

Why ‘cultural matters’ matter: Culture talk as the mobilization of cultural capital in interaction¹

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Abstract

In this paper, I provide evidence for the substantive relevance of a phenomenon that has been argued to be crucial in connecting cultural inequalities to stratification outcomes: “culture talk,” or the use of popular culture and the arts as conversation subjects with friends and acquaintances. In spite of its theoretical importance, this outcome has not received much empirical attention. To address this gap, I document the socio-demographic correlates of culture talk using survey data from a probability sample of Americans. I report three main findings. First, culture talk frequency across five culture consumption domains is stratified by socioeconomic status, primarily by education and secondarily by income, net of self-reported culture-consumption frequency. Second, the socioeconomic status effect on culture talk is strongest for those who are most culturally active. Finally, engagement in traditionally high status cultural pursuits (e.g. the fine arts) is a better predictor of culture talk across all domains than consumption in less class stratified domains (e.g. movies). I close by elaborating the theoretical and substantive implication of these results.

1 Introduction

Research at in culture and stratification has been primarily concerned with exploring inequalities linked to social position in access to and engagement with symbolic goods (Katz-Gerro, 2004). The main question animating this burgeoning literature is whether taste and culture consumption patterns—as constitutive of the lifestyles that mark Weberian status groups—continue to be associated with social position. This organizing concern can be appreciated whether the construct of “social position” is conceptualized in terms of educational attainment (Warde, Wright, & Gayo-Cal, 2008), membership in broadly defined occupational groups (Tomlinson, 2003), aggregate measures of social class (Katz-Gerro, 2006), or constructed scalar indices of social status based on patterns of interaction (e.g. intermarriage) across occupational groups (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007).

The main conclusion of this still vibrant line of research is that lifestyle practices continue to be strongly shaped—albeit in increasingly complex ways—by social position however it is defined (Bennett et al., 2009). One basic finding is now well-established: members of the educated, salaried professional elite are more likely to actively appropriate a wider variety of aesthetic offerings, within and across industry-defined genre categories and institutional contexts of dissemination and reception (Lizardo, 2008; Peterson, 2005; Prieur & Savage, 2011). In essence, what it means to be high-status in contemporary societies is to be an equal opportunity connoisseur of diverse cultural offerings and aesthetic experiences across domains (e.g. literature versus film, and within domains across substyles), forms of delivery (e.g. non-profit versus commercial systems) and external legitimation (e.g. “prescribed” or “authorized” culture versus “pop culture”, “folk culture” or “kitsch”) (Lizardo & Skiles, 2008, 2009; Peterson & Kern, 1996).

The persistent focus of the cultural stratification literature on the question of

whether lifestyle practices continue to be unevenly segmented according to class and status markers has resulted in a relative lack of attention to an equally important question: what is the *role* of aesthetic consumption in everyday life? More precisely, given that high status persons are more likely to engage with and be more generally knowledgeable about popular culture and the arts, how is this knowledge implicated in their everyday behavior? In essence, now that we know that eclecticism is the form that “good” taste takes in contemporary societies (Ollivier, 2008), it is time to ask—with Erickson (1991)—“what is [this kind of] good taste good for”?

This gap in our knowledge is surprising in light of the fact that the status of popular culture and the arts as a form of class culture was, and continues to be, central to the theoretical tradition from which most analysts of the culture-stratification build on (Collins, 2009; DiMaggio, 1987; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). In this respect, Gary Alan Fine’s basic complaint about research of popular culture in the early 1970s—that this research generally ignored the behavioral *implications* of everyday engagement with culture and the arts especially as it pertains to face-to-face interaction (Fine, 1977, p. 453)—can be repeated vis a vis research on cultural stratification today.

One of the key analytic lessons of some of these foundational writings is that general familiarity with a given class culture is useful symbolic resource when it can be used as a signal providing an entry-point into delimited arenas of association (Mohr & DiMaggio, 1995). This is the reason why, in their influential paper, Lamont and Lareau (1988) linked the notion of cultural capital to an explicit conceptual framework highlighting the active deployment of elite cultural signals for the purposes of drawing symbolic boundaries. DiMaggio (1987) was also adamant—building on the early work of Collins (2009)—in proposing that the major differences across status groups in the role that engagement with symbolic goods play in everyday social settings is connected to the routine exploitation of cultural knowledge in social interaction within everyday settings

(Erickson, 1996; Lizardo, 2006). From this perspective, one important way that cultural aptitudes and interests become actualized as cultural capital—that is “convertible” into other resources (Bourdieu, 1986)—is via their link to everyday processes of informal socialization, patterns of endogamy, social closure, and status group reproduction in the Weberian sense (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985).

2 Culture talk as sociability

We can begin to characterize the empirical phenomenon will be the focus of analysis via the rather common observation that conversational rituals usually require some sort of *content* for their successful initiation and maintenance (Collins, 2004; DiMaggio, 1987). Whenever the primary conversational subject matter animating a given interaction episode moves towards the arts and the symbolic products of the culture industry, we may consider this an instance of *culture talk*. Accordingly, I define culture talk as *the (more or less) routine deployment of cultural knowledge associated with aesthetic goods as a resource to generate conversation*. In a nutshell: the discussion of “cultural matters” with friends and acquaintances.

From a Simmelian perspective, we may consider culture talk one of the primary examples of “sociability” in late modern societies. Sociability is social interaction that is not driven by explicit instrumental purposes, but that is keyed to the continuing repetition of episodes of social interaction for their own sake (Simmel, 1949). Sociability thus represents the limiting case—and because seemingly devoid of explicit purpose, the “play form”—of the more general process of association (coming together from some purpose). In this respect, sociability is a *form* of social intercourse explicitly dissociated from any sort of goal-directed pursuit. As a social form, sociability is thus partially independent of the particular content that drives it in a given context, making culture talk a fairly general (and generic) phenomenon. However, this partial independence of form from content does not mean that just any content will do.

2.1 The importance of aesthetic discourse as conversational content

Recent theorizing on the culture-network link has moved beyond the early formalism of traditional network analysis to propose that specifying the form of association is not enough; instead, particular forms of association are constituted by specific cultural contents that provide meaning to those forms (Fuhse, 2009). Here I propose that in the contemporary context talk related to (1) *aesthetic consumption experiences* (Deighton, 1992; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), and (2) general knowledge of the accepted discursive conventions governing expressions of aesthetic categorization, evaluation, and enjoyment (Goldberg, Hannan, & Kovács, 2016; Lizardo, 2008) become one of the most important sources of meaningful content making possible sustained episodes of sociability.

As Simmel noted, sociability cannot be driven by “purposive” (e.g. goal-directed) or “practical” contents (e.g. work, politics, etc.), but requires instead ludic content that serves to simply sustain the focus of attention in the interaction itself (Collins, 2004). The reason for this is that sociability is a kind of social intercourse “which does not have a strictly economic or business purpose” but access to which (and restrictions on) is a key marker of the status group boundaries (M. Weber, 1994, p. 114)—although in other contexts similar kinds of seemingly purposeless content are useful in *relaxing* those same status boundaries (Ikegami, 2005). Building on Simmel, I argue that culture talk is the primary manifestation of sociability in contemporary class-differentiated societies, precisely because conversation related to symbolic goods is the ideal ludic content that fits this form of interaction. In comparison to aesthetic talk other types of conversational content—such as for instance religion or politics—are miserable failures, because they tend to suppress conversation and tend to highlight latent social divisions (Eliasoph, 1998).

2.2 Culture industries as the source of aesthetic content

Where does aesthetic content come from? Cultural theorists have persuasively argued that media-culture and arts dissemination institutions play a key role in producing an overabundant supply of (sometimes ephemeral) content useful for generating discussion that serves as a resource for conversation in the context of small groups (Fine, 1977, p. 453). The recurrently reproduced micro-orders based on face-to-face (and increasingly electronically mediated) interaction require a constant stream of novel content in order to be recurrently recreated and thus reproduce themselves over time (DiMaggio, 1987). In this respect, the formal and informal system of production of aesthetic goods provide as “input” the very content that serves as the scaffolding around which everyday episodes of “talk” and sociability are built.

In the same vein, popular culture scholars have proposed that “[p]art of the pleasure of popular culture is talking about it; part of its meaning is...talk” (Frith, 1998, p. 4). Accordingly, civic membership and even “belonging” to neighborhoods and communities is partially constituted via talk, and “[m]uch of this talk is about the mass media and its cultural commodities” (Fiske, 1987, p. 78). For instance, Elizabeth Long (2003) in her study of women’s reading groups in Houston, Texas, finds that cultural knowledge and taste become the primary content of social interaction. Consistent with the claim that connects the consumption of aesthetic products and sociability, she finds that reading group members “tend to press books into service for the meanings that they transmit and the conversations they generate” (2003, p. 73). Similarly, Benzecry and Collins (2014, pp. 316–317) point to the crucial role of culture talk in constituting the aesthetic experience for fanatics of Opera in Buenos Aires. Among Opera fans, talk is almost constant, and this talk revolves around the music, past performances, and tales of their own “heroic commitment” to the art form. Through this type of culture talk, “Opera fanatics” ritually construct and maintain their relationship to other fans, while at the same time marking the

boundary separating true connoisseurs from less serious followers.

2.3 Cultural content as a strategic interactional resource

Why is aesthetic talk effective at relationship building and maintenance? As noted in both classic (DiMaggio, 1987; Fine, 1977) and more recent (Cardon & Granjon, 2005; Lewis, Kaufman, Gonzalez, Wimmer, & Christakis, 2008) work, talk about culture and the arts infuses local conversation-based interaction rituals with a common focus of attention (Collins, 2004). If the establishment of this common focus is successful, then culture talk may serve as a conduit for either deep, engrossing conversations (Frith, 1998)---when others form part of more intimate circles---or “for least-common denominator talk” useful for sustaining brief interactions (DiMaggio, 1987, p. 443), depending on the pragmatic context (Schultz & Breiger, 2010).

In contrast to material goods which “are physically present and visible” and which may serve as barriers for interaction via the creation of invidious distinction, the consumption of aesthetic goods “is invisible once it has occurred. This evanescent quality makes artistic experience, described and exploited in conversation, a portable and thus potent medium of interactional exchange.” (DiMaggio, 1987, pp. 443–444). Because commercial (“popular”) culture and the arts (along with “fashion, cuisine and sport”) are the closest analog to a common cultural currency in late modern societies, they have the capacity to be a smooth facilitator of interaction across situational settings, social occasions and social positions (Erickson, 1996).

Sociological considerations of the role of culture talk in the creation and maintenance of social relations via consumption and interaction rituals, converges with work in marketing and consumer culture studies (Deighton, 1992). According to Gainer (1995), art consumers use conversation about the arts to make what could potentially be a purely private experience part of their public interactions with others. Via culture talk, art lovers jointly build both their own personal identities as art consumers *and* their interpersonal

relations with other art aficionados. In this way, “social relationships are often created and maintained through rituals of reproduction based on consumption which individuals join in shared performances with symbolic meaning” (Gainer, 1995, p. 254). Consumption of the arts, as mediated via culture talk, allows individuals to pursue interpersonal goals connected to companionship and friendship. This also helps to build bridges to socially distant acquaintances, via the above-referenced generation of interaction rituals for work conversation (Lizardo, 2013). Via the same mechanism, culture talk can help to establish criteria for co-membership in exclusive social circles (Kadushin, 1966), while at the same time managing and reinforcing individual and community identities.

3 The stratification of culture talk

3.1 Culture talk and socioeconomic status

The Simmelian link of culture talk and sociability, while revealing, also obscures a fact that is relatively uncontroversial for contemporary theorists of the link between culture and stratification processes. Rather than simply being a formal or neutral “form” of association, opportunities to engage in the type of non-instrumental sociability that Simmel points to are unlikely to be equitably distributed as access to and practical familiarity with the content in question is itself inequitably distributed (Bourdieu, 1984). This type of “entertainment talk” ((Collins, 2009, p. 81), *precisely* because it is dissociated from explicit instrumental pursuits and because it is not driven by “extrinsic rewards” but by friendship and personal liking, comes to serve as one of the primary ways in which vertical and horizontal status-group boundaries are dynamically built and rebuilt. These boundaries are recurrently recreated mainly via processes of inclusion and exclusion at the interactional level.

Accordingly, when the very knowledge and associated experiences that are required for engaging in this form of interaction are unequally distributed—coming to form the

basis for the formation of partially segregated status cultures (Collins, 2009)—then we should find that members of high-status groups should be more likely to routinely engage in culture talk. As noted at the outset, this proposition receives support from a long line of research in the sociology of taste showing the continuing existence of strong socio-demographic differences in rates of familiarity and engagement with culture and the arts, especially across groups defined by such status markers as education, and to a lesser extent, income.

If aesthetic experiences are translated into culture talk in mundane conversational settings, then we should expect that individuals who have a higher-baseline probability of engagement with culture and the arts should also be more likely to engage in culture talk. A strong version of this argument would predict that status-linked differences in the likelihood of engaging in culture talk are a byproduct of differential opportunities to consume cultural experiences. Under this formulation, status-linked differences in cultural engagement are the primary source of individual differences in cultural knowledge. Therefore, there should be no residual differences in culture talk propensities across status groups *within* levels of consumption. In statistical terms, the direct effect of socio-economic status on culture talk is fully mediated by consumption frequency.

Several considerations lead us to expect that this last version of the argument is not on the right track. First, persons endowed with large stocks of cultural capital should be able to participate in conversation featuring culture as a topic even when they are not active consumers in the domain in question. That is, they may demonstrate what Peterson (1992, p. 252) referred to as “passing knowledge” of a given cultural domain on the spot. This is in fact a form of “social skill” that is almost a requirement among members of the young, highly-educated, new middle class (DiMaggio, 1996).

Recent work on the culture-stratification link suggests that the ability to deploy cultural knowledge in interaction in partial dissociation from direct consumption can be

generated via multiple, interlinked mechanisms: (1) past experience in the educational system—“scholastic capital” in Bourdieu’s (1984) sense—where traditional high-status culture (and increasingly “popular” culture) have become established part of the curriculum (Lizardo, 2008); (2) past experience in the upper-middle and middle-class household—“domestic capital”—where extra-curricular forms of aesthetic engagement and arts-training have become an institutionalized element of the socialization process (Weininger, Lareau, & Conley, 2015); (3) routine interaction with members of the personal network who are themselves avid consumers of the cultural forms in question and who thus make culture talk a recurrent conversational topic allowing ego to gather cultural knowledge that may be used in other conversational interactions (Cardon & Granjon, 2005); and finally, (4) person-to-organization connections that allow high-status individuals to participate in elite urban social circles where culture talk is a prescribed conversational resource (Ostrower, 1998).

This alternative conceptualization of the link between culture talk and social position suggests the existence of (relatively) strong structuration of culture talk by socio-economic status and other markers of difference, even after adjusting for the relative propensity to directly participate in the cultural realms in question. These residual socio-demographic differences in culture talk propensities should be strongest precisely for those social markers most clearly associated with status and privilege (Khan, 2011), such as education and income stratum.² However, insofar as mechanisms associated with network connectivity and social capital may also be involved in generating the capacity to participate in “interaction rituals” featuring culture talk (independent of consumption), other axes of difference partially orthogonal to socio-economic status—but correlated with social connectivity—should retain their predictive power even after adjusting for

² As noted by (Bennett et al., 2009), this does not imply that those persons who are disengaged from cultural consumption do not have active social lives. My argument *does* imply however, that the social lives of the aesthetically disengaged will be structured in distinct ways, by for instance being relatively more tied to neighborhood, kinship, and locality (Prieur & Savage, 2011).

levels of cultural consumption.

Hypothesis 1: *A person's socioeconomic status predicts culture-talk frequency even after adjusting for levels of cultural participation.*

Nevertheless, we should not expect all dimensions of socio-economic status to be equally good predictors of culture talk. As argued above, culture talk is deeply tied to a person's capacity to appropriate cultural goods and then use this experiential content as discursive resource in interaction. In this respect, culture talk is more closely connected to a given person's stock of (embodied) *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) than it is to economic resources. Accordingly, we should find that those dimensions of socio-economic status that more closely track a history of accumulation of cultural capital (such as educational qualifications) should be better predictors of culture talk than those dimensions of socio-economic status that index material advantage (such as income).

Hypothesis 2: *Indicators of cultural capital (e.g. education) are better predictors of culture-talk frequency than indicators of economic capital (e.g. family income).*

3.2 Cumulative advantage processes

Insofar as being an active participant in the arts is a clear index of cultural capital, a variation of this argument would propose that the differences in cultural talk propensities that are traceable to differences in socio-economic status themselves not independent from a person's status as an active arts participant. Instead we should expect that the predictive power of socio-economic status should change depending on whether we are talking about active or inactive culture-consumers. More specifically we should expect that status-linked differences in the likelihood of engaging in culture talk should be larger among active culture-consumers than among inactive ones. This would be consistent with a world in which even when exposed to a similar set of experiences, persons would not only differ in the capacity to translate those experiences into a conversational resource

based on social location, but this differential capacity should be most evident among persons who are more likely to engage in culture consumption in the first place. This is consistent with a *cumulative advantage* (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006) mechanism linking consumption, status position and culture talk. If this is correct, members of the high status groups should not only be more likely to engage in culture talk than their lower-status counterparts but this difference should be largest among the most active consumers.

Hypothesis 3: *A person's socioeconomic status is a better predictor of culture talk frequency for culturally active persons.*

3.3 Cross-domain differences in the stratification of culture talk

Does the stratification of culture talk vary across domains? The fact that the traditional fine arts dissemination institutions, such as galleries and museums, symphony orchestras and theaters, continue to be patronized mainly by a highly selected, educated elite is a well-established empirical finding (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). We also know that attempts to “democratize” access to the fine arts on the part of these institutions have met with equivocal results, and in most cases have failed outright (Alexander, 1996). The dependence of nonprofit arts organizations on a primarily economically and culturally advantaged consumer base provides high-status elites with recurrent occasions to meet others in the same circles at sponsored social gatherings (Ostrower, 1998). These are interaction opportunities that are ideally suited for the deployment of culture talk.

In addition, it is clear that the field of fine arts production possesses a long-standing legacy of discursive tools—developed by professional critics and lay enthusiasts—for the critical evaluation and the *intellectualized* expression of taste judgments (Baumann, 2007; W. Weber, 1977). The availability of established linguistic conventions with which to categorize and evaluate cultural products may facilitate the mobilization of this type of content as a conversational resource among elites (DiMaggio, 1987). In all, if we presume

that routine access to and knowledge about the visual and performing arts is certainly more strongly stratified by education and socio-economic status than is the case for more commercialized domains, then we should find that culture talk involving this type of content should also be more highly stratified by status.

Hypothesis 4: *A person's socioeconomic predicts culture-talk frequency in fine arts domains but not in commercial arts domains.*

Recent studies of the consumption of the popular arts, inspired by Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1993)(1993) work on fields of cultural production, has begun to conceive of the popular and commercial arts as equally capable of being the subject of attempts to impose hierarchies of value and taste, the construction of exclusionary canons, and the establishment systems of cultural currency (Baumann, 2007; Frith, 1998; Regev, 2007; Thornton, 1996). Rather than operating according to a logic that is antithetical to that which structures fine arts consumption fields, as presumed by an earlier generation of cultural studies, the realm of commercial culture production and consumption comes to be structured according to hierarchies of perception and evaluation that are premised upon categories of perception and vocabularies of appreciation developed in autonomous fields of cultural production to the products of the culture industry. In this respect, "artistic hierarchies, which rank producers according to their aesthetic or expressive value...are becoming a central structuring force in a growing number of fields of production" including that of rock and roll, a quintessential instance of the commercial arts (Regev, 1994, p. 98).

More recently, other scholars have begun to extend this analysis of the dynamics whereby other popular culture fields—such as film—come to acquire a hierarchical form modeled on the artistic field (e.g. Allen & Lincoln, 2004). Thus, as Baumann (2007) has argued, certain commercial forms (such as film) have developed an intellectualized vocabulary of appreciation that matches that of their fine arts counterparts. The adoption

of this ideology of autonomous art by producers and gate-keepers of the popular arts mirrors the increasing propensity of (culturally advantaged) consumers of popular culture to adopt a similar stance (Thornton, 1996).

Just like in the fine arts field, where struggles to define artistic value based on what is defined as ‘art’ and ‘not art’ are in play, “a similar use of accumulated knowledge and discriminatory skill is apparent in low cultural forms, and has the same hierarchical effect. Low culture, that is to say, generates its own capital—most obviously perhaps, in those forms...which are organized around exclusiveness, but equally significant for the fans:...of even the most inclusive forms” (Frith, 1998, p. 9). Insofar as the popular arts are subject to this intellectualization process, and insofar as critical gatekeepers develop a language of appreciation and historical canonization, then they will be likely to figure as fadders for culture talk among high-status classes. Thus, in the very same way in which both the commercial and the traditional arts can be appropriated “aesthetically” by members of high status classes (Holt, 1998; Lizardo & Skiles, 2012), we should find that high status groups are equal opportunity culture talkers across domains:

Hypothesis 5: *A person’s socioeconomic status predicts culture-talk frequency across all cultural domains.*

If culture talk is spurred by the extent to which a person is familiar with intellectualized discourses of cultural appreciation, then we should also expect that there should exist predictable *asymmetries* in the extent to which the consumption of fine arts spurs cultural talk in commercial domains as opposed to the reverse. More specifically, we should find that the consumption of the fine arts (as an index of familiarity with the discursive conventions of the art field) should be a good predictor of culture talk in so-called commercial domains as the consumption of commercial art, but not vice versa. That is, fine arts consumers should be as (or more) likely to engage in culture talk in commercial domains, but commercial arts consumers should be less likely than fine arts

consumers to engage in culture talk in fine arts domains.

Hypothesis 6: *A person's fine arts consumption is a better predictor of culture talk across both commercial and fine arts domains than commercial arts consumption.*

4 Data and variables

4.1 Data source

In the analysis that follows, I consider data obtained from the Arts and Culture Supplement to the National Social Survey fielded in 2002 ($N=1,002$) and 2004 ($N=801$) (Miringoff, Miringoff, Opdycke, & Hoynes, 2016). The NSS is a weighted (by age, education, marital status, gender, race, ethnicity) probability sample of respondents residing in the United States collected through computer-aided telephone interviews. The NSS is particularly appropriate for my purposes because both waves contain information not only about culture consumption experiences, but also about the likelihood that individuals engage in informal social interaction featuring cultural content taken from consumption in the same domains. Because the items of interest were fielded in both waves, I pool individuals for which I have complete data on all socio-demographic variables from the 2002 ($N=1002$) and 2004 ($N=801$) surveys.

4.2 Outcome variables

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to report (during the past twelve months), “approximately how often have you had a discussion with someone you know” about (1) a movie, (2) a musical performance, live or recorded, (3) a book, a poem or a story, (4) an art show or a work of art, and (5) a play or other dramatic performance. Respondents were asked to choose from the following response categories: 1) very often, 2) fairly often, 3) not very often, 4) or not at all. These are the main empirical indicators of culture talk and thus will serve as the response variables in the analyses that follow.

4.3 Main predictors

4.3.1 *Indicators of culture consumption frequency*

Respondents were also asked to report how often (in the last year) they had been to the movies, listened to recorded music at home, read a book, had gone to an art show or a museum, or had gone to any live performances. Because I am interested in accounting for residual socio-demographic differences in culture talk net of consumption, I adjust for consumption frequency in the analysis. Respondents were asked to choose from the following response categories: 1) very often, 2) fairly often, 3) not very often, 4) or not at all.³

4.3.2 *Indicators of socioeconomic status*

I was limited by the availability of socio-demographic indicators in the survey: for instance, the NSS contains no information on respondent's current occupation or family background, both of which are theoretically relevant dimensions of social differentiation. The main indicator of socio-economic status, as indicated above, is educational attainment and, secondarily, family income. The education variable is coded as five ordered categories (from high-school dropout to graduate or professional degree) and the income variable is coded in six ordered categories (from less than 20K a year to 100K or more).⁴

³ How does the NSS compare to other Arts participation Surveys? When it comes to book reading, the 2002 NSS estimates that about 55.7% of respondents report reading books "Fairly Often" or "Very Often." The corresponding estimate for the 2002 SPPA (Survey for Public Participation in the Arts) is about 58%. When it comes to going to an art museum, about 12% of NSS respondents report going "Fairly Often" and about 3.7% of respondents report going "Very Often"; these correspond well with SPPA 2002 data based on more specific questions on attendance frequencies: 13.4% of SPPA respondents report having gone to the museum between 2 and 5 times in the last year, and 3.2% report having gone more than five times. In the NSS, about 9% of respondents report going to a live performance "Very Often." In the 2002 SPPA about 7.3% of respondents report having gone out to a Jazz, Classical, Opera, Musical, Ballet or Dance performance between 2 and 5 times in the last year. In all, the NSS appears to do a good job of capturing rates of arts participation that are comparable to that obtained from other National Surveys.

⁴ Family income information was not available for about one fifth of the cases (20.8%) across the two

4.4 Additional predictors

I also use the following vector of socio-demographic covariates: (1) respondent's age (in seven ordered categories), (2) respondent's gender, and (3) urban Location (urban versus other location).⁵ Descriptive statistics corresponding to each of the predictor variables included in the models are presented in Table 1. For the sake of efficiency, simplicity, and to achieve comparability in the magnitude of the effects across the different types of predictors in the presentation of the results, I enter all of the ordered categorical predictors as linear inputs (summarizing the effect of education, for instance, in a single coefficient rather than $(K-1)$ indicator variables, where K is the number of ordered categories). This linearity constraint results in some loss of information, but the substantive story remains the same even when the linearity constraint is relaxed and predictors enter as unordered categorical inputs (results available on request). To facilitate comparison of the magnitude of the effects across inputs, I standardized each of the predictors by subtracting the mean and dividing by *two times* the standard deviation as recommended by Gelman (2008). This makes the interpretation of the (ordered categorical) numeric predictors such as education, income, and age straightforward: the coefficient estimate indicates the effect of moving from the lowest to the highest value, while the binary predictors (gender, urban and marital status) retain their usual interpretation.

4.5 Analytic strategy

survey waves. For these cases (N=375) I imputed their income using the regression-based imputation procedure in Stata 11. Essentially this involves using an ordered probit model to predict the missing income values using all remaining socio-demographic information for that respondent (e.g. education, age, marital status and selected interactions).

⁵ I experimented with models that included a vector of dummy variables coding for race/ethnic identification and marital status. These variables had for the most part non-statistically significant effects in all of the equations. To avoid over-parameterizing the models and for the sake of parsimony, I excluded these variables from the presentation of the results. Tables showing the coefficient estimates and t -statistics for these variables are available upon request.

4.5.1 The additive model

As noted above, one obvious answer to the question of the socio-demographic structuration of culture talk suggests that this outcome should be most strongly predicted by culture-consumption. Insofar as it is direct experiences with cultural goods and performances that come to serve as the source of the available content for culture talk we should expect that individuals who are active culture consumers should also evince a higher propensity to engage in culture talk. However, my main interest is status-linked differences in culture talk propensity that are not directly traceable to diversity in consumption behavior. Thus, I specify an ordered probit model (J. S. Long & Freese, 2006) holding constant self-reported consumption frequency, in order to ascertain whether there is residual variation across status groups in culture talk propensity *within-levels* of self-reported consumption. This model takes the form:

$$E(P[Y_{it} \leq j]) = \alpha_j + \gamma_t E_i + \delta_t C_{it} + \sum \beta_k X_{ik} \quad (1)$$

Where Y_{it} is the frequency of culture talk for individual i in cultural domain t , E_i is the educational attainment (or family income) of that person, and C_{it} is the self-reported consumption frequency for each individual in that domain. The effect of these last predictor is expected to be large and positive ($\delta > 0$). Finally, B_k is an $i \times k$ vector of coefficient estimates corresponding to the effect of the other predictors included in the model (X_{ik}). I refer to this specification as the *additive model*. If there is residual variation linked to socioeconomic status in culture talk then we should expect that $\gamma > 0$, even after adjusting for self-reported consumption frequency.

4.5.2 The multiplicative model

Alternatively, we may expect that the status effect should itself vary according to the level of self-reported consumption. This would be the case, for instance, if persons of high socioeconomic status engage in culture talk at higher rates than persons of low-education even when they consume culture at the same rates. I examine the validity of this hypothesis by specifying a model of the form:

$$E(P[Y_{it} \leq j]) = \alpha_j + \gamma_t E_i + \sum_{m=2}^4 \delta_{mt} C_{imt} + \sum_{m=2}^4 \delta_{mt} C_{imt} E_i + \sum \beta_k X_{ik} \quad (2)$$

This is the *multiplicative* model. In this model I enter the frequency of consumption as (4 - 1 = 3) binary indicators (C_{im}) and interact each with the socioeconomic status variable (E_i). As Ai and Norton (2003), have noted, the empirical validity of hypothesis 2—which says that the effect of education varies across self-reported consumption status—cannot be verified simply by looking at the t -statistics corresponding to each of the multiplicative effects. This is due to the fact that in non-linear (e.g. logit or probit) models actual interaction effects may be present even if the t -statistic for the multiplicative terms is smaller than the conventional level (e.g. 1.96) corresponding to a “statistically significant” effect at $p = 0.05$. To deal with this issue, after estimating the model, I compute the *marginal effect* of moving from the lowest to the highest education level on the probability of engaging in culture talk “very often.” I then plot the corresponding point estimate and 90% confidence interval across groups of respondents defined by self-reported frequency levels. The presence of a statistically discernible upward trend in the marginal effects estimates would constitute positive evidence of the expected interaction between status and frequency of consumption for that domain. I estimated five ordered probit models

(one for each cultural domain available) of the additive and multiplicative form with the culture talk indicator as the response variable, the frequency of consumption for that cultural domain and the two indicators of socioeconomic status (family income and education) as the key predictors, and a series of socio-demographic variables as the additional predictors.

5 Results

5.1 Status-linked differences in the frequency of culture-talk

Hypothesis 1 proposes that a person's socio-economic status should predict culture talk even after adjusting for participation frequency. To test this hypothesis, I specified an additive model (equation 1) predicting culture talk while adjusting for self-reported frequency of consumption. Table 1 shows the point estimates and associated t -statistics corresponding for each of the predictors from these models. The results are consistent with this hypothesis. Looking at the effect of education, I find that there exist strong levels of status-linked heterogeneity in culture-talk even after holding constant self-reported consumption behavior ($p < 0.01$).⁶ Persons who have attained advanced educational qualifications are more likely to engage in culture talk featuring popular culture and the arts as content than persons who have not, within levels of self-reported participation frequency. Family income also predicts culture talk net of education and consumption frequency, although it is only statistically significant in three of the five cultural domains. In all these, results provide strong evidence for the proposition linking culture talk to social position within levels of same-domain culture consumption.

⁶ For those interested in whether culture consumption is predicted by the same factors as culture talk, table 4 in the appendix shows the results of models with consumption frequency as the main outcome across all five domains, with the same set of sociodemographic predictors.

Table 1: Coefficient Estimates for Predictors of Expected Frequency of Culture-Talk, Ordered Probit Estimates, 2002, 2004 NSS.

	<i>Movies</i>	<i>Music</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Arts</i>	<i>Plays</i>
Education (centered)	0.26*	0.33*	0.28*	0.22*	0.25*
	(4.80)	(5.97)	(4.99)	(3.63)	(4.35)
Family Income (centered)	0.08	0.17*	0.10*	0.07	0.18*
	(1.48)	(3.14)	(1.91)	(1.18)	(3.19)
Age (centered)	-0.45*	-0.27*	-0.25*	-0.16*	-0.16*
	(-8.11)	(-5.18)	(-4.72)	(-2.86)	(-3.03)
Gender (Woman=1)	0.23*	0.06	0.33*	0.19*	0.27*
	(4.32)	(1.07)	(6.18)	(3.42)	(5.12)
Urban Location (Yes=1)	0.05	0.19*	0.10*	0.08	0.23*
	(0.95)	(3.62)	(1.92)	(1.46)	(4.22)
Consumption Freq.	1.04*	0.62*	1.08*	1.28*	1.05*
	(17.39)	(11.29)	(19.09)	(21.60)	(18.39)
τ_1	-1.15*	-0.70*	-0.91*	-0.13*	-0.36*
	(-28.94)	(-21.11)	(-24.97)	(-4.17)	(-11.26)
τ_2	-0.31*	0.13*	-0.04	1.05*	0.76*
	(-9.55)	(4.16)	(-1.22)	(27.10)	(21.69)
τ_3	0.71*	1.00*	0.79*	1.85*	1.61*
	(20.83)	(27.65)	(22.80)	(34.03)	(34.03)
N	1791	1795	1792	1790	1793
BIC	4367.4	4724.7	4498.9	3634.9	4052.3
Model χ^2	568.7	266.4	529.5	609.6	517.8

Hypothesis 2 states that not all indicators of socioeconomic status are created equal when it comes to predicting culture talk. Instead, we should find that indicators of socioeconomic status closer to the cultural capital pole, such as education, are better predictors of culture talk than dimensions of socioeconomic status associated with economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). To test this hypothesis, I proceed in two steps. First, I

specify a model that constrains the coefficient estimates for education and family income to be the same and compare their fit (using Wald's likelihood ratio criterion) to a model in which they are allowed to vary freely for each of the five cultural domains. The results provide partial support for this hypothesis. We can reject the hypothesis that the magnitude of the coefficient estimates for education and income is the same for both Movies and Books ($p < 0.05$), reject it at a borderline level for Music ($p = 0.07$) and fail to reject for the fine art domains of Plays and Art, where the substantive magnitude of the income effect seems to rival the effect of education as a predictor of culture talk.

The likelihood ratio test is based only on the statistical significance of the coefficient estimates. A complementary test of hypothesis 2 directly compares the effect *sizes* of the two competing predictors. To that end, I compute the marginal effects of income and education from the models specified earlier. As noted above, the marginal effect is the shift in probability in the dependent variable for a unit change in the independent variable (which, given the standardization procedure I followed, is a shift from the lowest to the highest value). These results are plotted in Figure 1. The results provide even stronger support for hypothesis 2. Education matters more in a substantive sense than income for four out of five outcomes, with Plays being the only exception.

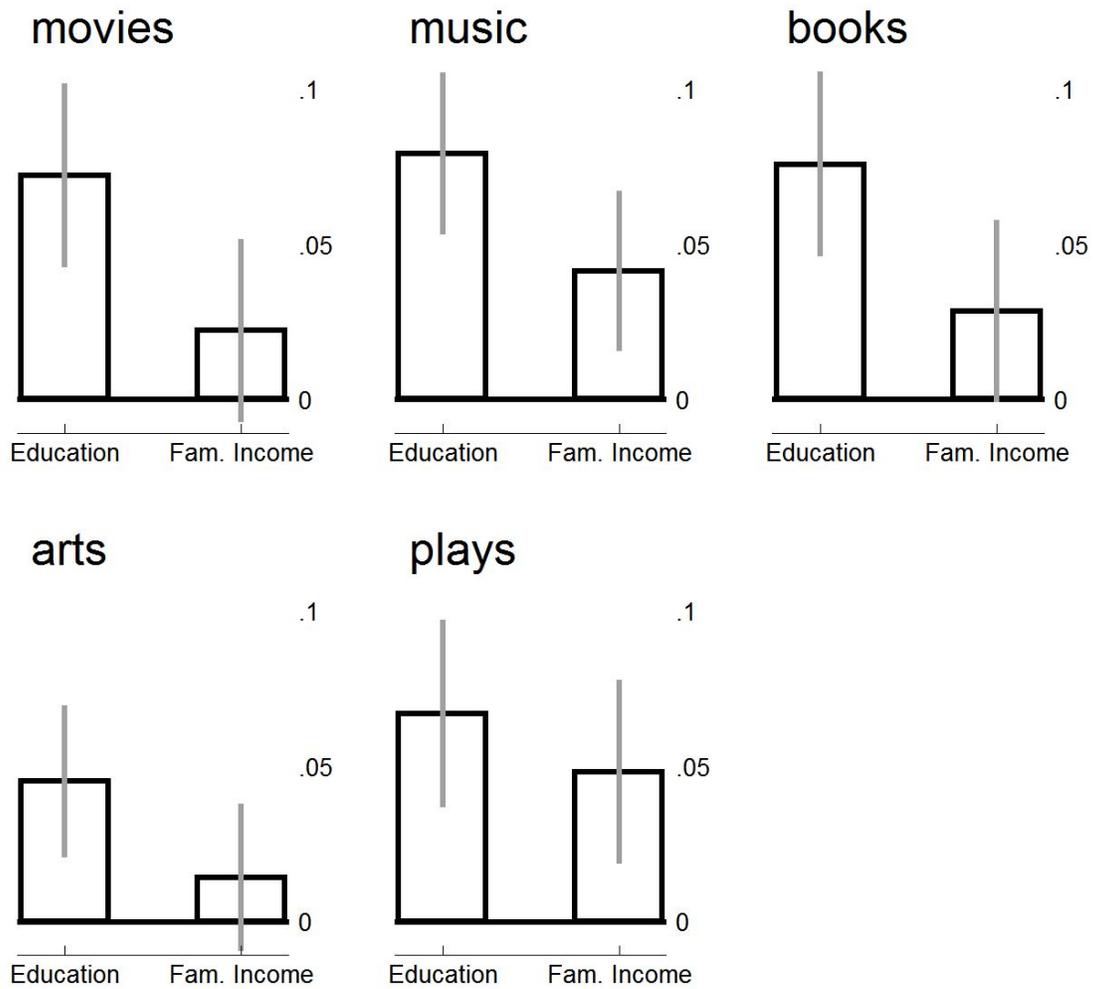


Figure 1: Marginal effects of (ordinal) standardized income and education predictors of the probability of frequent culture-talk.

5.2 Heterogeneity of socioeconomic status effects by levels of engagement

Hypothesis 3 proposes that indicators of socioeconomic status are better predictors of culture talk among consumers who are most actively engaged in culture consumption. To test this hypothesis I specify a multiplicative version of the specification shown in table 1 for all five outcomes (equation 2). In this model, the effect of socioeconomic status is allowed to vary freely by levels of culture consumption. I select

education as the main indicator of socioeconomic status for this test, since as we saw earlier, this is a more consistent predictor of the outcome. How does the additive model compare to the multiplicative specification? Figure 1 shows the marginal effect of education on the probability of engaging in frequent culture consumption (defined slightly different for commercial and fine arts activities) for respondents partitioned according to the levels of self-reported engagement in that domain. Because education is standardized by dividing by two times the standard deviation (Gelman 2008), the marginal effect here essentially refers to the shift in the probability of frequent culture talk as we move from the lowest to the highest level of educational credentials. As discussed earlier, the strength of the multiplicative interaction between education and consumption can be gauged by the extent to which we observe any trends in the marginal effect estimate as we move up from less frequent to more frequent engagement patterns.

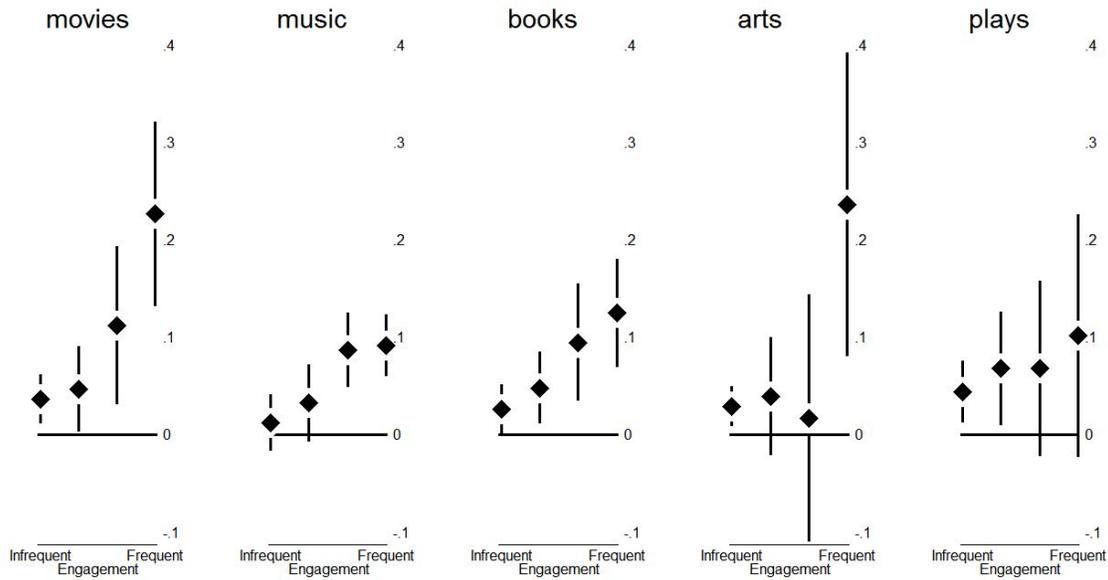


Figure 2: Marginal effects of education on the probability of engaging in culture talk “very often” (for movies, music and books) and either “very or fairly often” (for arts and plays) by levels of cultural engagement in each domain, 2002 and 2004 NSS.

The results provide fairly strong levels of support for hypothesis 3. Upward trends in the marginal effect of education on frequent levels of culture talk are strong and clear in film book-reading, and to a lesser extent music. They are much weaker in the case of dramatic performances.⁷ In the case of the visual arts, I simply find a categorical distinction between the most active participants and everybody else, with education-based differentiation in culture talk being strong for the former group and non-existent for the latter. In all, these results provide fairly broad support for the hypothesis that status linked differences in culture talk are much stronger for the most active culture consumers.

3.3 Heterogeneity of socioeconomic status effects across cultural domains

Hypothesis 4 predicts that status-based differentiation should be stronger for the

⁷ In this test, I define “frequent” as choosing very often for Movies, Music, and Books and choosing either “fairly often” or “very often” for Arts and Plays, to allow for more or less comparable probabilities across domains.

traditional high-status cultural domains, while hypothesis 5 predicts that we should find status-based differentiation in all domains. Estimates of the income and education effects plotted in Figure 1 can help us adjudicate between these competing predictions. If we take education as the relevant dimension of socioeconomic status, it is clear that hypothesis 5 is on the right track: Highly educated respondents are more likely to engage in culture talk across all cultural domains. This pattern of results supports hypothesis 5 and contradicts the status differentiation argument expressed in hypothesis 4. However, if we take income as the socioeconomic status dimension of interest, then it seems that hypothesis 4 receives some (equivocal) support, as income predicts culture talk with regards to Plays but fails to predict talk in other cultural domains (with the exception of music). However, given the fact that education is in fact the strongest and most consistent predictor, it seems like hypothesis 5, suggesting that all fields are subject to a logic of “intellectualization” conducive to culture talk is the most likely candidate.

3.4 Culture talk differences across commercial and fine arts audiences

Hypothesis 6 predicts that fine arts consumption is a better predictor of culture talk across domains than is engagement with the commercial arts. In order to test this hypothesis, I proceed in two steps. First, I create two variables designed to tap the relative likelihood of each respondent to engage in the commercial and fine arts. These variables come from a principal factor analysis of the five consumption frequency items, in which I retain only the two main factors (those with an eigenvalue larger than 0.9).⁸ I use a promax rotation to allow the factors to be correlated with one another. The factor loadings for the first two principal factors are shown in Table 3. Factor loadings conform

⁸ At the suggestion of an anonymous reader, I also estimated models predicting culture talk across all five domains using an overall (the first unrotated factor from a principal factor analysis) score tapping general consumption propensities across domains. The results are shown in Table 5 of the appendix. The key results in this specification are that, not surprisingly, the overall consumption score is a better predictor of culture talk than the domain-specific one and that a good portion (but not all, with the exception of music) of the effect of socioeconomic status on culture talk is mediated via the generalized propensity to engage culture across domains.

to our a priori classification of cultural domains: reading, visiting museums and galleries and attending the theater load on a common factor, while going to the movies and listening to the music load on a second factor. I use the regression-based scores from these two factors are taken as indicators of the relative likelihood to engage the fine and commercial arts respectively for each individual.

Table 2: Loadings for each of the five culture consumption items on first two factors, principal factor analysis with promax rotation.

	<i>Factor 1</i>	<i>Factor 2</i>	
Read Books (for Pleasure)	0.637	-0.239	0.610
Go to Museums/Galleries	0.783	-0.105	0.415
Go to Live Performances	0.650	0.264	0.426
Listen to Music	-0.091	0.882	0.252
Go to Movies	0.389	0.458	0.553

In a second step, I introduce these two variables as predictors of culture talk in an ordered probit model that adjusts for the same variables as those shown in table 1. The coefficient estimates for these models are shown in table 4 (I omit the presentation of the other predictors for the sake of economy). To test the hypothesis that fine arts consumption is a better predictor of culture talk than commercial arts consumption across all domains, I estimate a constrained model that restricts these two coefficients to be the same. I then use a likelihood ratio test to check whether there is a significant loss of model fit in comparison to the unconstrained model. The results provide strong support for hypothesis 6. Across all domains except for film, being a fine arts consumer is a better predictor of culture talk ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3: Coefficient Estimates for Selected Predictors of Expected Frequency of Culture-Talk, Ordered Probit Estimates, 2002, 2004 NSS.

	<i>Movies</i>	<i>Music</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Arts</i>	<i>Plays</i>
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Fine Arts Factor	0.24*	0.47*	0.30*	0.36*	0.52*
	(7.44)	(15.47)	(8.15)	(7.80)	(12.67)
Commercial Arts Factor	0.18*	0.26*	0.17*	0.04	0.11*
	(5.60)	(4.72)	(5.48)	(1.42)	(3.41)
N	1780	1779	1778	1780	1781
BIC	4263.1	4385.8	4341.5	3553.7	3875.0
Model χ^2	653.4	577.8	663.0	684.7	681.8

4 Discussion

4.1 Summary of the argument and findings

This paper furthers current understandings of the mechanisms connecting culture and status group stratification by bringing attention to the socio-demographic correlates of an important phenomenon. The literature on culture stratification has been primarily focused on the question of the determinants of lifestyle consumption patterns, with a view to establishing whether there still exists a correlation between cultural choices and social position. This one-sided concern has led to the neglect of an equally important question: that of the behavioral implications of familiarity and engagement with the arts. In this respect current research has generally failed to consider the existence of stratification-linked differences in the extent to which cultural knowledge is differentially “put to use” by members of different social strata as a resource for interaction.

To shed light on these issues, I synthesized insights from classical theoretical sources in the culture and stratification literature, the connection between culture and integration into Simmelian social circles, Simmel’s account of culture and sociability, and recent empirical and conceptual advances in our thinking of the relationship between culture and social networks. I argued that one of the most important behavioral implications of familiarity with culture and the arts is its role as the type of content that is useful for the generation of conversational interaction; in short, culture talk. This is a phenomenon that deserves as much empirical and theoretical attention the “patterns of

cultural choice” that have traditionally monopolized the attention of culture and stratification researchers.

This paper contributes to the study of culture and stratification in several ways: analytically, I developed a framework that partially meets my self-imposed challenge by highlighting the theoretical and empirical importance of the culture talk phenomenon. I began with the Simmelian legacy on the importance of seemingly “purposeless” (non-instrumental and non-goal-oriented) conversational content for the emergence of “sociability” (or the “play form” of association) and connected it to the more contemporary stress by cultural stratification theorists on “entertainment talk” as the cement that holds status groups together as micro-relational communities of acquaintance and informal membership (Collins, 2009; DiMaggio, 1987)

Second, I advance research in the now well-established literature linking taste, lifestyle consumption and stratification. I do this by examining the socio-demographic structuring of culture talk as a constitutive component of lifestyle-based stratification in contemporary societies. The results show that, consistent with prior theory in cultural stratification, culture talk is stratified by the same markers of social position and status that previous research has shown also characterize audience segmentation in the corresponding cultural domains. More specifically, I show that culture talk in all domains—whether commercial or the fine arts—is stratified by education, income, age and gender, and to some extent urban location net of self-reported engagement in those domains. Those individuals endowed with larger stocks of cultural and economic capital are more likely to routinely engage in culture talk, the young are more likely to engage in culture talk than the old, women are more likely to engage in culture talk than men, and urbanites (in some domains) are more likely to engage in culture talk than their suburbanite/rural-dwellers counterparts.

Most importantly, socioeconomic status structures culture talk across all cultural

domains that I examined, but it does so in a way that is structured by the expertise that comes with cultural engagement. This happens in two ways. First, socioeconomic status (especially education) has a much stronger effect on culture talk among those respondents reporting the highest level of engagement in that domain. Second, high levels of engagement in traditional “fine art” domains (such as art museums, galleries, and plays) predicts culture talk across all domains whether traditionally fine arts or commercial arts, suggesting that culture talk is driven by the intellectualization of aesthetic discourse that seems characteristic of an increasing number of culture production and dissemination fields (Allen & Lincoln, 2004; Baumann, 2007; Regev, 2007).

4.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This empirical study is not without its limitations. As noted above, a key limitation of the NSS data source is the lack of information on respondent’s occupation and family background. These are key dimensions of social differentiation that should be, according to the theoretical argument laid out above, clearly linked to variations in both the accumulation of dispositions towards certain forms of culture consumption, and associated tendencies to use culture talk as a conversational resource. For instance, as Lareau (2002, p. 763) notes there continue to exist systematic differences in the use of language between middle and working class homes, with middle class children being exposed to a constant stream of speech since early in life. These children are also encouraged to engage in prolonged conversations about abstract topics pertaining to events outside the home, in which they are encouraged, in contrast to working class children to develop their own “opinions, judgments, and observations.” It is thus very likely that the seeds of the capacity to use culture talk in interaction are rooted in the “domestic” cultural capital fostered in the middle class household (Bourdieu, 1984). Subsequent work on the accumulation dynamics of culture-talk capital should investigate differences in the propensity of culture-talk use by social background. This research may

focus in culture talk propensity differences (both in terms of frequency and content), for instance, between “movers” into high-education strata and “stayers.”

Occupational field should also be linked to systematic differences, both across and within levels of education, in the tendency to use culture talk in interaction. Certain fields, especially those concerned with the abstract manipulation of symbols as well as knowledge and culture production occupations, lend themselves more readily to the recurrent activation of latent capacities for the objectification of cultural works required to engage in culture talk. Thus it is likely that even when considering individuals with the same objective educational qualifications (e.g. a Bachelor’s or a Postgraduate degree) it is likely that depending on the field of specialization (e.g. interior design versus engineering) we should find systematic differences in the relative likelihood that individuals deploy culture talk for purposes of construction, maintenance and reactivation of social relationships. It is also very likely that a good portion of the residual gender effect on cultural talk documented above, may have a lot to do with the concentration of women in certain culture production and other “front-stage” occupational fields in which facility with high-status cultural resources is a precondition for both entry and success. As Erickson (1996) has shown, male dominated industries may actually discourage certain forms of culture consumption (and by implication culture talk), especially concerning certain aesthetic matters that are considered “feminine” pursuits, further contributing to both gender and within-education differences keyed to occupation in the likelihood of observing the deployment of culture-talk in interaction. Future research on culture talk should concentrate on empirical investigating the existence of heterogeneity in culture talk propensity across fine-grained Durkheimian “micro-classes” comprised of distinct occupational groups (Collins, 2009).

Another important limitation of the present study concerns the measurement of the culture-talk outcome itself. The NSS data limits the present study to “broad”

outcomes associated with culture consumption domains (e.g. art, movies, music) but there is no measurement of *within-domain* differences in culture-talk linked to fine-grained (e.g. genre-level) differentiation between different culture consumption activities (e.g. *kinds* of books, musical genres, types of movies, and so on). In addition, there is the issue of the extent to which culture-talk is centered around “cultural goods” traditional conceived (expressive cultural objects and performances) to include other domains such as sports, fashion, and cuisine (cultural domains initially included in DiMaggio 1987). This links up to both empirical issues regarding the existence of similar differentiation dynamics in culture-talk propensity across other “horizontal” axes of difference beyond socioeconomic status and social class as well theoretical issues regarding the conceptual bounds of the notion of culture-talk. For instance, it is clear that *generational* differentiation in both the rate and content of culture-talk is linked to corresponding differentiation in fine-grained categories of engagement with music, literature, and the arts (e.g. Hip Hop and Modern Art versus Classical Music and Impressionist Art) as these become linked to dynamically changing “new” and “old” forms of cultural engagement (Savage & Gayo, 2011).

In terms of the first issue, it is possible to extend the broad argument regarding the pervasiveness and “functional” utility of culture talk for the construction of social relationships to realms of differentiation that go beyond (and cut across) socioeconomic status narrowly defined. For instance, as Carter (2005) has noted Black youth differentiate themselves in terms of their levels of investment in what she refers to as “dominant” and “nondominant” cultural capital. While the former is composed of class differentiated set of cultural signals, linguistic habits, cultural tastes, and practices characteristic of middle class Whites, the latter consist of “identity confirming” tastes and lifestyle practices, speech styles, and sartorial choices (e.g. such as listening to Rap and Hip and Hop) that are seen as strong signals of cultural authenticity and as reaffirming ingroup boundaries.

The most successful minority youth are those who become “cultural straddlers” being able to code-switch between dominant and nondominant styles of self-presentation depending on the situation and institutional setting. It is clear that in this case, culture-talk is deeply involved in the construction and activation of social relationships, but this culture talk will be differentiated by content depending on whether the relationships pertain to relationships with co-ethnic others or with members of the dominant group. In this sense, extending the culture-talk argument to deal with differentiation by race and ethnicity would require information that goes beyond rates of culture talk in broad cultural domains to include more differentiated forms of cultural familiarity.

Theorizing how culture talk plays into the generation of gender-based inequalities would also require going beyond “culture” as traditionally conceived to include realms of cultural engagement that are more explicitly “gendered” in a way that benefits men. It has been traditionally found that there is a female advantage when it comes to the accumulation of explicitly aesthetic cultural resources such as the plastic and performing arts (Christin, 2012) as well as in terms of membership in the “reading class” (E. Long, 2003). However, other forms of cultural practice such as familiarity with and regular engagement with organized sports (especially in the U.S.) continue to be highly gendered in a way that advantages men. Thus, while culture-talk can be deployed in a way that allows persons to function as “bridges” (Schultz and Breiger 2010), it can also be used to build fences and reify gender boundaries (Erickson, 1996). Consistent with this idea, Turco (2010) finds that the experiences of two types of “tokens” in a high status segment of the financial industry (Black Men and Women) is qualitatively different and this difference is keyed to the extent that women are systematically excluded from sites of sociability, homosociality and occupational advancement built around interaction rituals centered on “sports talk.” This type of culture-talk is pervasive in this types of workplaces and sports language, metaphors, and self-conceptions become routinized in insidious

ways. This is a dynamic that has also been uncovered in professional settings less explicitly gendered, such as the retail fashion industry (Purcell, 2013).

In all, this research shows, in line with Erickson (1996) that in certain male-dominated contexts culture-talk with move away from that centered on the “culture industry and their products” (where women’s expertise is equal or exceeds men) to realms of cultural competence in which men are able to showcase higher levels of expertise. The theoretical lesson seems to be that in extending the argument above to other axes of stratification beyond social class and education to include gender, race, age, ethnicity, nationality (and even religion) may require extending the bases of culture talk beyond expertise with the formal and content-based properties of aesthetic goods. Yet, this does not mean that the culture-talk concept has no natural bounds. As noted above, due to the particular exigencies required of the forms of interaction typical of culture (that it be removed from explicit instrumental pursuits) not all domains of experience can serve as its basis. In particular I argued that “ludic” domains, where persons consume objects and experiences in “play form” (up to an included entertainment, the arts, and sports) are the prototypical experiential sites of culture talk (Fiske, 1987).

An empirical implication of this is that most “conversation for enjoyment” (DiMaggio, 1987) should feature content related to these domains as its basis, while the introduction of topics from more serious domains, such as politics, the economy, or religion should actually serve as a deterrent for culture mediated interaction. We should also expect other forms of “particularistic” talk (e.g. that related to experiences circumscribed to a given domain such as family and work) to not be good candidates for culture-talk (and thus to be unlikely to be featured as conversational content across different relationships) for the simple reason that they lack “transposability” and thus can only be used to construct relationships with specific others at a given social site. These are of course all empirical and not purely theoretical questions, and should be the subject of

future research, one that builds on the now non-negligible amount of work demonstrating the cultural, social and institutional potency of the phenomenon (e.g. Long 2003; Rivera 2012; Turco 2010; Purcell 2013).

4.3 Implications for culture and inequality studies

The argument and the results reported in this paper have broader implications contemporary theory on the connection between culture, connectivity and structured inequality (Erickson, 2008). In this respect, the type of routine deployment of cultural knowledge in concrete interaction that I have labeled as culture talk can be thought of as an important “relational mechanism” (Gross, 2009), linking inequalities in the propensity to use aesthetic content as a conversational resource to inequalities in relational outcomes associated to social connectivity and status-based boundaries. These long-standing inequalities in connectivity (both in terms of range and diversity) have been duly noted in the network literature, but have yet to receive a satisfactory treatment. Building on the results reported in this paper, it can be argued that different rates of engagement in culture talk provides a micro-interactional mechanism accounting for the dynamic persistence of cross-group inequalities on the major dimensions of social connectivity.

First, under the proposed account, individuals who have a larger propensity to engage in culture talk should also have an easier time during the *relationship-formation* process (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). This is a plausible micro-mechanism that can help us to account for the existence stubborn status-linked inequalities social capital. For instance, it is well-known that education has been and continues to be one of the best predictors of network size in the United States (DiPrete, Gelman, McCormick, Teitler, & Zheng, 2011; Fischer, 1982; Marsden, 1987)—and other national settings (Mollenhorst, Völker, & Flap, 2011)—today. As we have seen, the higher-educated are also more likely to engage in culture talk than the less-educated (within-levels of consumption), and thus they should also be more likely to routinely use this as an interactional resource to form

new relationships. The same can be said for those socio-demographic groups known to have smaller networks than average such as the less-educated elderly (Cornwell, Laumann, & Schumm, 2008). Culture talk propensities decline with age for this group, consistent with the claim that rates of relationship formation underlie these differences.

Second, persons who belong to socio-demographic groups that exhibit a larger propensity to engage in culture talk should also tend to be embedded in status segregated networks. Social ties that are partially constituted via culture talk retain this property because they are dynamically sustained via conversational meanings and contents access to which is also status-segregated (Collins, 2009), as well as the relationship level meaningful histories built around those culture-mediated interactions (Fine & Kleinman, 1983). In this respect, differential rates of culture talk across socio-demographic groups emerge as a plausible mechanism that accounts for the existence of status-segregated social networks even in the absence of any strictly conscious attempt on the part of individuals to select status-homogamous contacts.

Third, it is well-established that the social-networks of Americans are characterized by high-rates of status-endogamy specially premised on race and education (DiPrete et al., 2011), and that marital homogamy premised on education and income has increased at the expense of marital endogamy premised on other axes of difference (Kalmijn, 1994). Persons who belong to high-education or high-income groups are also more likely to engage in culture talk than the less-educated (within-levels of consumption). Following the same line of reasoning, they should also be expected to be more likely to routinely use this as an interactional resource to recurrently recreate status-segregated conversational rituals (Collins, 2004).

Finally, those individuals who have a more pronounced propensity to engage in culture talk should also tend to be more likely to bridge structural and “cultural holes” (Lizardo, 2014; Pachucki & Breiger, 2010). This is a phenomenon that has been referred

by Schultz and Breiger (2010) as the “strength of weak culture.” Status-linked inequalities in culture talk propensities can thus be proposed as a mechanism that explains the often noted fact that high-status individuals are more likely to be connected to a more diverse pool of others than low status individuals (DiPrete et al., 2011; Erickson, 1996; Marsden, 1987). With persons of high education and/or high-income more likely to engage in culture talk than the less-educated, it stands to reason that they should also be able to—in some settings (Purcell, 2013)—use this cultural expertise to make sporadic connections across group and status boundaries.

While the validity and scope of these hypotheses remains to be more fully explored, the results reported in this paper—along with convergent evidence from other sources (Rivera, 2012; Schultz & Breiger, 2010; Turco, 2010)—strongly point in this direction, suggesting exciting prospects for future research in this area. In this manner, a focus on the culture talk phenomenon can serve to cross-fertilize research in the culture and stratification literature and the sociology of taste with research on inequalities in network access and social capital.

Appendix

Table 4: Coefficient Estimates for Predictors of Frequency of Cultural Participation, Ordered Probit Estimates, 2002, 2004 NSS.

	<i>Movies</i>	<i>Music</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Arts</i>	<i>Plays</i>
Education (centered)	0.25*	0.09	0.36*	0.59*	0.43*
	(4.51)	(1.52)	(6.58)	(9.83)	(7.76)
Family Income (centered)	0.28*	-0.01	0.05	0.21*	0.24*
	(5.18)	(-0.14)	(0.99)	(3.54)	(4.46)
Age (centered)	-0.77*	-0.60*	0.10*	-0.10*	-0.22*
	(-14.34)	(-9.76)	(1.87)	(-1.73)	(-4.23)
Gender (Woman=1)	0.12*	0.17*	0.36*	0.10*	0.04
	(2.37)	(3.02)	(6.93)	(1.79)	(0.70)
Urban Location (Yes=1)	0.23*	0.04	0.10*	0.18*	0.23*
	(4.44)	(0.64)	(1.87)	(3.14)	(4.30)
.					
τ_1	-0.51*	-1.70*	-0.90*	0.14*	-0.34*
	(-15.87)	(-33.37)	(-25.89)	(4.47)	(-10.91)
τ_2	0.59*	-0.99*	-0.18*	1.08*	0.60*
	(18.26)	(-27.46)	(-6.08)	(28.92)	(18.68)
τ_3	1.33*	-0.36*	0.43*	1.88*	1.40*
	(32.33)	(-11.77)	(13.95)	(33.17)	(32.90)
N	1792	1798	1795	1792	1794
BIC	4401.5	3603.4	4847.0	3715.8	4472.5
Model χ^2	280.5	106.5	108.9	163.8	150.2

Table 5: Predicting Culture Talk Frequency Using Overall Consumption Factor Score.

	<i>Movies</i>	<i>Music</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Arts</i>	<i>Plays</i>
Consumption Factor Score	0.67*	0.86*	0.69*	0.84*	0.94*
	(16.29)	(20.33)	(16.88)	(19.46)	(21.59)
Education (centered)	0.12*	0.08	0.19*	0.22*	0.14*
	(2.15)	(1.38)	(3.33)	(3.62)	(2.38)
Family Income (centered)	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.13*
	(1.06)	(0.62)	(0.22)	(0.40)	(2.26)
Age (centered)	-0.60*	-0.21*	-0.00	0.04	-0.00
	(-10.89)	(-3.83)	(-0.03)	(0.69)	(-0.08)
Gender (Woman=1)	0.20*	-0.00	0.41*	0.13*	0.20*
	(3.76)	(-0.04)	(7.82)	(2.41)	(3.71)
Urban Location (Yes=1)	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.19*
	(0.61)	(1.22)	(0.61)	(0.59)	(3.46)
.					
τ_1	-1.14*	-0.79*	-0.89*	-0.10*	-0.39*
	(-28.79)	(-22.24)	(-24.56)	(-3.25)	(-11.64)
τ_2	-0.31*	0.14*	-0.04	1.03*	0.80*
	(-9.51)	(4.40)	(-1.18)	(27.11)	(22.12)
τ_3	0.71*	1.10*	0.77*	1.79*	1.69*
	(20.68)	(28.57)	(22.35)	(34.17)	(34.36)
N	1780	1779	1778	1780	1781
BIC	4368.1	4378.9	4537.2	3700.7	3875.0
Model χ^2	533.4	569.7	452.3	522.8	666.8

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for predictor, control, and outcome variables included in the analyses.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Consumption Freq. (Books)	2.72	1.13	1	4
Consumption Freq. (Art)	1.65	0.83	1	4
Consumption Freq. (Plays)	2.01	0.97	1	4
Cult. Consumption (Music)	3.41	0.89	1	4
Consumption Freq. (Movies)	2.09	0.97	1	4
Cult. Talk (Movies)	2.72	1.05	1	4
Cult. Talk (Books)	2.55	1.10	1	4
Cult. Talk (Plays)	1.98	0.95	1	4
Cult. Talk (Art)	1.80	0.91	1	4
Cult. Talk (Music)	2.38	1.05	1	4
Respondent's Educ.	4.04	1.21	1	6
Family Income	3.35	1.78	1	6
Respondent's Age	4.58	2.02	1	7
Gender (Woman = 1)	0.50	0.50	0	1
Urban Location	0.60	0.49	0	1
Observations	1774			

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