

The Puzzle of Women's "Highbrow" Culture
Consumption: Integrating Gender and Work into
Bourdieu's Class Theory of Taste

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Abstract

The fact that women are more likely than men to participate in traditional high status leisure activities constitutes one of the most consistent findings in the empirical study of cultural choice. Most explanations of this phenomenon point to the role of early socialization and society-wide cultural norms, but surprisingly, the more proximate influence of labor force participation and embeddedness in gendered occupational cultures has not been empirically explored. In this paper I fill this gap in the cultural participation and gender literature by asking whether extent of involvement in the labor force mediates the gender gap in highbrow consumption. I follow Erickson (1996) in considering the relative usefulness of arts-related culture at work as an important determinant of individual taste patterns. Further, I show how Bourdieu's own theory of class fractions is compatible with Erickson's emphasis on highbrow devaluation as a byproduct of the pragmatism of workplace "business culture". In tandem with an eye toward gender dynamics, this modified Erickson-Bourdieu perspective can then be used to solve the puzzle of the gender difference in highbrow consumption.

1 Introduction

A recurrent puzzle in the empirical study of culture consumption has to do with the reasons why women participate in traditionally “highbrow” cultural activities to a larger extent than men do (Bihagen 1999, Bihagen and Katz-Gerro 2000, DiMaggio and Mohr 1995, Katz-Gerro and Sullivan 2004, Tepper 2000). While several theories have been proposed in order to explain this phenomenon, most of these approaches point exclusively to factors related to gender-differential patterns of socialization in adolescence (i.e. Mohr and DiMaggio 1995, Dumais 2002, Kracman 1999) or society-wide cultural norms that define the realm of highbrow cultural participation as a feminine realm (Katz-Gerro and Sullivan 2004, Bihagen and Katz-Gerro 2000, Bourdieu 1984: 55, 107, Collins 1992, DiMaggio and Mohr 1995). In this paper I explore a different avenue of explanation by focusing on the role of workforce participation and differences in occupational cultures (Bourdieu 1984, Grusky and Weeden 2002, Weeden and Grusky 2005) in modulating the disparities in highbrow cultural choice between men and women.

Why focus on employment? The employment sphere is one of the most important realms of social activity in modern industrial societies and integration into occupational groups has become one of the most important source of cleavages therein (Bourdieu 1984, Grusky and Sorensen 1998, Grusky and Weeden 2002, Weeden and Grusky 2005). However it has been for the most part ignored in theoretical and empirical accounts of gender differences in the consumption of highbrow cultural goods (but see Bihagen and Katz-Gerro 2000 for an exception). This is somewhat surprising given that entrance into the labor force has been shown to affect a variety of substantive outcomes in areas of social life where gendered interactional and cultural dynamics come into play (Acker 1990, England 1992, Kanter 1977, Ridgeway 1997, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 2001). These include gender role attitudes (Plutzer 1988), marital stability (South 2001), family commitment

(Bielby and Bielby 1989) and the timing of entry into marriage (Blossfeld and Johannes 1991) among others. Consequently, it is reasonable to consider labor force participation as an important factor that may mediate the differential involvement of men and women in the highbrow culture field.

In this paper, I attempt to tackle the question of the sources of persistent gender differences in highbrow consumption in adulthood by drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Bonnie Erickson and Randall Collins. I follow Erickson (1996) in concretizing Bourdieu's class theory by connecting to the ways that class and culture interact *at work* and on the incompatibility between highbrow culture and the pragmatism of market oriented business culture. However, in contrast to Erickson, who rejects Bourdieu's class-based theory of taste *in toto*, I show how a modified version of Bourdieu's theory of class fractions, one that is attentive to the intensification of gendered dynamics at work as occupational fields come to be dominated by the logic of economic capital, can allow us to isolate and predict the structural conditions under which gender will be an important factor in helping to understand the structural conditions that facilitate the consumption of highbrow culture. This serves to generalize Erickson's notion of the incompatibility between arts-related cultural capital and market orientation (the *highbrow devaluation* argument) as a special case of Bourdieu's account of the heteronomy of the market in relation to the autonomy of aesthetic production and consumption (Bourdieu 1980).

The primary empirical contribution of this paper revolves around the demonstration that -at least in the United States- there is no such thing as "the" gender gap in highbrow culture consumption, but that this gender difference only applies to those individuals who are active in the labor force. Among individuals who are not in the labor force (students, housekeepers, and retired people) the gender gap that can be detected is dramatically attenuated in comparison to individuals who spent the larger part of their everyday life at work. Further, I show how the gender-differentiating effect of labor force participation is not a constant, but is itself mediated by dynamics

described in Bourdieu's original theory of class-based *habitus* and lifestyle: as we move across the "second dimension" of Bourdieu's class scheme (that which divides occupational groups relatively rich in cultural capital from those with a relative imbalance of economic capital) the gender differentiation in highbrow consumption habits becomes more pronounced as a result of the higher propensity of individuals employed in economic capital-dominated fields to forgo engagement with this type of culture. This is the process originally described in Erickson's account as a general feature of "business culture". However, in this paper I show that this "highbrow devaluation" process is more pronounced for men than for women, as a result (I argue) of men's higher integration into the "heteronomous" market oriented culture and informal social networks of these occupations. In this way I am able to shed light on the puzzle of women's highbrow cultural involvement, while specifying the settings in which Bourdieu's taste theory can do useful explanatory work.

2 Gender and Patterns of Cultural Choice

2.1 Highbrow Culture, Gender and Work

There have been some scattered attempts to explain the gender difference in highbrow culture consumption by pointing to factors related to embeddedness in certain occupational sectors and by reference to cleavages related to labor market experience. DiMaggio (2003: 100) speaking of the structural incentives for women to accumulate higher levels of cultural capital than men, points to "the migration of middle-class women into the labor force in the US [and other economically advantaged societies]" as a factor that should "to some extent alter these incentives and induce change in the distribution of cultural capital between the genders."

Tepper (2000) has investigated the role of employment status in modulating persistent gender differences in fiction reading in the U.S. Reasoning that women who work part time or who

do not work outside the home will have more free leisure time to spend reading, he predicts that women who are employed full-time outside the home will tend to consume less fiction literature than women who are not employed full time (what Bihagen and Katz-Gerro deem the “constraint” argument). Furthermore, Tepper notes that working full-time might be an indicator of non-traditional gender socialization and values rather than constraint, and that since fiction reading is a traditionally “feminine” activity (in the separate spheres ideology that developed in late nineteenth century Victorian England and that continued to shape gender differential patterns of arts participation as late as the mid 1960s in the U.S. [Mohr and DiMaggio 1995]) then we should expect that for women, working full-time in traditionally “feminine” occupations should depress fiction reading less than working in traditionally “male” occupations. Tepper (2000: 272) finds that being a full-time worker has a slight negative impact on the odds of being a fiction reader for women (and slightly reduces the gender gap), but that for the most part “...the negative effects of working full-time on fiction reading were limited to only those jobs that would be considered gender-neutral or male occupations. Working full-time in female occupations, like nursing and teaching, is not associated with lower levels of fiction reading.” Therefore a self-selection (with more traditional gender typical women preferring to work in traditionally female fields) effect seems to be more consistent with the findings than a pure “constraint” model.

2.2 The Culture Production Sector and the Division of Status Labor

Collins (1992) offers a more elaborate argument. He notes that the reason why women are more likely to consume highbrow culture than men is because they are overrepresented in occupational strata that specialize in culture production such as education and the arts. For Collins (1992: 223) this stratum of culture producers, because of their pivotal role in creating the objects that will come to play the role of expressive status symbols for the dominant class, has a special

relation to high status culture. He argues (1992: 223) that individuals who work in these type of occupations “artists, teachers, actors, designers, publishers...” will find it “...especially easy...to consume formal culture and to acquire the most ‘sophisticated tastes’, a fact that “...enables them to short-circuit the loop between class and culture” thus being able to come to share the tastes of the elite classes without having to go through the “...long years of training as consumers of art” (since that is their job).

Collins reasons that because women are disproportionately involved in this culture production sector, their tastes gravitate toward the traditionally “consecrated” objects and aesthetic experiences of the dominant classes (Bourdieu 1984). Coupled with the fact that in the intimate sphere of the household women specialize as “Goffmanian laborers”, tending to the household’s collective status needs and public self-presentation attempts, it is to be expected that women will have both a more intimate appreciation for the specialized and complex forms of culture traditionally labeled highbrow because their role as status laborers leads them toward acquiring expertise in consuming objects of potential symbolic value. This is what Collins refers to as the *gendered division of status labor*, where men specialize in the household’s productive responsibilities (“the class sector”), while women take care of the family’s status work, of which culture consumption is an important part, “converting these male-generated resources of money and leisure time into status” (Collins 1992: 227).

Bihagen and Katz-Gerro (2000: 340), in an effort to put Collin’s gendered occupational distribution argument to an empirical test, find that “gender differences are not generally smaller within the cultural sector. The conclusion that emerges from these findings is that holding a cultural sector job does *not* account for gender differences in cultural consumption.” Bihagen and Katz-Gerro also test for the salience of the gender difference across other life-course related social divisions and find (p. 343) that “the gender differences that we identify persist in significance and

size across educational categories, age categories, income levels, and across most occupational classes.”

Bihagen and Katz-Gerro (2000), argue that the persistent difference in cultural participation cannot be made sense of, neither from the “class position” point of view associated with Bourdieu, since men are on average structurally more advantaged than women are in the class structure, and we would thus expect them to be more likely to participate in the cultural pursuits favored by the dominant class; nor from the “constraint model” perspective which emphasizes family pressures and the “squeeze on women’s leisure times originating from marital and childcare obligations”. Bihagen and Katz-Gerro note (2000: 329) that “Neither the ‘class and culture consumption’ approach nor the ‘constraint model’ approach would predict women’s greater participation in highbrow culture. Therefore, we must look for other ways to make sense of this gender difference.” They conclude that gender appears to be an “independent source of differentiation in cultural consumption” since other research shows that the difference appears early in life (usually adolescence) and seems to persist over-time into adulthood. Thus, it seems to them that some sort of socialization factor that provides women with “certain dispositions” toward the consumption of highbrow culture might be the ultimate explanation. However, they *do* find some weaker differences for skilled manual workers, *respondents who are not in the labor market* and married/cohabiting respondents. This is suggestive in light of the empirical findings reported below. In the following, I will argue that it is not necessary to conclude, as Bihagen and Katz-Gerro do, that because “cultural sector” gender differences are not smaller than in other sectors that gender has somehow come to represent a cultural cleavage that is independent from class.

2.3 Work and the Devaluation of Highbrow Culture

Recent research examining the relationship between the world of paid labor and the domain of taste and culture has uncovered important weaknesses in Bourdieu's account of the operation of cultural capital, defined as knowledge about and dispositions toward consumption of certain traditional "highbrow" cultural objects, especially when the concept is considered in relation to the associational arenas of the workplace (Erickson 1996). The most important point of contention has to do with a reassessment of how *relevant* involvement in the realm of highbrow culture is for individuals who are employed in certain industries. One key line of argument (Erickson 1996) considers the impact that embeddedness in specific workplace contexts can have in the individual's relation toward prescribed highbrow culture.

Erickson (1996) has shown that within certain market-oriented industries, involvement in what she refers to as "high-status" (i.e. classical music, opera, the arts, literature) leisure culture is considered a patent waste of time and is defined as an exogenous distraction from the more focused pursuits related to career advancement within the workplace. Further, the availability and internal normative endorsement of locally defined cultural knowledge and resources such as business or sports culture (Erickson 1996) or "law firm culture" (Kay and Hagan 1998) may lead toward alternative investments in different forms of cultural expertise, resulting in a decline in involvement with cultural offerings that are not directly relevant to work-related social routines. For Erickson, this is particularly salient in most *market-oriented* occupations and industries where alternative types of cultural resources, because they are weakly correlated with class, may serve important internal coordination functions -operating as a social bridge for individuals who belong to different class positions but are required to interact within the organization.

From this point of view, cultural capital, traditionally conceived as mastery of the requisite codes necessary to consume the more elite cultural forms (Bourdieu, 1984), while good for symbolic

shows of *domination* cannot do the work of *integration*. Erickson (1996: 248) notes that “At work, the uses of culture are more complex than Bourdieu leads us to expect. He expects that culture correlated with class, especially highbrow culture, helps a higher class to dominate lower ones, but in fact, correlation with class is not the same as usefulness in class relations.” In support of this argument, she notes that some forms of culture that are in fact associated with class simply do not get used in the private sector because they are “profitless irrelevancies that the upper classes themselves exclude through their intent focus on doing business. *High-status culture in particular is just such an excluded waste of time in the business world. Business culture itself supports domination* (italics added).” For Erickson, profitable work organizations, more than ritual shows of domination also require coordination across class positions. Thus “culture useful in coordination is uncorrelated or almost uncorrelated with class, popular in every class, and rich enough to provide enjoyable conversation”. Examples of this coordination culture include “the sports talk that links native-born men in all levels of security work simultaneously excludes the female and foreign born minorities in each class.” Thus this opens up the possibility that normative and social pressures originating in the realm of paid labor may reduce involvement in highbrow leisure culture alien to the workplace among employed individuals in comparison to those who are not active in the labor force (and who are thus free from those pressures).¹

If it is possible for normative and social pressures originating in the realm of paid labor to reduce involvement in the field of leisure culture external to workplace and occupational settings then we should expect *employment status* –as a measure of integration into the public world of the labor force- to be an important factor affecting the individual’s cultural participation habits.

¹ This argument does not apply if the workplace is itself a site of highbrow culture production or dissemination such as a gallery or a theater.

Following Erickson's devaluation argument would lead us to expect employed individuals to *decrease* their involvement in leisure activities, reducing their rate of consumption as they become embedded in their specific work industry (especially those industries that are open to cultural accounts that devalue occupation-irrelevant forms of leisure). From this point of view, we should expect this stance toward culture to be primarily prevalent among *men*, insofar as the normative and social pressures to define leisure culture as irrelevant to the work domain should be expected to obtain mainly within male-dominated fields and the "coordination" culture (such as sports or business culture) that is usually endorsed instead is gender-coded as typically "men's culture" in the broader society (Erickson 1996). This helps create workplace and organizational cultures that are heavily gendered in favor of men (Acker 1990, Kanter 1977, Robinson and McIlwee 1991), and where traditional highbrow culture is more likely to be devalued by men than by women. Thus if the gender gap in highbrow consumption is a by-product of a devaluation process as described by Erickson, we should expect gender differences in highbrow consumption to be more pronounced among those individuals who are active in the public arena of work in comparison to those who are not:

H1: The gender gap in highbrow consumption is more pronounced among those individuals active in the labor force in comparison to individuals out of the labor force (retired people, students).

2.4 Is Bourdieu's Class Theory too Limited?

While Erickson's critique of Bourdieu seems to imply that he misconstrued the relationship between class position and the relative openness to highbrow culture, a closer look at Bourdieu's class theory of cultural taste reveals a different story. Bourdieu was clearly cognizant that different "class fractions", especially as these were structured along craft and occupational divisions would have radically different attitudes toward highbrow culture. In fact in *Distinction* he goes through

great pains to show that a lot of high-status culture is summarily rejected by members of certain classes, especially those employed in traditional working class manual occupations and low skill service jobs (see for instance Bourdieu 1984: 373-396). Therefore it is not quite accurate to suggest that Bourdieu completely flubbed his conception of the process through which highbrow culture is put to different uses and may even be subject to devaluation and refusal by different status groups.

Erickson's more focused critique, having to do with Bourdieu's relative underplaying of the uses of culture and taste *in the workplace* "class relations at work" does have merit however (see Erickson 1996: 220).² The reason for this is that due to Bourdieu's relatively narrow focus on the way that tastes are used in informal social arenas, he obscured the ability to theorize the difference in the patterns of taste between those people who spent most of their time at work (especially in contexts such as the U.S. characterized by modal working weeks of 40 hours or more among certain segments of the population) versus those whose lives revolve around the management of more informal social networks and situations (housepersons, retired people, students). Further, Bourdieu's relative silence about how the workplace structures consumption leads him to ignore the—in all probability—non-trivial influence of gender dynamics in public arenas and modern work

² Erickson's second line of critique, suggesting Bourdieu's class model is "two-dimensional" and that it ignores a third dimension of class ranking based on social capital is much less defensible. In fact Bourdieu referred to his class model as a *three-dimensional space* (Bourdieu 1984: 114) and he was explicit that the third dimension was indeed social capital. Thus volume of capital should be understood as "...the set of actual resources and powers—economic capital, cultural capital *and also social capital*." One defensible version of Erickson's critique is that Bourdieu did go on to empirically ignore social capital in his analysis, but it was always there in the "background" both theoretically and methodologically.

organizations (Acker 1990, Kanter 1977, Ridgeway 1997) that plays a role in modulating cultural choice by either providing the individual with new sets of values and habits dominant in their occupational field (Weeden and Grusky 2005) or surrounding her with a network of relations that supports or discourages certain practices (Ibarra 1992).

As a corrective to this focus on gender only as it pertains to the private sphere, I propose that paying attention to the interplay between the workplace, gender and class will allow us to go a long way toward solving the puzzle of the gender gap in highbrow cultural involvement. However, the solution to this problem does not necessitate that we jettison Bourdieu's class theory of taste (Holt 1997: 99-101). Instead it requires that we go back to Bourdieu's largely neglected account of the divisions between class fractions, and connect it to Erickson's change of focus to the workplace and her more nuanced attention to dynamics other than class ("like gender or ethnicity" [Erickson 1996: 223]) that interact with class position.

2.5 A Second Look at Bourdieu's Theory of Class Fractions

How did Bourdieu conceive of structural differences between class fractions that may lead to a rejection or embracement of highbrow culture? Beyond the traditionally considered high prestige/low prestige contrast, Bourdieu deployed a second axis of variation among occupational groups that has so far been under-exploited in subsequent attempts to put his theory of culture consumption to empirical scrutiny. This alternative axis of class division can be shown to in fact subsume both theoretically and empirically the high prestige/low prestige distinction favored by Anglo-American researchers (i.e. Blau and Duncan 1968). I refer to the division in "the space of positions" between status groups whose primary claim to social standing rested on cultural capital, which Bourdieu usually indexed by reference to the average educational attainment of those groups, versus those that relied primarily on economic capital and those that had ample doses of both

(Bourdieu 1984: 114-116, 122-123, 316-317) or who had an imbalance of economic capital in relation to cultural capital.³

For Bourdieu the only way to grasp the “structure of social space” is to recognize its structuring along its “*two fundamental dimensions*” which “...correspond to the volume and composition of the capital of the groups distributed within it” (1984: 126, italics added). In Bourdieu’s view, the division between volume (high/low) and composition (economic/cultural) yields four major class fractions: those with a high volume of both cultural and economic capital (the “temporally dominant” professions, lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc. “the dominant fraction of the dominant class”, those with a high volume of cultural capital and low volume of economic capital (teachers, artists, college professors, etc. “the dominated fraction of the dominant class”), those with a high volume of economic capital and a low volume of cultural capital (skilled manual workers and supervisors “the dominant fraction of the dominated class”) and those with a low volume of both economic and cultural capital (low skill labor and working poor, or the dominated class for short).

The key point to keep in mind for our purposes is that Bourdieu understood that *variation* in the extent to which individuals used and consumed highbrow culture had to be explained by movement across this space of positions (this is the way that he usually interpreted his “analyses of

³ This usage and operationalization of cultural capital as a property of the occupational group (usually indexed by the “objectified” cultural capital produced through credentials and educational requirements) is to be kept distinct from the idea of cultural capital as a property of individuals which can be indexed by way of their culture consumption habits and other lifestyle choices and which is separable from individual educational attainment (“embodied” cultural capital). For more on the different meanings of cultural capital in Bourdieu’s work see Holt (1997).

correspondences”); and especially, along the horizontal dimension which indexed relative volume rather than along the vertical dimension which indexed overall capital. Thus, in Bourdieu’s rendering the probability of engagement in highbrow culture is not simply a function of “occupational status” as in the usual way of defining the concept in American sociological stratification research (i.e. Blau and Duncan 1968, Hauser and Warren 1997). The reason for this is that the notion and usual operationalization of occupational status averages out both the endowment of cultural and economic capital of occupational groups and focuses purely on raw *volume*. This misses what is for Bourdieu the primary source of differentiation: *the relative salience of one in comparison to the other* (Bourdieu 1984: 114, 260-261).

Why is this important? Ignoring the notion of capital composition leads us to view the dominant classes as a homogeneous “high status” group.⁴ However, in Bourdieu’s class theory most of the action comes from the *rift in the dominant class* by way of the relative weight of economic capital or cultural capital as a proportion of the total volume of capital of the two dominant class fractions. Thus it is precisely because “...as one moves from the artists to the industrial and commercial

⁴ The confusion on this matter is so widespread as to have acquired the status of unquestioned gospel. Emmisson (2003: 219) for instance, in an otherwise lucid discussion, finds that economic capital is not a good a predictor of what he refers to as “cultural mobility” and thinks of this finding as “consistent with the ‘predictions’ of postmodern approaches.” But *not* consistent with Bourdieu class theory because “[we cannot] speak of a unified ‘dominant class’ with an affinity for ‘legitimate culture’ as was the case for Bourdieu’s France in the 1970s”. However, he goes on to elaborate the fact that the culturally mobile are more likely to hail from the “knowledge classes”. A more nuanced view of Bourdieu’s taste theory would have seen that last finding as compatible with Bourdieu’s formulation.

employers, volume of economic capital rises and volume of cultural capital falls” that “...*it can be seen that the dominant class is organized in a chiasmic structure*” (Bourdieu 1984: p. 116, italics added).

In Bourdieu’s view, highbrow cultural involvement increases with the *relative* prevalence of cultural capital in relation to economic capital of the class fraction to which the person belongs. As economic capital begins to overshadow cultural capital as a proportion of the total volume of capital, *highbrow culture consumption (and other forms of engagement with rare, refined and “difficult” cultural goods) should be expected to decrease*. Thus, the most avid consumers of highbrow culture should be the intellectuals, teachers and artists (especially since this last group is also the producers [Collins 1992: 223]), while those who consume the least should be the self-employed, small business owners and skilled technical workers (because their volume of economic capital exceeds their cultural capital), with the members of the temporally dominant professions in the middle (they have a lot of both so they tend to cancel each other out).

2.6 Integrating Erickson, Collins and Bourdieu: Coordination, Domination and Gender in the Workplace

2.6.1 Highbrow Devaluation and Bourdieuan Class Fractions

I begin by noting that Erickson’s somewhat vague term “business-orientation” characteristic of certain workplace cultures (her case-study concerned the Toronto security industry, a field that would certainly qualify as relatively rich in economic but poor in cultural capital), which she uses to explain the rejection and devaluation of “irrelevant” highbrow culture in those settings, is in fact equivalent to Bourdieu’s own observation of the consequences that stem from the fact that for certain occupational groups, economic capital outweighs cultural capital. In Bourdieu’s view, whenever economic capital begins to form a larger part of the total volume of capital than cultural

capital, we should expect a rejection of highbrow artistic products in favor of more pragmatic and “relevant” forms of culture, as per Erickson (1996).

Erickson’s distinction between coordination and domination culture is useful in this respect because it maps neatly into Bourdieu’s classification of class fractions according to the composition of their capital. This is because we can expect highbrow culture to change roles as we move across the class fractions relatively rich in cultural capital and poor in economic capital (where highbrow culture might play a coordination and not a domination role in the workplace) to the class fractions rich in economic capital and poor in cultural capital. For this last group we should expect highbrow culture to play the role of domination culture and therefore to be *forgone* in favor of other forms of culture (sports or other forms of pop culture [Erickson 1996, Kay and Hagan 1998]) that are more functional in terms of coordination. This is especially the case since in these latter types of field-specific business culture (i.e. “law firm culture” [Kay and Hagan 1998]) can itself be used for domination (Erickson 1996). Following this reasoning we can expect that:

H2: As the volume of economic capital increases relative to cultural capital, highbrow consumption decreases.

2.6.2 The Gendered Organization

By bringing gender into the mix, a factor that was ignored by Bourdieu with his sole focus on class divisions (DiMaggio 2003, McCall 1992), we can use the current “Ericksonian” reinterpretation of Bourdieu’s own class theory to help answer the question of *when* will labor force participation exacerbate the difference between men and women in highbrow cultural involvement (and when it will attenuate it). Noting that those occupational groups that are dominated by economic capital in relation to cultural capital are also the most likely to have developed *gendered* organizational (Acker 1990) and workplace cultures (because they are the traditionally male-dominated fields and the market/culture dichotomy is itself gendered), we should expect the

rejection of highbrow culture also to follow a gendered pattern as highbrow culture moves from being coordination culture to domination culture. Thus we should expect that men embedded in those occupational fields high in economic capital but poor in cultural capital to be more likely to reject highbrow culture than women who work in these same fields.

Why should we expect men and women to have different stances toward highbrow culture as the relative volume of economic capital of their occupation increases? Three interrelated mechanisms seem to be paramount: 1) within occupation job segregation by gender⁵ (Bielby and Baron 1986) which leads to 2) attitudinal and behavioral differences between men and women in relation to the dominant culture and values (Collins 1992: 214) and 3) gender-differential relational environments at work in the form of gendered workplace social networks (Ibarra 1992, Straits 1996) which serve to reinforce and amplify dispositional gender differences.

It is well known that even within the same occupation men and women are likely to be assigned to different jobs (Acker 1990) and are therefore expected to play different roles in the internal functioning of the workplace. As Collins (1992: 214-215) notes, in contemporary organizational settings women are more likely to perform what he refers to as “Goffmanian labor” or in other words to serve as the “...specialists in initial impression management and in backstage access to order givers.” For Collins, this specialization in Goffmanian labor “...results in a tendency to self-indoctrination, self idealization and formal manners.” Even more importantly, Goffmanian laborers in contrast to “backstage” line and production workers are less likely to become alienated from the official dominant culture and are therefore less likely to develop the oppositional cynicism typical of many backstage workers vis a vis the values, and symbolic status symbols representative of this culture (Collins 1992).

⁵ I thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.

This within occupation job-segregation, in addition to creating dispositional differences in the relation to highbrow culture between men and women as reflected in the different roles that they play within the organization should be amplified by well-known gendered relational dynamics within the workplace (Acker 1990, Ridgeway 1997). Research on the social networks of employed individuals has uncovered important differences in the pattern of network relations that men and women keep in the workplace (see Brass 1985, Burt 1998, Ibarra 1992, Robinson and McIlwee 1991 and Straits 1996 for reviews and evidence). The most relevant findings for our purposes concern the relative gender composition of the networks of men and women. Not surprisingly, workplace networks are extremely sex segregated, with the likelihood of a same-gender friendship being much larger than a cross-gender friendship. This is particularly true for men (Straits 1996) who are able to use workplace contacts for both expressive (friendship, support, gossip) and instrumental purposes (advice, mentorship). Women on the other hand, for obvious reasons having to do with the prevalence of men in workplace positions of instrumental utility, are forced to segregate their networks along these lines being more likely to use same-gender contacts for expressive purposes and cross-gender contacts for instrumental purposes. The fact that most of this research –mostly done in management studies- has taken place in fields where economic capital is dominant is compatible with the explanatory sketch outlined here.

Given these set of organizational, dispositional and relational mechanisms, we can therefore expect that women who work in “market oriented” fields therefore, are *less likely* than men who work in the same fields to reject the domination culture of their superiors in favor of other forms of coordination culture (because as Goffmanian laborers they are less prone to be alienated from it than the disproportionately male backstage workers). This dynamic should therefore serve to weaken the expected negative effect that an occupation’s relative volume of economic capital has on the relative likelihood to consume highbrow culture (hypothesis 2) for women. In addition, because

in cultural capital-heavy fields a) highbrow culture is less likely to play the role of domination culture (instead serving a coordination function) we should expect *both* men and women who work in these fields to be positively oriented toward it, and b) even in the face of extensive gender segregation at the job-level men and women are doing “similar” kinds of work (i.e. symbolic production and knowledge-intensive labor) and thus should develop converging attitudes toward class related status symbols (Collins 1992), the gender gap should be narrower for individuals who work in fields with an imbalance of cultural over economic capital.

Thus to Bourdieu’s class theory, we add both the influence of workplace embeddedness and gender. This allows us to qualify hypothesis 1 (as a result of combining with hypothesis 2), by noting that it is not workforce participation per se that produces higher gender differentiation in terms of highbrow consumption, but that it is work in “market oriented” occupations which should be associated with the strongest levels of gender differentiation. This reasoning leads to a clear-cut empirical implication:

H3: As the volume of economic capital increases relative to cultural capital, men reject highbrow culture at a faster rate than women, thus increasing the gender gap in “market oriented” fields.

3 Data and Variables

In order to shed light on the set of issues outlined above, I use pooled data from the 1998 and 2002 United States General Social Survey (Davis, Smith and Marsden, 2002). Beginning with the 1994 General Social Survey, the GSS has consisted of a biennial, split-sample design. For the 1998 and 2002 GSS, in-person interviews were conducted with national, full probability samples of 2,832 and 2,765 English-speaking persons 18 years of age or over residing in the continental U.S., respectively, with a response rate of about 70 percent.

3.1 Highbrow Consumption Indicators

Included in these two GSS waves was a short “culture module” that included questions regarding participation in an array of arts-related leisure activities. The number of respondents that completed the arts participation module consisted of a random sub-sample of 1433 (50.6%) in 1998 and 1365 individuals (49.4%) in 2002. From this group, the number of respondents that I have complete data on all of the relevant sociodemographic controls for both years is 2678. The culture module for these two years consisted of a series of items in which respondents were asked to report whether they had engaged in the following activities during the past year: 1) gone see a movie in a theater 2) gone to a live performance of popular music like rock, country, or rap 3) gone to a live performance of a non-musical stage play 4) attended a live ballet or dance performance 5) gone to a classical music or opera performance and 6) visited an art museum or gallery, 7) Read a novel, poem or play.

In order to ascertain whether a gender gap in the consumption of traditional “highbrow” cultural genres obtains for these data, I create a measure of highbrow culture consumption. First, I use a “cluster analysis around latent components” procedure (Vigneau and Qannari 2003) to confirm whether the seven cultural activities included in the GSS culture module can be classified according to the still salient highbrow/popular axis. The CLV technique is an Item Response Theory (IRT) method designed to partition binary items into meaningful clusters.

Figure 1 shows the results. Looking at the figure, we can verify that indeed at a point at which the majority (close to 75%) of the variance between genres is explained, the items partition into two major clusters organized according to the familiar highbrow/popular divide, with the literature item forming an independent “in-between” cluster. Four genres fall on the highbrow culture clusters: arts consumption, going to the ballet, going to a theater and attending a classical music or opera concert. Using this partition, I create a dummy variable to index individual-level

highbrow consumption. This variable is equal to one if the respondent reports having consumed *at least two* of these highbrow genres in the past year and zero otherwise.

3.2 Bourdieuan Class Fraction Measures

In order to operationalize Bourdieu's class scheme, I develop a measure of the *relative economic capital volume* of each respondent's occupational group. Since I want to be faithful in my operationalization to Bourdieu's idea of the "proportion" of capital that is economic in relation to the total "volume of capital", I take an index of standardized occupational earnings and divide it by the sum of a score for occupational educational qualifications and this same measure of earnings.⁶ This gives me the proportion of the total capital of the occupation that is accounted for by the economic capital of the occupation.⁷ The variable ranges from 0 to 1 with lower values indicating

⁶ In order to measure *occupational cultural capital* I use Hauser and Warren's (1997) disaggregated measure of occupational educational requirements, while I measure *occupational economic capital* using their disaggregated measure of occupational earnings. In the Hauser-Warren operationalization, occupations –partitioned according to the 1990 U.S. census classification- are scaled by educational requirements using a started logit transformation (to deal with extreme values) of the proportion of individuals in the employed civilian labor force who had completed at least some college as of 1990. A similar procedure is used to scale occupations according to earnings, this time using proportion of individuals in the employed civilian labor force who earned \$14.30 or more per hour in 1989. For more details concerning the design, construction, and external validation of these scores, see Hauser and Warren (1997).

⁷ In formal terms if $RV(EC)$ is the relative volume of economic capital, EC and CC are the economic capital and cultural capital scores for each occupation respectively, and TVC is the total

an imbalance of cultural over economic capital and higher value a preponderance of economic over cultural capital. In order not to conflate the effects of relative volume of capital with the overall prestige standing (what Bourdieu would call “symbolic capital”) of the occupational group or the total amount of resources commanded by occupational incumbents, it is important to hold constant the influence of *overall volume of capital* of the occupation. This is measured as the *sum* of the economic and cultural capital score for the given occupation, which is equivalent to the traditional omnibus SEI measure used in American stratification research (Hauser and Warren 1997); for a similar operationalization of this two dimensional “French” conceptualization of occupational scaling, see Weeden and Grusky (2005: 158).

3.3 Labor Force Participation

I consider a respondent to be *active in the labor force* if he or she is between 25 and 64 years of age and reports having been employed full or part time in the past year. Respondents who do not report having held a full or part time job in the past year are deemed to be outside of the labor force. In subsequent analyses I distinguish between two major groups of respondents in the labor force: those who work *more than 38 hours a week* (the median number of hours worked in the past week for U.S. respondents according to these data) and those who work *less than 38 hours week*. I also distinguish between two major groups of individuals outside of the labor force: *students* and those who report being *retired*.

volume of capital, then the relative volume of economic capital of the occupation is given by

$$RV(EC) = \frac{EC}{TVC}, \text{ and the overall volume of capital is simply } TVC = EC + CC .$$

3.4 Gender

Gender is a binary variable that equals one for women. Thus, in the analyses reported below a higher positive value for gender indicates a stronger gender gap.

4 Results

4.1 Gender Differences in Highbrow Consumption and Labor Force Participation

Is there a difference in the strength of the gender gap in highbrow consumption between employed respondents and respondents who are not in the labor force? According to hypothesis one, we should expect the gender gap to be stronger among those who are active in the labor force, with women who work being much more likely than men who work to consume highbrow culture. This gender gap should be weaker for respondents who are not in the labor force. Table 1 shows the results of a logistic regression with the highbrow consumption indicator as the dependent variable, and the gender dummy variable and survey year (to control for possible trends) as the predictors.⁸

The results are consistent with hypothesis 1. As shown in the first column in the table, the gender gap in highbrow consumption is strong and significant ($t=4.40$) among those who are active in the labor force with women who work about 60% ($\exp [.48] = 1.62$) more likely than men who work to have consumed at least two highbrow genres in the past year. Among those who are not in the labor force in contrast (the fourth column of table 1), there is *no appreciable difference* between men

⁸ Models (available on request) including a more elaborate vector of predictors –i.e. age, education, parental education, marital status and number of children- did not appreciably change the size of the gender coefficients reported in the table. Thus, for the sake of simplicity, I show the models including gender and the Bourdieuan class position measures as the sole predictor.

and women in their rates of highbrow culture consumption ($t=-.64$), with the coefficient for being female in a negative direction. This pattern of results suggests that *among those who are not active in the labor force, there is no gender difference in highbrow culture consumption*, and that consequently *the effect of gender on highbrow culture consumption is, at least in the United States, only effective among individuals who are active in the paid labor force*.

Columns 2 and 3 in table 1 show how the gender gap varies among individuals who are active in the labor force at different levels of intensity. We can see that the gender gap is strong and significant ($t=4.00$) among those who work at least 38 hours a week, but declines in strength and significance among those who participate in the labor force with a lower level of intensity ($t=1.63$). This indicates that men and women become more different in their relation to highbrow culture as they become more intensely embedded in the world of work.

Turning to those who are not active in the labor force (columns 5 and 6 of table 1), we can also notice some suggestive differences in the strength of the gender gap among students and those who report being retired. Among students, the gender coefficient (significant at a .10 level) suggests that *men* consume more highbrow culture than women ($b=-.90$), while among those who are retired the gender gap favors women but is much weaker than among those who work and is not significantly different from zero ($t=0.88$). The larger propensity of men who are still in the process of acquiring educational credentials to consume highbrow culture than women can be interpreted in two ways: 1) as a *cohort* effect (the average age for this group is 25) which indicates that for this more recent generation of men, highbrow consumption is not a gender marker and may actually be the opposite (and which suggests that the gender gap among adults will gradually disappear in future generations); or 2) As a *life-course* effect, with younger men being avid consumers of highbrow culture *before* they enter the world of work and then reducing their investment in this form of cultural capital as they become socialized into specific occupational strata (creating the gender gap among employed

adults). It is not possible to adjudicate between these two explanations for the gender effect among students (as that would require longitudinal data), although it bears mentioning that hypotheses 1 and 2 are more compatible with the latter account than with the former.

4.2 Gender, Work and Bourdieuan Class Fractions

If the gender gap among working individuals shown in column one of table 1 is driven by the occupational culture dynamics described above, then we should be able to explain it by taking into account the dimensions of class highlighted in Bourdieu's class theory. Furthermore, if Erickson's contention is correct, the relative volume of economic capital in the occupation should be a more important intervening factor in explaining the gender gap in highbrow consumption among employed individuals than the total volume of capital. This should be the case because across all levels of total capital, we should expect that as the given occupation comes closer to the "heteronomous" pole of the market (Bourdieu 1980) the gendered devaluation of highbrow culture should increase.

Model 1 in Table 2 shows what happens to gender coefficient when we hold constant the total volume of capital of the occupation. The models in table 2 are restricted to individuals who are active in the labor force with four cases excluded (N=1567) due to missing information on occupation. We can see that that the gender coefficient becomes even more positive when we hold total capital constant, suggesting that that this "vertical" dimension of class *does not* intervene (and therefore fails to explain) the gender/highbrow culture association. In model 2, we add the effect of the relative volume of economic capital (recoded into five quintiles). Consistent with hypothesis 2, we find that as the *relative volume* of economic capital increases (holding total volume constant), investment in highbrow cultural capital decreases ($t=-3.16$). More importantly, after holding constant this second class dimension, the gender coefficient is reduced by about 62% and is no

longer statistically distinguishable from zero ($t=1.34$), suggesting that the gender gap in highbrow consumption among working individuals is completely explained by this intervening factor (women are disproportionately overrepresented in occupations with a low relative volume of economic capital: $r=-0.56$).

Hypothesis 3 predicts that among those who are employed, the gender gap grows among those who belong to occupations with an imbalance of economic over cultural capital. In order to test this hypothesis, I allow the gender/highbrow cultural association to vary uniformly within the five levels of the proportion of economic capital for the occupation. The results are shown in model 3 of table 2. Consistent with this hypothesis, I find that there is indeed a significant interaction between gender and relative volume of economic capital ($t=2.13$), and that the negative effect of this last factor on highbrow consumption is almost entirely negated for women, with the effect being about 75% weaker ($-0.28-[-0.21] = -0.07$).

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of these last set of results. In the figure I plot the odds of having consumed at least two highbrow genres in the past year against the relative volume of economic capital in the respondent's occupation with two different lines for men and women (in the Y axis, a value of one is equivalent to being as likely as the average respondent to have engaged in highbrow consumption). We can clearly see that while there is a relatively muted negative effect of relative cultural capital volume for women on the odds of consuming highbrow culture, the corresponding effect is much stronger in the case of men. This is not to say that the effect is trivial for women, only that it is much more dramatic for men. While women go from being 31% to 13% more likely than the average respondent to have consumed at least two highbrow genres in the past year as we move from the first to the fifth quintile in the relative economic capital scale, men go from being 45% *more likely* than average to being 33% *less likely* than expected of having consumed any two highbrow genres as we move across the five levels of relative economic capital.

Furthermore, in occupations where cultural capital outweighs economic capital, men and women have roughly the same likelihood of engaging in highbrow consumption (with men having a substantial edge in fact). These results lead to the following conclusion: *men who are employed in occupations where economic capital is the dominant currency stay away from highbrow culture at a higher rate than women employed in the same occupations, and more importantly, among individuals employed in occupations where cultural capital dominates, men and women consume highbrow culture at the same rate.*

5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Summary and Implications of the Results

In this paper I have explored the puzzle of women's apparent higher propensity to consume "highbrow" culture in comparison to men. Following recent proposals in the literature that point to the neglected influence of class, culture and gender at work, I examined the way that the gender gap in highbrow culture participation varies across levels of employment status. The results show that, at least in the U.S., there is no such thing as "the" gender gap in highbrow cultural choice. Instead I show that a gender gap favoring women is only present among those who are active in the labor force, with men who are not in the labor force engaging in highbrow culture at similar (and for students at higher) rates than women.

I show that we can explain this more pronounced differentiation of the cultural choices of men and women among those who are active in the labor force, by drawing on Bourdieu's relatively neglected theory of class fractions. However, while Bourdieu's class theory concentrated on the influence of social position on lifestyle patterns in the private sphere, I follow Erickson (1996) in highlighting the interrelation between culture and class in the workplace, and Collins (1992) on the consequences of the gendered nature of the job positions of men and women even within the same work establishment. I move beyond Collins and Erickson however, by showing that the finding that

in some settings highbrow culture is defined as an “irrelevant” waste of time, is itself explainable by drawing on Bourdieu’s own theory of class fractions, which highlights how cultural and lifestyle choices are shaped by individual membership in occupational fields defined by their relative volume of economic to cultural capital. Further I show that women’s status as “Goffmanian” laborers in the organization serves to strongly differentiate them from men vis a vis their consumption of highbrow culture only within those male-dominated “market oriented” occupational fields in which the process of “highbrow devaluation” noted by Erickson is more likely to be in effect.

An important substantive result of this analysis is that labor force participation does not result in a drop-off in highbrow consumption for *all* men. In fact for men employed in fields that have a higher proportion of cultural capital in relation to their total volume of capital, increasing embeddedness in the workplace *increases* highbrow culture consumption. Thus these men, employed in the fields which Bourdieu identified with the “dominated fractions of the dominant class” (higher education, artists, etc.) *do* behave according to the popular conception of Bourdieu’s schema. The gender gap in highbrow consumption results therefore *not* because of a weakness in Bourdieu’s *class* theory (if this is revised following Erickson to be applicable only to class at work) but due to his oversight of the interaction between *gender and Bourdieuan class fractions in the workplace*.

This allows us to be more specific about the way that women’s culture consumption behavior is “anomalous” (Bihagen and Katz-Gerro 2000) from the perspective of Bourdieu’s account of the relationship between class and lifestyle (“the class position” argument). Women only behave in a way that is not accounted for by Bourdieu’s theory of class-based habitus insofar as women who are employed in fields where economic capital is dominant *do not* forgo highbrow consumption, a fact that is explainable by the different roles that men and women play at the local organizational level of the workplace, with women being more likely to play the role of “frontstage”

Goffmanian laborers –even in economic capital heavy fields- and thus being more likely to be attuned to dominant values and symbols (Collins 1992).

Thus the aggregate negative effect of economic capital volume is primarily driven by the rejection of highbrow cultural goods on the part of *men* employed in those occupations. As shown in figure 2, among men and women employed in fields where cultural capital outweighs economic capital, a gender gap favoring women cannot be detected, because men follow the same pattern of intense involvement in highbrow culture as women. The gap appears and widens dramatically only as economic capital comes to dominate the field in relation to cultural capital, and men follow suit by rejecting highbrow culture while women do so to a substantially lower extent.

In this way we can see that Collins' (1992) starting idea that gender differences in highbrow consumption are due to the relative over-representation of women in certain culture producing sectors only bears a superficial similarity to Bourdieu's (1984) theory of class fractions. The reason for this is that Collins' theory defines those "culture producing" class fractions in a way that is *too specific* (this may be the reason why Bihagen and Katz-Gerro were unable to find a "cultural sector" effect).

From a Bourdieuan point of view, culture producing occupations are simply a subset of the total fraction of occupations characterized by an uneven distribution of cultural capital in relation to economic capital. Therefore the relevant line of comparison is not between the "culture producing sector" and the rest, since in this case "the rest" is going to include many occupations that Bourdieu would consider "structurally equivalent" (White, Boorman and Breiger 1976) to the culture producers in terms of their relative capital composition (i.e. higher education teachers and administrators, architects, sociologists, botanists, etc.). This is because at the levels of class fractions, Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital goes beyond culture conceived as expressive symbols or aesthetic objects and comes to encompass *all* those occupations which produce "generalized

symbolic goods” (Bourdieu 1980) including the production of knowledge (scientists, psychologists), and even religious belief systems and rituals (priests, theologians).

The mechanism that produces cultural choice in Bourdieu’s taste theory is the relative *homology* between these occupations and the *position* of highbrow culture in the culture producing field. Those occupations in which cultural capital outweighs economic capital are in a dominated position in relation to the temporally dominant fraction of the dominant class, and therefore their tastes gravitates toward those cultural products that are in a structurally homologous position in the cultural field (“difficult” and more esoteric cultural products, which occupy a *dominated* position vis a vis more “middlebrow” and distinctively commercial versions of highbrow fare). This homology mechanism is the cognitive-sociological link that produces cultural choice in Bourdieu’s framework. Unfortunately most empirical tests of Bourdieu’s scheme have ignored this theoretical proposal (Holt 1997: 100), in favor of a “flattened” version of Bourdieu’s homology hypothesis in which “high status” groups choose “high status” culture (i.e. Bryson 1996, Halle 1993). However this formulation misses the most important twist in Bourdieu’s taste theory: the “chiastic” divisional structure among the dominant class, itself divided between dominant and dominated groups (Bourdieu 1984, Holt 1997). It is this latter *fraction* of the dominant class that should be expected to choose highbrow culture with a higher intensity.

I find that, indeed, not only is this fraction more likely to consume highbrow culture, but that a) gender differences are relatively negligible within this class, and b) highbrow culture consumption is the highest within this occupational field as Bourdieu would expect. The bulk of the gender difference therefore is concentrated within class fractions where economic capital is dominant, and is mainly driven by the stark refusal of men embedded in those fields of highbrow culture (also as Bourdieu would expect) and by the relative lack of refusal of highbrow culture by women who are member of these same fields. While Bourdieu spoke of the higher propensity of

the working class to draw gender boundaries in the realm of *personal* behavior his account stopped short of considering the influence of gender at work. Thus the original version of Bourdieu's class theory cannot account for this effect, while the present integrative account is able to explain it.

The first finding serves to put to rest contentions regarding the relative applicability of Bourdieu's theory of taste to the U.S. I establish that there are no dramatic differences in the way that Americans in different structural positions engage highbrow culture –when class fractions are properly operationalized according to both their total and relative capital composition- in comparison to the findings reported by Bourdieu. In the U.S., the “dominated fraction of the dominant class”, those embedded in occupational fields where cultural capital dominates, are more likely to choose highbrow culture. These results are also consistent with the view that Bourdieu's taste theory may have more general applicability across national settings –and therefore may need less attention to “history” and context than some defenders of the theory claim is necessary to “save” it.

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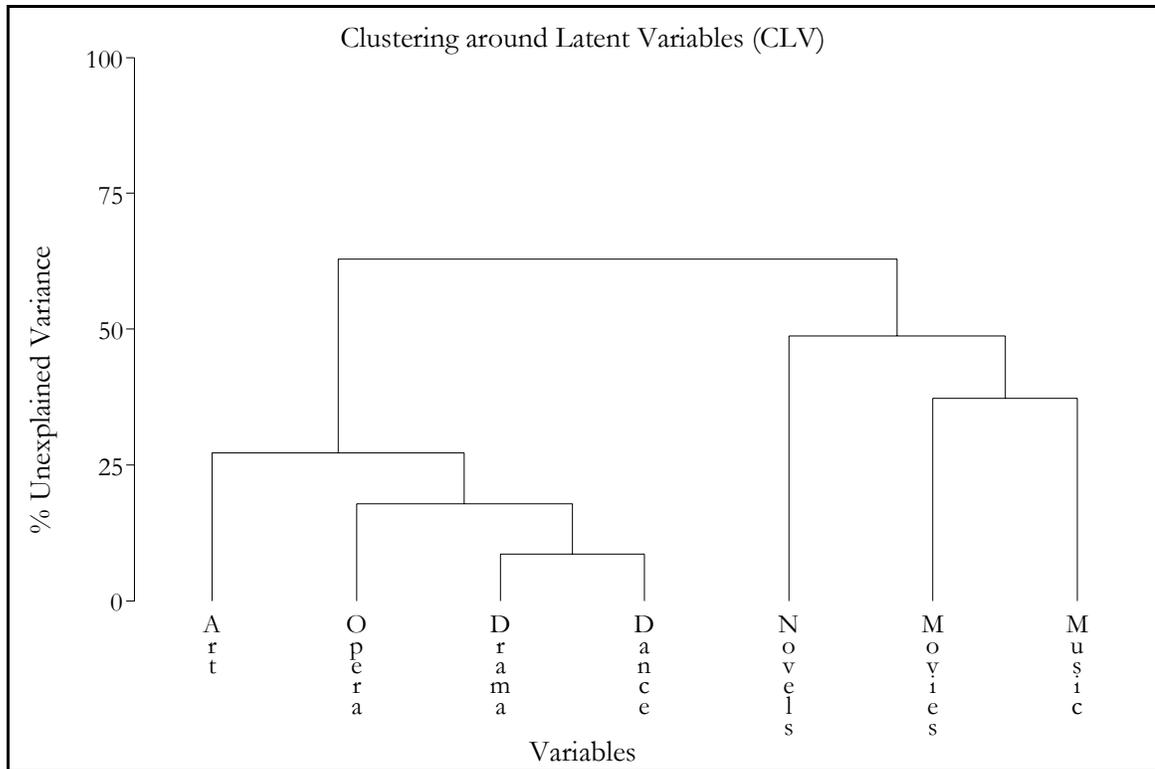


Figure 1. Dendrogram of the Cluster Analysis of Culture Consumption Indicators, 1998 and 2002 GSS.

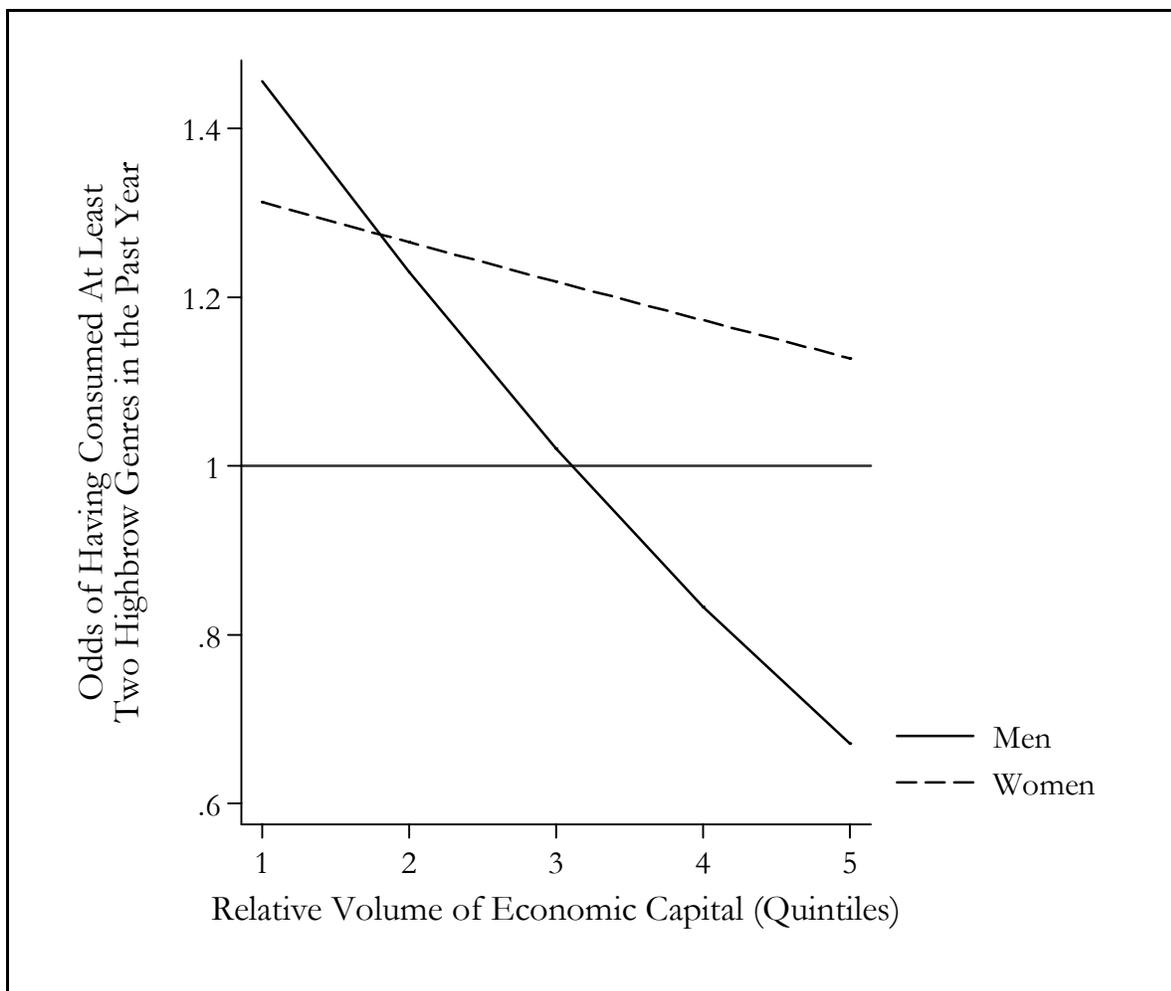


Figure 2. Plot of the expected probability of consuming at least two highbrow genres in the past year, by relative volume of economic capital and gender.

Table 1. Logistic Regression Coefficients Estimates of the Effect of Gender on Highbrow Culture Consumption for Different Groups of Respondents (t-Statistics in Parentheses).

	Respondents Active in the Labor Force			Respondents not in the Labor Force		
	<i>All</i>	<i>More than the Median N. of Hours</i>	<i>Less than the Median N. of Hours</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Retired</i>
Gender (Women=1)	0.4776** (4.40)	0.4896** (4.00)	0.3974 (1.63)	-0.1015 (-0.64)	-0.9017+ (-1.81)	0.1983 (0.88)
Year	0.0218 (0.81)	0.0329 (1.08)	-0.0146 (-0.26)	0.0840* (2.17)	0.0165 (0.21)	0.0725 (1.29)
Constant	-44.6165 (-0.82)	-66.6930 (-1.09)	28.3437 (0.26)	-169.1928* (-2.19)	-33.6490 (-0.21)	-146.0726 (-1.30)
chi2	20.31**	17.43**	2.82	5.50+	3.11	2.27
N	1571	1241	366	938	278	412

+ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients Estimates of the Effect of Gender and Bourdiean Class Measures on Highbrow Culture Consumption (t-Statistics in Parentheses).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender (Women=1)	0.5012** (4.38)	0.1997 (1.34)	0.2640+ (1.76)
Total Volume of Capital	0.0470** (11.66)	0.0402** (8.86)	0.0397** (8.77)
Relative Volume of Economic Capital		-0.1815** (-3.15)	-0.2781** (-3.77)
Economic Capital x Gender			0.2190* (2.13)
Year	0.0193 (0.68)	0.0179 (0.63)	0.0178 (0.62)
Constant	-41.4834 (-0.73)	-38.2934 (-0.67)	-37.9526 (-0.66)
chi2	170.86**	180.80**	185.29**
N	1567	1567	1567

+ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01