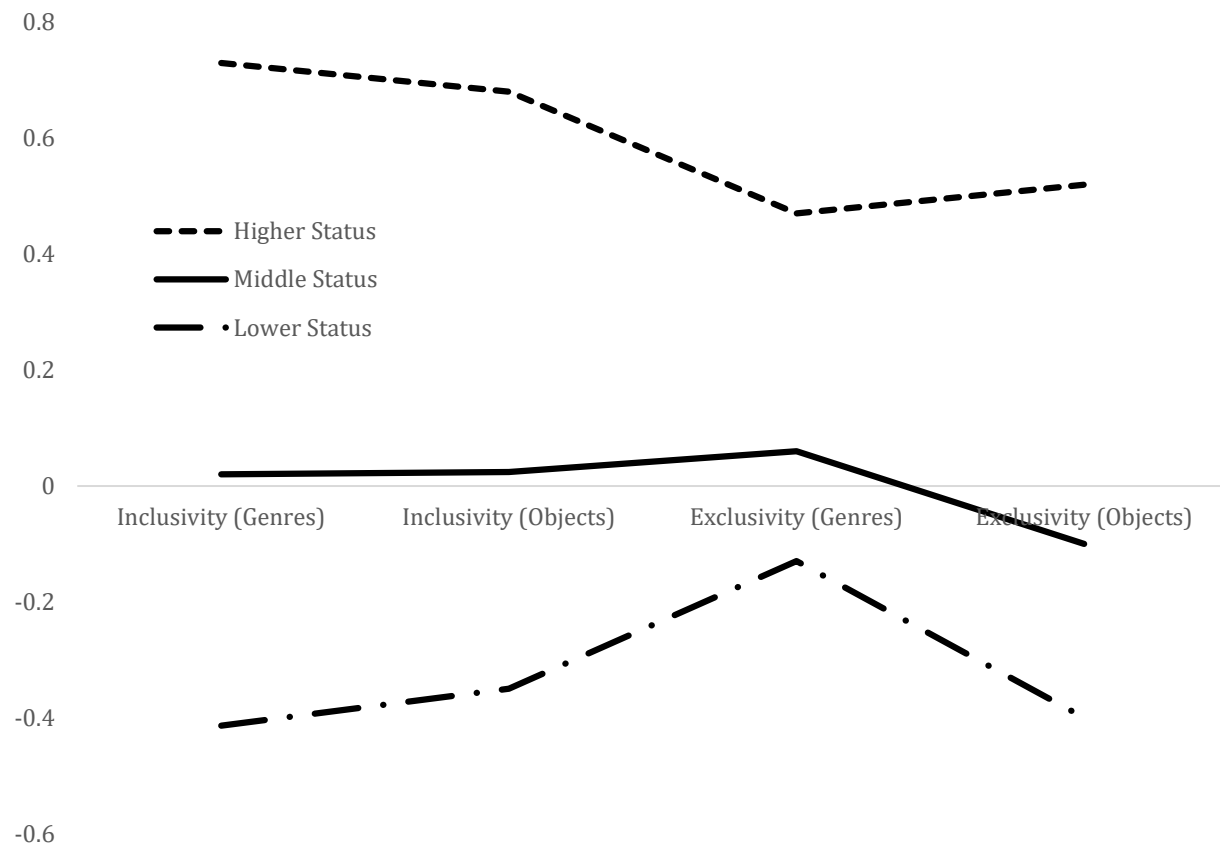


Figure 2: Status-based differences in taste configurations for genres and objects. *Note:* Lines linking predicted point estimates are added emphasize the overall *pattern* of tastes and the differences in these patterned configurations.

the overall volume of consumption. Also, in support of the hypothesis, we see that the average socioeconomic status of one's strong ties associates with exclusivity in object tastes. However, this exclusivity also plays out at the genre level: having strong ties to higher-status positions is indicative of an exclusive taste configuration across genres and objects. Thus, strong ties to more elite social positions mirror a more traditionally snobbish taste configuration.

Figure 3 shows how social network effects combine with familial socialization and schooling in shaping taste configurations. These configurations correspond to ideal types outlined in Table 1 and are here represented in a two-dimensional space. The lower right quadrant, which represents an openness to many genres and a preference for lower-status objects within all genres, is empty. The other quadrants show how combinations of significant factors can combine to generate different taste configurations. In addition to the contemporary configuration of higher-status tastes in the upper right and the low-status configuration in the lower left, we can see several off-diagonal configurations. For example, our models predict that an individual who lacks high-status familial socialization, who achieves high levels

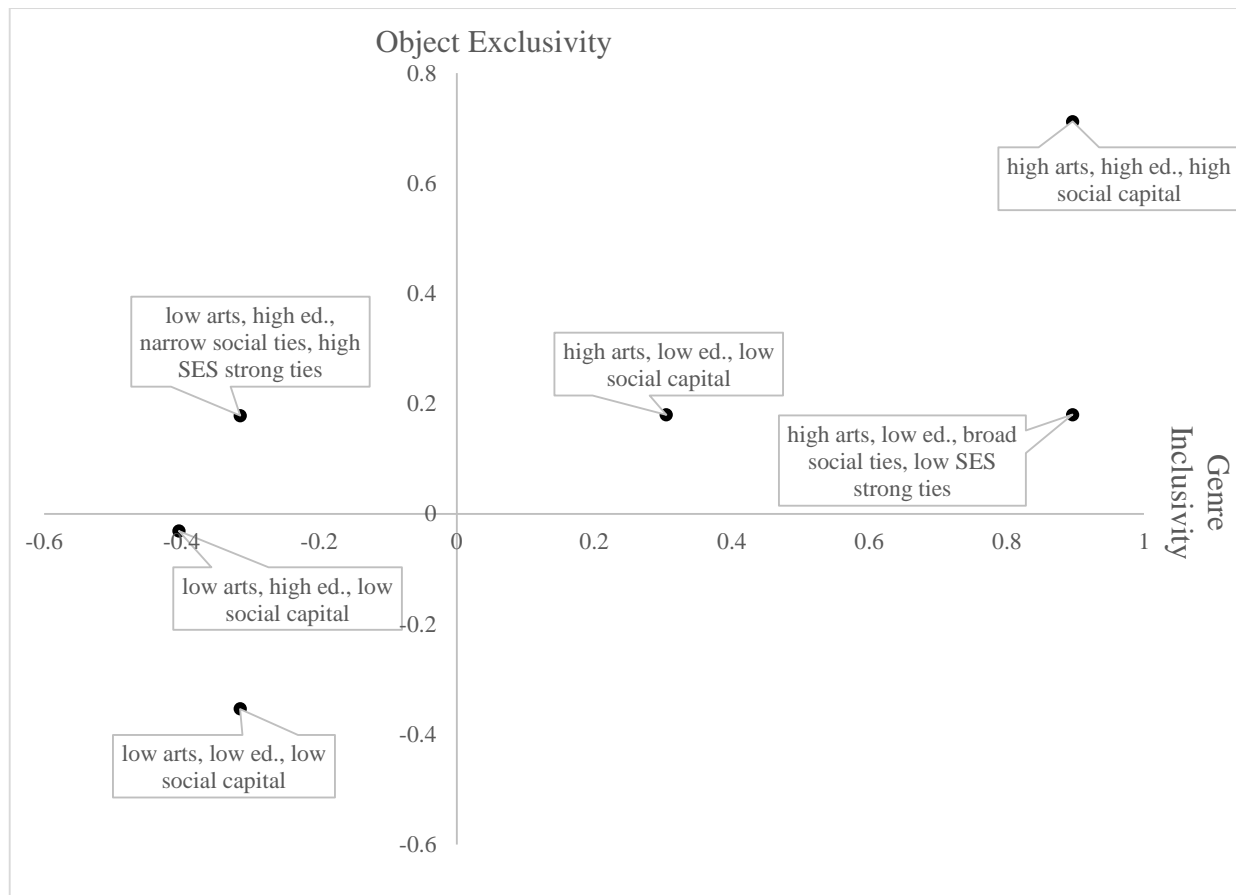


Figure 3: Taste configurations based on significant coefficients in Table 5. *Note:* Social capital is used here to indicate having both more broad-based ties, and higher socioeconomic status (SES) ties.

of education, and who has narrow social ties to fewer positions and strong ties to high-socioeconomic status positions, will likely have a much more traditionally snobbish taste configuration. In contrast, our models predict that an individual who has high levels of childhood arts exposure, but who only has a high school education, and who has broad-based social ties and strong ties to individuals in lower-socioeconomic status positions, will be the most clearly omnivorous (i.e., having inclusive genre tastes and relatively nonexclusive object tastes).

These results merit two points of theoretical elaboration. First, it is worth emphasizing that these positions are likely experienced in relational terms—that is, individuals see others' tastes from the standpoint of their own taste positions. Thus, those who are inclusive for both genres and objects may be seen as too undiscerning by those holding a contemporary higher-status taste configuration, just as those who are exclusive for both may seem snobbish. Second, as we will touch upon more in our discussion to follow, these combinations of characteristics strongly suggest interesting differences in how tastes correspond with differences in the life

course—namely, how tastes emerge from and reflect differences in individuals who move into, stay within, and fall out of higher-status positions.

Discussion and Conclusion

Contributions

Recent work has found that, at least discursively, those of higher status have been blending principles of inclusion and exclusion in their tastes. In this article we shed light on how high-status tastes are configured, how this configuration predominates despite upholding two seemingly contradictory principles, and the socializing influences that produce this contemporary configuration of tastes.

We find that those of higher status are not so much blending these principles—having tastes for genres and objects that *simultaneously* express both inclusivity and exclusivity—as they are configuring them in a distinct manner by tasting *differently* at different levels of culture. Different levels of culture, we argue, have different affordances that better allow for different configurations of higher-status tasting: democratically and openly at the level of categories, and restrictively and more hierarchically at the level of objects. Whereas prior work regularly notes the antecedent effects of early familial socialization and formal schooling in producing higher-status taste formations, here we untangle and formally model the independent effects of each of them, as well as how they combine to form higher-status taste configurations. We find that familial socialization more heavily contributes to democratic openness in tastes at the genre level, whereas continued years of formal schooling has a ratcheting effect on the preference for consecrated culture over nonconsecrated culture at the level of objects.

In our argument, and following Bourdieu, those of higher status do not strategically seek out this configuration of tastes. However, for three reasons we believe that holding this contemporary configuration of high-status tastes has social utility. First, to the degree that those of lower status try to emulate the tastes of those of higher status (Friedman and Reeves 2020; Veblen 1899), a subtler and more complicated configuration of higher-status tastes across different levels of culture is harder to inculcate or to be learned and therefore will be rarer and more useful in social closure.

Second, even outside of an emulation framework (e.g., Bourdieu [1984], although see pages 318–65 on “cultural goodwill”), given the fungibility of culture, simultaneously liking culture both broadly and narrowly allows one to form connections across the status spectrum. Just as higher-status individuals can access social or material gains by using culture to bridge groups (for which expansive tastes are particularly useful, e.g., Erickson [1996]), they can in other contexts access social and material gains through narrower inroads to their own higher-status groups (for which specific and hierarchically contemporary tastes are particularly useful, e.g., Rivera [2016]). In short, even apart from the distinction offered by the specific configuration of their tastes, the combination of broader and narrower tastes allows higher-status individuals to access a wider range of conversionary opportunities.

Third, the contemporary configuration of tastes allows high-status individuals to maximally conform to highly valued norms and beliefs. Exclusivity—manifested in discernment, rarefied tastes, and specialized knowledge—has traditionally been associated with high-status tastes. But contemporary ideals for a “worthy” person are also inclusive—manifested in recognition of the value and authenticity of aesthetics connected to diverse social groups. This contemporary configuration of tastes is a cultural tool (Swidler 1986) that can serve as a powerful resource for high-status people. It can facilitate social closure, bridge social groups, and help to convey one’s position as elite but with a solid moral foundation (Friedman and Reeves 2020; Hahl et al. 2017).

In addition to our substantive findings, we see this work as making a conceptual contribution to the study of classed cultural consumption. We bring the consideration of the affordances of culture into the analysis of taste profiles. Although in science and technology studies and related disciplines affordance theory is traditionally associated with the materiality of objects—and has reasonably been adopted in sociology primarily in this way (e.g., Klett 2014; McDonnell 2010; Stoltz and Taylor 2017; although see DeNora 2000; McClain and Mears 2012)—we extend this perspective to the symbolic or communicative affordances of different levels of culture. Previous studies have examined tastes without regard for the important ways that genres and cultural objects are fundamentally different. To the extent that prior research examined both genres and objects, it did not recognize the significance of the generality of genres and the specificity of objects as the targets of individuals’ taste choices. We argue that the generality afforded by genres and the specificity afforded by objects are the key to understanding how high-status tastes are configured to be both inclusive and exclusive.

A further contribution we make builds on prior theory and empirical research on the different roles of childhood aesthetic socialization and education in influencing adulthood tastes. Research has consistently demonstrated that both of these factors influence adult tastes; parents with cultural capital can pass on high-status tastes to children, and schools can also inculcate high-status tastes. Our findings clarify these broader trends by showing how they tend to have different effects that each contribute to a particular part of what we term the contemporary configuration of higher-status tastes. Whereas childhood aesthetic socialization tends to produce tastes that are broader and more inclusive than the tastes of individuals without this socialization, formal schooling tends to produce tastes that are discriminating and more exclusive than those of individuals with less formal schooling. This combination of influences together is likely to maximize the holding of the contemporary taste configuration in adulthood.

As suggested by Lizardo (2018), we believe that in disaggregating the effect of these two socializing agents, future work can more directly focus on the different social positions of “stayers” and “movers” into and out of higher-status positions (Bourdieu 1984; see also Streib 2015). Specifically, our findings highlight the roles that tastes may play in mitigating the downward or upward slopes of “movers” into different classes, as well as potentially cementing the positions of otherwise unworthy high-status “stayers.”¹² As suggested by Lizardo and Skiles (2012:271; see also Bourdieu 1984:63–65), we find clear evidence for the differences in early

versus late acquisition of an aesthetic disposition. Individuals moving into higher-status networks through formal schooling, but who lack broad-based social ties and higher-status familial socialization, may be limited in how they relate with those “stayers” who will be relatively more invested in an even more consecrated set of objects across a wider array of genres. Higher-status college dropouts may seek to form stronger ties with individuals from less privileged origins with whom they can connect with respect to specific unconsecrated objects. In the process, these more privileged individuals may be part of the processes through which certain genres and objects that are outside the mainstream gain recognition and artistic merit. Higher-status individuals may leverage their social networks and artistic dispositions to artistically recognize more “authentic” genres and objects in helping to directly or indirectly elevate them. This suggests a way that higher-status individuals who fail to achieve success through institutionalized cultural capital may be able to convert their embodied and objectified forms of cultural capital into success in a number of realms of cultural production and consumption (Bourdieu 1986).

Limitations and Future Directions

We see this work as opening the door to several future topics, some of which are, as is to be expected, tied to our limitations here. For instance, although we suspect that it is the generality of genres and the specificity of objects that cause the former to be good for bridging and the latter to be good for fencing, rather than two categories of culture, one can easily imagine multiple levels of culture that exist on a continuum of specificity. In this sense, at the top of the continuum are entire domains of culture (e.g., all of television, or music, or art, or literature), which a level down are followed by genres within that domain, and then by subgenres within those genres, artists and objects within those subgenres, and even more fine-grained cut points within those artists and objects (e.g., the early vs. late career of an artist, a particular live recording vs. the studio recording of a song, or the third season of a television show vs. the second or fourth). By taking the perspective of a continuum of levels and sublevels, future work could confirm whether the degree of specificity at a level is the mechanism for the differential affordances of tasting broadly or narrowly at that level, or whether something else is generating the effect.

Likewise, in taking (what would likely be) a qualitative approach to the same questions, one could further differentiate between liking the “right” cultural object and liking the “right” cultural objects the “right” way. To take the example of a highly consecrated television series, this approach would explore differences between liking *Breaking Bad* as a morality tale about human frailty versus liking *Breaking Bad* as a comedic crime caper with drugs and gadgets. By considering both of what Daenekindt and Roose (2014:25) call “the ‘what’ and the ‘how’” of cultural consumption, this would reasonably extend the analysis from taste and evaluation to the intersection of taste and evaluation with meaning-making. In turn, given our reliance on survey research, we have stayed within the realm of popular culture music, film, and television, examining the degree to which tastes are associated with preferences for (overall very well known) artistically consecrated artists and

objects. And yet, one could imagine there being two separate axes of variation in the exclusive signaling functions of artists and objects, in which degree of artistic consecration is one axis and degree of knownness is the other. There could be an additive restrictive effect for culture that is both consecrated and comparatively unknown, or perhaps consecration level is the signal of higher status and then knownness is operationalized more in defining subgroups within higher-status populations.

Future work might also investigate the degree to which those combining inclusive tastes at the genre level and exclusive tastes at the object level are actually acting on their stated taste preferences in practice. When higher-status individuals claim to like (for instance) folk music or reggae music, are all of them actually seeking out these genres or particularly knowledgeable about them, or do they merely self-conceptualize as the type of people who are open to a wide variety of genres? One could address this question by conducting ethnographic research, through cultural time-use diaries, by pairing simple survey items about tastes with data on respondents' personal listening habits from online music streaming services, or even just by including short quizzes about different genres to see what proportion of respondents who claim to like those genres actually know more about them than those who do not. The degree to which liking is associated (or not) with increased engagement, knowledge, or commitment could also be a mark of status in itself, opening an entirely new set of research questions.

Lastly, sociological interest in the study of tastes is founded on the role they play in generating and maintaining inequalities. Given the history of scholarly attention to taste and inequality, we also see our findings as having potential applications to multiple subfields and literatures. Here we discuss two of them. First, scholars of organizations and labor markets have found that both elite (Rivera 2011; Thomas 2018; Williams and Connell 2010) and culturally matched (Rivera 2012; Koppman 2016) expressions of taste and cultural compartments affect outcomes in hiring decisions. Our findings suggest that one way in which applicants of high cultural or social skill may be able to game job interviews is by first fostering perceptions of "cultural matching" through the appreciation of a wide swath of cultural categories while at the same time fostering perceptions of elite status by only expressing an appreciation for the "right" cultural objects within those categories. This is a proposition that could be tested with qualitative data. In turn, from DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) we know cultural tastes play a role in marriage markets, and from Bruch, Feinberg, and Lee (2016) we know that the decision to date someone is a two-stage process with different decision rules at each stage. Building on these findings, studies of homogamy in dating markets could investigate if cultural openness across categories is more frequently deployed as a first-stage screening rule whereas liking the "right" objects within those categories is a second-stage decision rule, or if this type of cultural sorting of potential romantic partners co-occurs in the same stage. This is a proposition that may be most effectively tested through quantitative data and tools from natural language processing (McFarland, Jurafsky, and Rawlings 2013). Along a similar vein, building on the work of Rentfrow and Gosling (2016), this same basic proposition could be tested in the formation and

continuation of friendships, for which the role of cultural tastes has also been widely studied (Edelmann and Vaisey 2014; Lewis and Kaufman 2018; Lizardo 2006).

More generally, we believe that scholars studying cultural capital—be they in the sociology of education, the professions, or networks or in other subfields—should consider the differences between categories and objects in the expression of cultural tastes. As we come to recognize that perceived cultural similarity in interaction plays a role in everything from securing a publishing contract (Childress and Nault 2019) to interacting with police officers (Campeau 2018) and public defenders (Clair 2020), training our measures to capture the different ways higher-status tastes are conveyed (and the configuration through which these different ways are combined) is of the utmost importance.

Notes

- 1 See Lizardo and Skiles (2012, 2015) for an explication of the foundational concepts that have been animating the study of class stratification and tastes. These concepts are most strongly associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Peterson.
- 2 Note that this strict reading of Bourdieu's argument is in contrast with a great deal of Bourdieusian-inspired research that has found that family socialization into consecrated tastes in childhood produces a tendency to have tastes for consecrated culture in adulthood (e.g., Nagel and Lemel 2019).
- 3 Prior work that finds an association between education and omnivorousness (see Peterson [2005] for review) crucially does so at the genre level. To be clear, our argument is not that in the accumulation of capital, familial socialization is *only* ultimately expressed through genre-level openness and that education is *only* ultimately expressed through object-level exclusivity, but rather that the family plays a larger role in contributing to genre-level openness just as schooling plays a larger role in contributing to object-level exclusivity.
- 4 Lizardo (2018) explores a crucial nuance regarding Bourdieu's argument, namely that the effects of family socialization and formal schooling are contingent. Specifically, family socialization's influence will be greater for tastes for cultural goods that are less consecrated, and one's own education will have more influence for tastes for cultural goods that are more consecrated.
- 5 As noted by Peterson (1992:245), the term "snob" is a pejorative to describe someone who only holds higher-status tastes.
- 6 The tautology may in fact be correct in the long run as the tastes of higher-status individuals become more consecrated. However, some analytic separation of the statuses of consumers and the statuses of the genres and objects they consume is, in our view, necessary for valid testing of our hypotheses.
- 7 We selected music, television, and film because these cultural domains are broadly popular across the social spectrum, and so they are relevant to understanding tastes for a broad swath of the population. These domains also allow our study to be in conversation with prior research.
- 8 Genres and objects of middle consecration were excluded from the composition measures because they provide no information regarding the compositional leaning of respondents' tastes toward more or less consecrated culture. To support this decision, we ran our

models with genres and objects of middle consecration both included and excluded for both measures, with no meaningful changes to our results.

- 9 Disaggregated results showed consistent patterns (available on request).
- 10 To ensure that our results do not conflate variation in taste configurations with differences in general knowledge of genres and objects, all models were also estimated controlling for the number of genres and objects known by respondents, with no meaningful difference in the results. Thus, the simpler models were retained.
- 11 The effects of several of our control variables merit some mention. Net of all included effects, we find that age, gender, race, and urban/rural residence all play a role in shaping inclusivity and exclusivity. None of these effects is particularly surprising, given past research on taste influences, although some of the associations of taste configurations and race (net of our class measure) suggest a complex set of influences in shaping taste configurations beyond our key predictors. An investigation of these effects is beyond the scope of this article, although they point to interesting new possibilities for future research.
- 12 See Laurison, Dow, and Chernoff (2020) for a nice visualization of movers and stayers by race across class strata.

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