Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?

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This study examines one of the most debated questions in the sociology of culture: Does Pierre Bourdieu's theory relating levels of cultural capital to consumption patterns apply to the contemporary United States? First, I summarize the innovative characteristics of Bourdieu's theory in relation to the Wannemacher tradition of social class research. Next, I critique American appropriations of Bourdieu's theory of tastes and suggest that, in the contemporary United States, the theory should be reformulated to focus on consumption practices rather than consumption objects and on mass rather than high culture. Using this reformulation, I conduct an interpretive empirical study to investigate whether differences in cultural capital resources structure patterns of taste in a midwestern American county. Analyzing a series of ethnographic interviews, I describe six dimensions of taste that distinguish informants with high versus low cultural capital resources: material versus formal aesthetics, referential versus critical interpretations, materialism versus idealism, local versus cosmopolitan tastes, communal versus individual forms of consumer subjectivity, and aesthetic versus self-actualizing leisure. These findings suggest that consumption continues to serve as a potent site for the reproduction of social class.

Although consumption has, throughout history, served as a consequential site for the reproduction of social class boundaries, the particular characteristics of consumption that are socially consecrated and, hence, used to demarcate those boundaries have been configured in myriad ways. For example, elite lifestyles have been characterized by a rigid, formal interactional style and understated simplicity (the gentry of the eighteenth century), extravagant, fashion-conscious public sociability (high society in "the Gilded Age" of the late nineteenth century), informal social clubbing (the new upper-middle class of the early twentieth century), and cultural refinement (the highbrow taste of urban elites in the twentieth century; see Collins 1975, pp. 187–211). But, many academics and critics now claim that in postmodern consumer societies, the United States in particular, consumption patterns no longer act to structure social classes. The massive proliferation of cultural meanings and the fragmentation of unitary identities, two primary traits of postmodern culture, have shattered straightforward correspondences between social categories and consumption patterns. So we find conservative, individualist arguments typical of marketing and economics (e.g., Schouten and McAleary 1995), liberal sociological arguments (e.g., Halle 1993), and radical postmodern arguments (Baudrillard 1981), all inveighing that consumption patterns are no longer consequential to class reproduction. If such societies, critical analysis of the reproduction of social class through consumption has become an increasingly treacherous interpretive exercise. Analyses that seek out such patterns are often dismissed as essentialist or worse. But is it true that social class is no longer produced through distinctive patterns of consumption? Or, alternatively, is this relationship occluded when old theorizing is used to analyze a new social formation?

Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital and taste offers the most comprehensive and influential attempt to develop a theoretical framework to plumb the social patterning of consumption in an increasingly mystified social world. Yet this theory has received a chilly reception in the United States, routinely subject to both theoretical critique and empirical refutation. This study is motivated by the premise that these criticisms have misconstrued Bourdieu's research and so have not explored fully the potential usefulness of the theory for disentangling the relationship between class...

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and consumption in contemporary postmodern societies.

**DISTINGUISHING BOURDIEU**

Max Weber (1978) coined the term "social class" to capture the idea that, in addition to the economic resources described by Marx, hierarchical social strata are also expressed and reproduced through "styles of life" that vary in their honorific value. Societies segregate into different reputational groupings based not only on economic position, but also on noneconomic criteria such as morals, culture, and lifestyle that are sustained because people tend to interact with their social peers. American social class strata were first analyzed in Veblen's (1899) bombastic essays about the leisure class, Simmel's (1904) theory of trickle-down status imitation, and in the Lynds' studies of "Middletown," but it is the approach developed by W. Lloyd Warner and his associates in a series of widely publicized studies of the stratification of small American cities following World War II that has dominated consumer research for more than 30 years (Coleman 1983; Coleman and Rainwater 1978; Rainwater, Coleman, and Handel 1959; Warner, Meeker, and Eells 1949). Notwithstanding a variety of incisive critiques, the Warnerian approach offers an important formulation of the relationship between social class and lifestyle that is foundational for the advances made by Bourdieu. Yet the advantages of Bourdieu's theory relative to Warner have never been foregrounded, likely because Warner's social Darwinist presuppositions are directly at odds with Bourdieu's (1984) critical view of consumption patterns as a consequential site of class reproduction.

**Warner's Anthropological Approach**

The Warnerian approach to social class describes the primary social strata within a community by mapping the relative amount of respect and deference accorded to each group. The primary Warnerian method, evaluated participation, requires ethnographic interviews with a stratified random sample of the population of a town or small city. The interview is structured to allow informants to express specific criteria used to judge the reputation of fellow townspeople. This approach yielded a multidimensional conception of status: reputation is influenced by a wide range of moral, aesthetic, intellectual, educational, religious, ethnic, and personal behaviors for which hierarchical judgments can be formed. Like Veblen, Simmel, and the Lynds before him, Warner finds that consumer behavior (e.g., "the 'right' kind of house, the 'right' neighborhood, the 'right' furniture"), are among the most important expressions of particular status positions in a community (Warner et al. 1949, p. 23). In addition, institutional affiliations (churches, clubs, political organizations) and neighborhoods are used to make judgments. These data are interpreted relationally to build the status hierarchy operating in each town. Because ethnographic studies using evaluated participation are prohibitively expensive to administer, Warnerian status studies since the 1950s have relied instead on surrogate measures such as the Index of Status Characteristics (Warner et al. 1949), the Index of Social Position (Hollingshead and Redlich 1959), or the Computerized Status Index (Coleman 1983), which are derived from survey measures of occupation, income, neighborhood, and house type. There is still much to value in Warner's conception of status. In particular, its structuralist emphasis on relational differences in collective understandings of social position is an important but largely unacknowledged precursor to recent American sociological studies of the symbolic boundaries that sustain social hierarchies (e.g., Lamont 1992). However, in sociology, the Warnerian approach was long ago discredited owing to its narrow functionalist presuppositions that deny the interplay between cultural, economic, and political resources in the construction of social classes (Bendix and Lipset 1951; Gordon 1963; Pfauz and Duncan 1950). Beyond this metaphoretic problem, two specific conceptual lacunae become evident when Warner's approach is compared with Bourdieu's theory.

Conflating Dimensions of Social Class. Warner's community studies provide extensive empirical support for Weber's multidimensional conception of social class: collective understandings of reputation are formed on the basis of criteria such as consumption patterns, economic position, morals, and educational attainment. Yet, Warnerian research never isolates and investigates the relationships between these dimensions. Without so doing, it is impossible to understand the distinctive contributions of consumption to social class. Instead, consumption is an untheorized covariate. Warner argues that each status group develops, like a society in microcosm, a unique way of life; the consumer goods and activities that classes adopt are arbitrary. Any good or activity can be used as a means of maintaining in-group solidarity and excluding status inferiors. So he does not offer a coherent theory describing the conditions leading to status group formation, how these differences structure tastes, and why they are relatively durable over time. This lack of specification decreases the usefulness of Warner's approach since it offers no explanation for the elective affinities between particular groups and particular consumption patterns. One example of this theoretical black box is the debate in marketing concerning the relative explanatory power of income and social class in predicting consumption patterns (see Schaniger [1981] for a review). Consistent findings that social class measures capture more variance than income alone never broach the central theoretical question underlying demonstrations of covariation: If fac-

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Compare Warner's findings to imperialist interpretations in consumer research asserting that lifestyle and social class are synonymous (Levy 1966; Myers and Gutman 1974).
tors other than income influence stratified consumption patterns, what are they and how do they work?

Object Signification. For Warner, American social classes are organized in a manner analogous to the social structure of small, isolated, preindustrial societies of classic anthropological ethnographies—"Gemeinshaft" communities bound by affiliative ties within strong, interpenetrating social networks. Thus, his method emphasizes descriptions of peoples' networks of friends, acquaintances, and organizational affiliations. This view of social organization motivates Warner's incipient theory of status-based consumption patterns. Similar to Veblen, Simmel, and the Lynds, Warner views consumption objects as positional markers reinforcing status boundaries. In this emulationist model, elites are engaged in a continual game with those below in which elite consumption patterns are universally valorized, and thus lower-class groups attempt to emulate them, leading elites to defend the distinctiveness of their consumption through pecuniary symbolism (Veblen), stylistic innovation (Simmel), and activities bounded by closed social networks (Warner).

This view of social class is an anarchonism built upon a Rockwellian image of small town life that represents a minuscule and declining fraction of the contemporary United States (in contradistinction to Warner's famous aphorism, "To study Jonesville is to study America"). Although status judgments based on the goods one owns and the activities in which one participates have merit for describing small, isolated, relatively immobile populations, they are of little value for most of the population in an era of transnational consumer capitalism. Status construction now must contend with the tremendous geographic mobility of American professionals and managers, the privatization of social life, the proliferation of media and travel, and the anonymity of urban environments, all of which have personalized the "other" whom one views as social references (Collins 1981; DiMaggio 1987; Dimaggio and Mohr 1985; Meyrowitz 1985). With interactional groups multiplying and in constant flux, it becomes exceedingly difficult to develop stable consensus goods that represent the group.

In addition, Warner's object signification approach implies a highly strategized conception of consumption: people learn about, acquire, and experience consumption objects as status markers. Yet cultural consumer research has demonstrated repeatedly that consumption patterns can never be explained primarily by recourse to theories based on a view of consumption as instrumental or strategic action. Consuming is significantly an autotelic activity in which tastes are formed around the desires for and pleasures gained from particular goods and activities relative to others; so, to be empirically compelling, a theory describing differences in consumption across groups must explain these differences in terms of tastes, pleasures, and desires rather than strategic action.

Bourdieu's Theory of Tastes

Across a diverse range of substantive studies, Pierre Bourdieu has synthesized Weberian, Marxist, Durkheimian, and phenomenological traditions to argue for a model of social organization, the generative mechanism for which is competition for various types of capital within social fields. In Distinction (Bourdieu 1984), arguably the most important application of this grand theoretical project, Bourdieu describes how these various capitals operate in the social fields of consumption. I first review briefly Bourdieu's key concepts and then discuss how the theory addresses the limitations of Warnerian social class research.

Bourdieu argues that social life can be conceived as a multidimensional status game in which people draw on three different types of resources (what he terms economic, cultural, and social capital) to compete for status (what he terms "symbolic capital"). Distinct from economic capital (financial resources) and social capital (relationships, organizational affiliations, networks), cultural capital consists of a set of socially rare and distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge, and practices. Cultural capital entails what Goudner (1979) has called a "culture of critical discourse": a set of decontextualized understandings, developed through a reflexive, problematizing, expansionist orientation to meaning in the world, that are readily recontextualized across new settings (as opposed to knowledge of specific facts; see Hannerz 1990). Cultural capital exists in three primary forms: embodied as implicit practical knowledges, skills, and dispositions; objectified in cultural objects; and institutionalized in official degrees and diplomas that certify the existence of the embodied form. Cultural capital is fostered in an overdetermined manner in the social milieu of cultural elites: upbringing in families with well-educated parents whose occupations require cultural skills, interaction with peers from similar families, high levels of formal education at institutions that attract other cultural elites studying areas that emphasize critical abstract thinking and communication over the acquisition of particularized trade skills and knowledges, and the refinement and reinforcement in occupations that emphasize symbolic production. These innumerable, diverse, yet redundant, experiences particular to cultural elites become subjectively embodied as ways of feeling, thinking, and acting through the generative social psychological structure that Bourdieu terms the "habitus." The habitus is an abstract, transposable system of schema that both classifies the

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It is impossible to do justice to Bourdieu's theory, complexly articulated over many dozens of studies over more than 30 years, in a short review. Instead I briefly summarize the key concepts that pertain specifically to Bourdieu's work on social reproduction linking cultural capital to the field of consumption, and then highlight those aspects of the theory that distinguish it from Warner. Interested readers are encouraged to read Distinction and supporting theoretical statements that outline Bourdieu's project, such as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and Bourdieu (1977).
world and structures action, Bourdieu emphasizes that the contents of the habitus are largely presuppositional rather than discursive and that the habitus structures actions through a process of creative typification to particular situations. In its subjective embodied form, cultural capital is a key element of the habitus.

Like other capital resources, cultural capital exists only as it is articulated in particular institutional domains. According to Bourdieu (as well as many other theorists of modernity), the social world consists of many distinctive, relatively autonomous, but similarly structured (i.e., "homologous") fields such as politics, the arts, religion, education, and business. Fields are the key arenas in which actors compete for placement in the social hierarchy through acquisition of the statuses distinctive to the field. Thus, cultural capital takes on a distinctive form in each field: for example, in the academic field, cultural capital takes the form of intellectual brilliance, research competence, and detailed expertise that is embodied in presentations, teaching, and informal interactions, objectified in journal articles and books, and institutionalized in prestigious university degrees and society fellowships. In Distinction, Bourdieu documents how cultural capital is enacted in fields of consumption, not only the arts but also food, interior decor, clothing, popular culture, hobbies, and sport. Although cultural capital is articulated in all social fields as an important status resource, it operates in consumption fields through a particular conversion into tastes and consumption practices.

Unlike economic theories of markets in which people are conceived as strategic actors, in Bourdieu's theory, resources that are valued in fields of consumption are naturalized and mystified in the habitus as tastes and consumption practices. The habitus organizes how one classifies the universe of consumption objects to which one is exposed, constructing desire toward consecrated objects and disgust toward objects that are not valued in the field. The manifestation of the structuring capabilities of the habitus as tastes and consumption practices across many categories of goods and activities results in the construction of a distinctive set of consumption patterns, a lifestyle ("manifested preferences") that both expresses and serves to reproduce the habitus. Within the field of consumption, tastes and their expression as lifestyles are stratified on the basis of the objective social conditions that structure the habitus. Thus, the field of consumption is stratified so that there exist different lifestyles organized by class position. (To continue the academic field example, the same stratified patterns can be discerned in the desired qualities for faculty members at elite "research" schools, "balanced" schools, "teaching" schools, and community colleges.)

Isolating Cultural Capital, Tastes, and Consumption Fields. Bourdieu argues that it is critical to distinguish between the different types of statuses that accrue in different fields: consumption is a particular status game that must be analyzed in isolation rather than lumped together with work, religion, education, and politics as Warner does. In addition, compared with Warner's conflation of the different bases of social class, a key contribution of Bourdieu's theory is that it effectively disaggregates the key dimensions of taste and explains their unique contribution to social reproduction. Economic capital is inscribed in consumption fields as tastes and consumption practices organized around the exchange value of consumption objects. Like Veblen's pecuniary distinctions, consumption objects can symbolize differences in economic resources of the consumer. But, whereas economic capital is expressed through consuming goods and activities of material scarcity and imputed luxury, cultural capital is expressed through consuming via aesthetic and interactional styles that fit with cultural elite sensibilities and that are socially scarce.

Taste as Practice. Warner and Bourdieu both argue that status is expressed and reproduced through implicit evaluations in everyday social interactions. However, for Warner, these interactions occur within heavily sedimented social networks and formal organizations such as leisure and service clubs and religious groups. This allowed him to assume, like Veblen, the Lynds, and Simmel before him, that elites evolve a distinctive constellation of consumption objects that express their status position. Public signaling of these consensus goods affirms one's social position.

Significantly, Bourdieu offers a theory of social class consonant with social relations in advanced capitalist societies. Downplaying public displays of status symbols, Bourdieu emphasizes that status is continually reproduced as an unintended consequence of social interaction because all interactions necessarily are classifying practices; that is, micropolitical acts of status claiming in which individuals constantly negotiate their reputational positions (see also Collins 1981; Goffman 1967). Crucial to this process is the expression of cultural capital embodied in consumer actions. Rather than accruing distinction from pecuniary rarity or from elite consensus, Bourdieu argues that cultural capital secures the respect of others through the consumption of objects that are ideationally difficult and so can only be consumed by those few who have acquired the ability to do so. To take an example that Bourdieu might use were he to study the contemporary United States, when someone details Milos Forman's directorial prowess in The People vs. Larry Flynt to a friend over dinner (or, conversely, offers a damning hagiography of Forman as an unrepentant proselytizer of the dominant gender ideology), this discussion not only recreatesthe experiential delight that the movie provided but also serves as a claim to particular resources (here, knowledge of directorial styles in movies and the ability to carefully analyze these characteristics) that act as reputational currency. Such actions are perceived not as explicit class markers but as bases for whom one is attracted to and admires, whom one finds uninteresting or does not understand, or whom one finds unimpressive and so seeks
to avoid. Thus, status boundaries are reproduced simply through expressing one's tastes.

In addition to this embodied form, Bourdieu argues that cultural capital also becomes objectified in consumption objects. At first blush, this idea appears to parallel the object signification approach since consumption objects serve as signals of status in both. However, with objectified cultural capital, the stratificatory power of cultural objects results not from group consensus or economic scarcity but from the inferred cultural aptitude of the consumers of the object. In other words, cultural objects such as the high arts that require significant cultural capital to understand and appreciate properly imply that their consumers apply distinctive practices and so serve as surrogate representations of these practices. A foundational premise of Bourdieu's theory, then, is that categories of cultural goods and activities vary in the level of cultural capital required to consume them successfully (i.e., to fully enjoy the act of consuming).

Recovering Bourdieu's Theory of Tastes from Its Critics

Cultural sociologists have vigorously debated the applicability of Bourdieu's theory to the contemporary United States for over a decade. Although early research offered modest support, influential recent studies have challenged its usefulness for explaining how social reproduction works in the contemporary United States (Erikson 1996; Gartman 1991; Halle 1992; Lamont 1992). I argue that two crucial flaws in operationalizing tastes limit the credibility of these refutations (see Holt [1997a] for a more detailed version of this argument):

**Forms of Taste.** Quantitative empirical studies of Bourdieu's theory routinely operationalize tastes only in their objectified form — preferences for particular categories, genres, or types of cultural objects. Exemplary studies of this type such as those conducted by Paul DiMaggio (1957; DiMaggio andMohr 1985; DiMaggio and Ostrower 1990; DiMaggio andUseem 1978) and Richard Peterson (Hughes and Peterson 1983; Peterson and DiMaggio 1975; Peterson and Simkus 1992) use large-scale surveys that are analyzed through regression and factor analyses. The obvious advantage to measuring only objectified tastes is that there are large databases available and this type of data is compatible with sophisticated statistical analysis.

But operationalizing Bourdieu's theory in terms of preferences for cultural objects has become problematic, regardless of whether these objects are conceived as Warnerian consensus goods or as Bourdieusian objectified cultural capital. The utility of goods as consensus class markers has weakened substantially owing to a variety of widely noted historical shifts. Technological advances have led to the wide accessibility of goods, travel, and media by all but the poor (Bell 1976). Innovative styles and designs now diffuse rapidly between haute and mass markets, and between core and periphery states, thus dissolving lags that once allowed for stylistic leadership. From a different vantage point, theorists of postmodernity such as Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson have argued that a defining characteristic of advanced capitalist societies is the massive overproduction of commodity signs. This proliferation of signs leads to an anarchic welter of consumer symbols that are not readily assimilated by social groups in any coherent way. This argument is supported by sociological research demonstrating a high degree of overlap in consumer preferences across social categories (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Peterson and Simkus 1992). In postmodern cultures, it is increasingly difficult to infer status directly from consumption objects, as the object signification approach requires.

Historical changes are also draining the symbolic potency of objectified cultural capital. The postmodern condition is characterized by the breakdown of the hierarchy distinguishing legitimate (or high) culture from mass (or low) culture (Foster 1985; Frow 1995; Huysseun 1986; Jameson 1991). Many of the distinguishing traits of mass culture, such as seriality and mass reproduction, have now become central concerns of the art world, and many popular cultural forms from comic books to rock music to celebrities to television programs are produced and consumed using increasingly complex and esoteric formal lexicons that parallel modern art (Ganson 1994; Jenkins 1992). The objectified form of cultural capital becomes less effective in such a world since it depends on cultural categories and genres for which necessary levels of cultural competence are immanent and vary significantly. Objectified cultural capital can operate effectively only within a stable cultural hierarchy. Thus, as cultural hierarchies have dramatically blurred in advanced capitalist societies, objectified cultural capital has become a relatively weak mechanism for exclusionary class boundaries.

I suggest, then, that the cultural capital requirements necessary to consume successfully particular consumption objects today pose few constraints. Objects no longer serve as accurate representations of consumer practices; rather, they allow a wide variety of consumption styles. But this increasing semiotic malleability does not imply that cultural capital differences in consumption no longer signify. Rather, class differences in American consumption have gone underground; no longer easily identified with the goods consumed, distinction is becoming more and more a matter of practice. As popular goods become aestheticized and as elite goods become "massified" (Peterson and DiMaggio 1975) the objectified form of cultural capital has in large part been supplanted by the embodied form. Given the deteriorating classificatory power of objectified tastes, cultural elites in advanced capitalist societies now attempt to secure distinction by adapting their consumption practices to accentuate the embodied form.

Emphasizing embodied tastes leads to a different style of consuming than in previous eras. In fields organized
by a hierarchy of objectified tastes, consumption practices emphasize knowing about and consuming the appropriate goods (e.g., Bourdieu uses Mondrian paintings and Bach concertos as measures). However, for fields in which there is great overlap in the objects consumed, to consume in a rare, distinguished manner requires that one consume the same categories in a manner inaccessible to those with less cultural capital (see Bourdieu’s 1984, p. 282) description of the lifestyles of cultural producers). In other words, to express the same through tastes leads cultural elites to emphasize the distinctiveness of consumption practices themselves, apart from the cultural contents to which they are applied.

Contents of Taste. Although not always clear in Distinction, it appears that Bourdieu, his supporters, and his critics all now agree that the particular cultural objects in which cultural capital is invested are conventions that are differentially configured across sociohistorical settings (Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone 1993; Joppeke 1986; Lamont 1992; Lamont and Lareau 1988). It is unlikely, then, that the cultural objects Bourdieu describes as resources for the expression of exclusionary tastes in 1960s Parisian society will operate similarly in other sociohistorical settings. Rather than a nonomestic theory, Bourdieu’s theory is a set of sensitizing propositions concerning the relations between social conditions, taste, fields of consumption, and social reproduction that must be specified in each application to account for their particular configuration.

American refutations of Bourdieu’s theory (Erikson 1996; Hall 1992; Halle 1992); and Lamont 1991) are the most significant have, with few exceptions, operationalized elite tastes using the same variables as Bourdieu. These studies evaluate whether the particular articulation of cultural capital in Parisian society of the 1960s, objectified primarily in the legitimate arts and embodied in formal aesthetic appreciation, applies to the contemporary United States. These critics echo a claim that is well documented in historical, demographic, and humanist writings (see, e.g., Huyssen 1986), that the fine arts are much less popular among cultural elites in the United States. Only a small fraction of the American population, cultural producers and a small coterie of insiders from the urban upper class, are knowledgeable fine arts consumers of the type Bourdieu describes as predominant in middle-class circles in France. Art history is not currently a regular part of academic training or informal family socialization in the United States, Bourdieu’s two primary

channels for cultural capital accumulation. And, as sociological studies of genre preferences report, those with high cultural capital are the most ardent consumers of mass culture (DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Peterson and Simkus 1992). Thus, critics conclude that since the high arts play only a peripheral role in the lives of cultural elites, Bourdieu’s theory has little explanatory value in the contemporary United States (Erikson 1996; Halle 1992; Lamont 1992).

The flaw in this argument is that the arts constitute only a small fraction of the universe of consumption fields that can be leveraged for social reproduction. By focusing exclusively on art, these studies give short shrift to the activities that American cultural elites expend the vast majority of their nonwork energies pursuing, such as food, interior decor, vacations, fashion, sports, reading, hobbies, and socializing. These fields should be central to empirical studies of Bourdieu’s theory in the contemporary United States since tastes serve as a resource for social reproduction only in fields in which cultural elites have invested the requisite time and psychic energy to convert their generic cultural capital assets to particular field-specific cultural capitals.

METHODS

I used this reformulation of Bourdieu, specified to account for the sociohistorical context of the contemporary United States by emphasizing mass consumption practices, to guide the design of an interpretive study. The goal of the study is to explore whether variation in cultural capital resources leads to systematic differences in tastes and consumption practices for mass cultural categories. In so doing, I respond to Lamont’s call for a detailed mapping of how cultural capital currently operates in the United States (Lamont 1992; Lamont and Lareau 1988). I began with a sample of 30 informants from the vicinity of State College, a small city in rural central Pennsylvania dominated by Penn State University, who were randomly selected from the phone book (about 20 percent response rate). From this group, I compared 20 informants in the top quintile of cultural capital resources (whom I will refer to as “HCCs”) and 10 informants whose cultural capital resources are in the lowest quintile (hereafter “LCCs”). I view this comparison as a conservative evaluation of Bourdieu’s theory since the most significant class differences in cultural-capital-structured taste are found in large urban areas, where the new class (Gouldner 1979) of symbolic manipulators is larger and more cosmopolitan (Lamont 1992) and where there exist many urban subcultures of cultural producers that are more dis-

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1Bourdieu’s broad theoretical statements support the contemporary interpretation, yet he often makes ahistorical generalizations about the superordinate status of the high arts as a locus for high cultural capital consumption. In Distinction, Bourdieu encourages the latter reading because, in his intensive effort to isolate and describe synchronic differences in formal qualities of taste that vary with cultural capital, he does not execute a fully cultural analysis in which social differences in meanings of those objects consumed, and their sociohistorical genesis, also become a focus of investigation (Calhoun 1993; Gartman 1991).

4I selected the terms “HCC” and “LCC” to connote a hierarchy of tastes and, thus, of social and moral value. The terms are not intended to denigrate LCCs. Just the opposite: by illuminating hierarchies that are smoothed over in everyday life, I hope to defuse their exclusionary power.
tinctive than the new class populations of suburban, ex-
urban, and rural locations (Crane 1992). While LCCs are
all from the local area and so express certain regional
particularities in their tastes, the HCCs have lived across
the country and the world, so their upbringing and educa-
tion is similar to other HCCs in the United States.
Informants, all adult permanent residents of the county,
were randomly selected from the local phone book, con-
tacted by phone, and offered $20 to participate in an in-
home interview. Although more women than men agreed
to be interviewed, I compared the male and female infor-
mants and did not find any differences on the dimensions
taste reported below (DiMaggio and Mohr [1985] re-
port similar findings). Following prior research (Halle
1992; Lamont 1992; Rainwater et al. 1959; Warner, et
al. 1949), in-home ethnographic interviews were used to
collect data. The interviews lasted an average of one hour
and forty minutes, and ranged from one to three hours.
The interviews were transcribed into about 950 single-
spaced pages of text. In addition to these transcripts, the
data examined in the analysis also included details ob-
served in the homes and a demographic questionnaire.
The two groups were constructed on the basis of cul-
tural capital resources. According to Bourdieu and his
American interlocutors, cultural capital resources are ac-
cumulated in three primary sites of acculturation: family
upbringing, formal education, and occupational culture
(Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio and Unseem 1978; Lamont
1992; Peterson and Simkus 1992). The cultural capital
rating scheme for this study uses all three of these ante-
cedents, equally weighted. Family upbringing is measured
in terms of father’s education and occupation, because
the father’s status dominated family status when these
informants were young. Five categories were created for
each dimension (5 = high resources for cultural capital
accumulation, 1 = low resources for cultural capital accu-
cumulation), guided by previous work that has calibrated
differences in American education and occupation with
differences in cultural capital (see Lamont 1992; Peterson
and Simkus 1992). The 10 HCC informants are roughly
equivalent to Gouldner’s (1979) “‘New Class’; all have
at least bachelor’s degrees and work in professional, tech-
nical, and managerial jobs. Most come from families in
which the parents are college educated. In contrast, the
10 LCC informants are from a working-class background:
they have at most a high school education, do manual
labor or service/clerical work if they have jobs, and come
from families where the father has at most a high school
education (usually less) and did manual labor (see Ap-
pendix).2

2Empirical assessments of Bourdieu’s theory typically compare two
or more social class groupings as I do here. However, many studies use
measures of social class to group informants that conflict directly with
Bourdieu’s formulation. For example, Halle (1992) uses Wamerian
measures of income and and neighborhood measures that necessarily
confound economic and social capital with cultural capital, while Erikson
(1996) uses Erik Olin Wright’s class measures, which are primarily

The goal of the data collection was to elicit detailed
descriptions of people’s tastes and consumption practices
across a variety of popular cultural categories prevalent
in the contemporary United States—food, clothing, home
decor and furnishings, music, television, movies, reading,
socializing, vacations, sports, and hobbies. I developed
an interview guide to elicit people’s understandings and
evaluations of different consumption objects, and the
ways in which they consume their choices. Within each
category, questions probed for detailed preferences and
recountings of particular episodes across a variety of situ-
ations and time periods (e.g., for eating: breakfast, lunch,
dinner, and snacks; at home vs. take-out, or eat-in restau-
 rant; with family vs. alone; weeknights vs. weekends;
before vs. after having children; special meals) to elicit
as much detail as possible. Follow-up questions probed
key emic terms that emerged in these descriptions.
In the next section, I describe six systematic differences
in tastes and consumption practices between HCCs and
LCCs that are structured by differences in social condi-
tions. Like all social patterns, these dimensions are sig-
nificant tendencies rather than orthogonal characteristics
of the two groups.

MATERIALITY AND TASTE

A central contention in Distinction is that tastes are
structured through continuities in interactions with mate-
rial culture. The LCCs are acculturated in a social milieu
in which they engage continually the material rigors of
everyday life (e.g., paying monthly utility bills, keeping
the car running, saving money to visit relatives) and so
the ability to manage these material constraints becomes
a primary value. The tastes of LCCs are organized to
appreciate that which is functional or practical—the taste
of necessity (Bourdieu 1984, p. 177). Goods and activi-
ties are valued for their embodiment of the practical: vir-

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tuoso skills that achieve utilitarian ends evoke praise, cultural texts that realistically capture personal experiences are appreciated, corporeal pleasures take precedence.

In contrast, HCCs are acculturated in a social milieu in which they seldom encounter material difficulties and in which their education emphasizes abstracted discussion of ideas and pleasures removed from the material world. For HCCs, the material value of cultural objects is taken for granted: instead taste becomes a realm of self-expression, a means of constructing subjectivity. The tastes of HCCs express this distance from necessity, a distanced, formal gaze and a playful attitude that often takes the material value of cultural objects for granted.

This fundamental distinction in relationship to material culture underlies three important dimensions of taste and consumption practice that distinguish LCC and HCC informants across many of the categories discussed in the interviews: material versus formal aesthetics, referential versus critical appreciation, and materialism versus idealism.

Material versus Formal Aesthetics

For categories that are an important and a routine part of everyday life such as furniture, food, and clothing, LCC tastes are organized by a desire for pragmatic solutions to basic requirements. The LCC informants express concern for the utilitarian characteristics of their house and its furnishings; they must be comfortable, functional, durable, and easy to care for:

Interviewer: What kind of decor do you like in your house?
Katie (LCC): I like comfort. And things that people don’t have to be afraid of when they come in the house, that they have to take off their shoes. Like the dark carpet that you don’t have to worry about. I used to have a dark carpet, but the lighter carpet is easier to clean than the dark carpet. The dark carpet shows every little lint and this can go for a week without having to vacuum. I think we go for comfort more than anything else. We each have our own couch, as you see. Now if I had a larger room, I’d have more rocking chairs or another chair. . . . And if I had another house I’d build a larger kitchen. I’d have a rocking chair in the kitchen and I would have it more comfortable in the kitchen.

Interviewer: When you’re setting up your house, what kinds of things do you like?
Betsy (LCC): Well, wood. We both like . . . well, we have a lot of wood.

Interviewer: When you say you like wood, what about it? Just any furniture that’s made with wood you prefer?
Betsy (LCC): Yes, that’s basically what we do. When we go for a piece of furniture, like when we were looking for a recliner, because I knew it was going to be used a lot, I said I want wood and he agreed because you get kids or company or whatever and they’re always going to go for the recliner and, of course, they’re not always going to have their arms clean or whatever. I said that’s basically what always wore out on mom’s furniture because of all the kids. You know, it’s just one of those things. I mean you wear out the arms of the furniture. I said, “I want wood.” So we basically always go for wood because it’s more durable and you just polish it and you know it’s going to last. I mean it’s not like cloth.

Although material characteristics dominate LCC tastes for interior and furniture, three informants do mention particular styles: two favor a country look, which uses colonial furniture, calico prints, and handmade crafts decorating walls and tables, while one is redecorating her house in Victorian antiques and decor. However, unlike HCCs, LCCs do not invoke a discourse of style to talk about these decorative preferences. Instead, they describe their tastes in terms of the traditions in which they have been raised, which makes their choices comfortable and reassuring.

The HCCs often share LCC material requirements for home interiors; comfort and durability are still important. But rather than dominant dimensions of their taste, material characteristics are baseline criteria; choices between materially satisfactory options are based on formal aesthetic qualities. The HCCs view their homes as canvases upon which they express their aesthetic sensibilities. Interiors need to be visually appealing, to provide the appropriate experiential properties. Decorating is a highly personalized and personalizing activity that is an aesthetic expression of the cultivated sensibilities of the decorator:

Kathryn (HCC): I like choosing things and fitting things together, and bringing a few things from my old life into the new one, and putting them there as a reminder of where you came from. . . . Houses should be a background and they shouldn’t interrupt. They shouldn’t make people look at them rather than the people in them. . . . [when decorating] The main thing is not to draw attention to what we’re going to do. . . . That’s my philosophy, and anything that’s glaring or ostentatious or says its important is out the window to me. I don’t like something that is built to impress.

Interviewer: Tell me about the changes you’ve made to the house.
John (HCC): Well, this house was a disaster. I hadn’t done anything to it in almost 30 years. It’s almost a shrink question. I decided to get my life in order. And part of getting my life in order, now that I have the intellectual energy to do so after [he had recently taken early retirement]. . . . You know, when I’m not working it’s amazing how much intellectual energy you have and it’s all for you. I realized that my surroundings had to be harmonious and sympathetic and supportive and all of that.

Similarly, preferred clothes of LCC informants are durable, comfortable, reasonably priced, well fitted, and, for clothes that will be seen by others, conforming to role norms (i.e., they are appropriate “work clothes” or “church clothes”). A common reference point that illuminates this materialist idea of desirable clothing is that many of the LCC women but none of the HCC women raise (with no prompting) the option of making clothes as a relevant baseline to evaluate store-bought clothing:
Interviewer: What kind of clothes do you like?

Kathryn (HCC): I do not like clothes that draw attention to themselves. . . . But, I’m wearing more bright-colored clothes than I used to, because my first husband didn’t like me to draw attention to myself so I was dressed in very pale colors. But now, I think partly in reaction to that, I will buy clothes that are more brightly colored if I like them. . . . I don’t like clothes that are covered with—I call them “suburban clothes”—they are made of very synthetic fabrics and they have lots of gold on them, and buttons that shine a lot. They look kind of as if they’re shouting.

When HCCs do talk of economical choices, these are couched as less desirable outcomes forced by budgetary constraints (i.e., driven by economic capital) rather than as acculturated desires:

Interviewer: How about clothing, what types of clothes do you like?

Denise (HCC): What kind of clothes do I like—it’s different from what kind of clothes I can afford. I like well-made, well-tailored clothes that have absolutely luxurious fabrics. However, I have been buying a lot of stuff from L. L. Bean because it’s durable and I like gorgeous colors and all those kind of things.

Interviewer: When you say tailored. . . What kind of styles?

Denise (HCC): I don’t like really trendy looking clothes that you’re not going to be able to wear next week. I’m trying to think of a look, you know Chanel?

Some HCCs prefer “functional” clothing, but this term has a very different meaning for HCCs than for LCCs. Functional, for HCCs, is a distinctive aesthetic based on parsimonious design and utilitarian construction similar to the functionalism of high modern architecture and design. “Function,” rather than a pragmatic solution to everyday needs, is inverted by HCCs into form through an aesthetic opposition to the frivolity of “fashion.”

John (HCC): Today I’m buying practical clothes. That is to say they’re mostly cotton. They’re all washable. Mostly they don’t require ironing because I get tired of ironing. . . . I look for—now when I’m buying clothing—I really don’t care what the current style is anymore. You know, if it has good design it will always be in style. And I also tend to look for things which probably are more expensive but which I know will be more durable.

Interviewer: Are there any particular clothing styles that you like?

John: Yeah. I guess the best way to say it would be styles that are functional and designed to be worn by human bodies as they are; as opposed to designed to be worn only standing up at cocktail parties or the races or, you know, as soon as you sit down you know it was a mistake.

Critical versus Referential Reception of Cultural Texts

Habitus-structured orientations toward material culture also organize distinctive styles of consuming mass cultural texts such as books, television, film, and music. Applying a formal interpretive lens, HCCs read popular entertainment as entertaining fictions that are potentially edifying but that do not reflect directly the empirical world (i.e., what Liebes and Katz [1990] term “critical” interpretations).

Interviewer: Why did you like Rain Man so much? Why is that on your list?

Sharon (HCC): Partly because I thought the dynamics between Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise was really entertaining and because Dustin Hoffman did such a good job in that role.

Interviewer: When you say just that Dustin Hoffman was really good, what do you mean by that?

Sharon: I found it amazing. . . . When you watch a string of movies—I’ve seen most of the Tom Cruise movies—to me most of his roles it’s Tom Cruise, not the character that he becomes, even though he does a really pretty decent job, more decent than a lot of actors do. But you’re still very aware of who the actor is and in him I see a lot of the same very subtle mannerisms that he brings to every role probably without even realizing it. And I’ve seen Dustin Hoffman in other things and to me in that movie he became the person he was portraying where your mind. . . . you didn’t even think of the fact that you’d seen him in how many other shows or movies because you were into the character. I like it when an actor and actress can do that. I think it’s rare.

The LCCs, in contrast, tend to interpret cultural texts from a referential perspective: they read these texts as more or less realistic depictions of the world that are potentially relevant to their own lives (see Press 1991). Because LCCs apply the classificatory system used in everyday life to cultural texts, they are attracted to programs and movies they feel are “real!” and to music that speaks directly to their life situation.
Interviewer: What did you like about Sleepless in Seattle?  
David (LCC): It has a good ending and it’s realistic. Yeah, in a way, realistic. In a way it’s kind of far out because, you know, there’s a tremendous amount of money spent in phone calls and transportation back and forth and that bothered me all during the movie, you know, who can afford that? You know, maybe these people in their positions can. I’m never going to be in that position where I can afford that kind of . . . but, you know, if I could, I would probably get involved with somebody with that. If I had the money to do it, you know.

The LCCs’ referential interpretations lead them to dislike programs, movies, and music whose characters, plots, and lyrics conflict with their worldview or remind them of disturbing past experiences:

Interviewer: Do you like Steven Spielberg movies?  
Betsy (LCC): We liked E.T. I haven’t seen the one [Schindler’s List]. Because I’m not in . . . I know it’s all real, as far as what happened to the people, but I can’t get into these . . . even when they have them on A&E like when they’re showing how the concentration camps were and things like that. But this movie, everyone I’ve talked to at work said the same thing as even what the critics are saying that he really did a good job showing exactly what happened to these people for real. I talked to a couple of people that seen the movie: “You have to see the movie.” Well, I can’t watch that kind of movie. I know it’s real and I know this happened to these people, but I can’t get into those kind of movies.

Interviewer: What kind of movies do you like?  
Lynn (LCC): I like the more romantic ones. I try to steer away from the ones that people die of anything, like any diseases or anything like that. . . . Because my mom died of cancer in 1981 so I usually try to stay away from those.

Some HCCs also dislike and actively avoid scenes with graphic violence, but they see a tension between the use of violence in a fictional art form and their visceral reactions to it and so do not reject disturbing scenes categorically. For example, like Betsy above, Sue (HCC) has avoided seeing Schindler’s List because of its graphic depiction of genocide, but her rationale for doing so is quite different. Betsy wouldn’t think of seeing Schindler’s List because the horrific scenes of concentration camps are an extremely disturbing reality—she calls it “too real” —one that is too painful to voluntarily expose oneself to. Sue, in contrast, knows that she also will have an intense emotional response to Schindler’s List but is conflicted about seeing it because she perceives the movie as an artistic statement about an important event rather than just “reality.”

Materialism versus Idealism

Because LCCs are acculturated in materially constrained environments, the good life is often cast in terms of having an abundance of things one likes and having things that are popularly understood as luxurious (Bourdie 1984, p. 177). These materialist tastes are particularly influential in preferences for housing, food, and vacations. The LCC informants grew up and currently live in relatively small living spaces—apartments, trailers, and bungalows. So these informants value uniformly a large living space and large yards and have pursued these goals to the limits of their financial resources.

Heather (LCC): Well it’s kinda weird how we settled on this house. We weren’t looking to buy a house cause we had the house in [town near college], but it was really, really small. Really small. I mean, our bedroom, you walked sideways around the bed. It was small. . . . [Seeing the new house for the first time] First word out—“Wow!” And we walked in and “Whoa!” ‘cause it’s really big.

I asked Heather if their old house was a Victorian since the town has a large Victorian housing stock. She nods and continues to talk about the advantages of the floor plan in the new house. In contrast, HCCs Anna and Rebecca do not evaluate old versus new houses in terms of size. Instead they emphasize the charm and character of historic houses that new houses lack. Other LCC informants who have the money to do so (Ruth, Betsy, Susan) have also moved to larger houses on bigger pieces of property away from neighbors, while others without the necessary income dream of doing so (“any house out of town where I have some space”).

The LCCs with higher incomes consistently express preferences for consumption objects that are indicative of luxury and material abundance: Ruth and her husband own one Mercedes coupe and are shopping for more of these, they have recently acquired numerous antiques, and they enjoy dining regularly at the most expensive restaurant in the county. She tells a story about a birthday party she threw for her husband at this restaurant where they paid for dinner for a large group of friends. Similarly, Lisa and her husband recently dined at an expensive French restaurant, and she professes a desire to own a BMW someday, while Susan and her husband took up yachting on Chesapeake Bay four years ago and have recently upgraded to a sailboat that can sleep seven people comfortably.

Desirable vacation destinations also reveal a yearning for abundance and luxury. For three of the LCCs an ocean cruise is the ideal vacation, and they speak excitedly about the cruises they have taken, describing the cornucopia of dining and social activities (Nancy: “If you’re bored on a cruise, it’s your own fault”). Cruises are an ideal expression of LCC materialist tastes because they are popularly constructed as luxurious and they promote an abundance of activities, food, and drink. Another LCC informant spoke in similar terms about her vacations to Poconos resorts:

Lisa (LCC): [Poconos resorts] have all kinds of activities. . . . The next year we went to a different place and got the room with the pool in your own room and that place had horseback riding and carriage rides and it had a

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shooting range. . . . You pay like $400 a night and it’s most of your meals and entertainment, mostly all the activities they had.

Many LCC informants cannot afford these objects of luxury and abundance, yet they too express a yearning for abundance and luxury within the universe of consumption objects that is economically feasible. Among LCCs, restaurants that serve buffet style are consensus favorites—the contemporary American equivalent of the French working-class meals characterized by “plenty” and “freedom” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 194):

David (LCC): Well, generally when I go out to eat, I’m sitting there thinking, “If I was at home I could fix this, a bigger portion for a whole lot less money than what I’m paying here.” It destroys the whole thing, because I’m thinking so much about how much . . . they’re making a bloody fortune off me for, you know, . . . where a buffet, you know, it’s a sort of a seat kind of you know, I know up front how much it’s going to cost me and I can eat as much as I want. If I go away hungry it’s my fault, you know.

Kate (LCC): Of late, we’ve been going over to Milroy for seafood. Every Friday night they have a buffet. . . . They have crab legs, shrimp, all kinds of fish deep fried, with clams that are deep fried. Along with ham, chicken, beef. You have your beverage and delicious homemade dessert and soft ice cream for $6.95. . . . I wish you could see people eat those crab legs. They bring them out on trays and the minute they bring them to the salad bar, everyone rushes to get them.

Ruth (LCC): At the Hotel Edison—it’s a family-style that has chicken, turkey, or ham that you can pick; there’s filling, and there’s lettuce with that. Jell-O salad, dessert, and coffee, all for like $10, you get all this food, as much as you want, they keep bringing it out, plus waffles. That’s why it’s his favorite thing to eat is to go there and have waffles.

In contrast, through informal and formal humanistic education, HCCs learn to emphasize and value metaphysical aspects of life. They emphasize the subjective production of experience through creative, contemplative, aestheticized, abstracted engagement with the world rather than brute encounters with an empirical reality. Material abundance and luxury are eras forms of consumption because they are antithetical to the ethereal life of the mind. Since HCCs have been raised with few material constraints, they experience material deprivation differently than LCCs. Material paucity is often aestheticized, similar to functionalist design, into an ascetic style by HCCs (cf. Bourdieu 1984, p. 195). This said, it should also be noted that HCCs are at least as willing to make material acquisitions, often spending large amounts of money in so doing, provided that the good or activity supplies (or, at least, can be rationalized or imagined to supply) desired metaphysical experiences.

Materialism and idealism, then, refer to the cultural understandings that are inscribed in consumption practices rather than the quantities and physical characteristics of consumption objects. The HCCs are able to consume luxurious and scarce goods while at the same time negating connotations of waste, ostentation, and extravagance through tastes that assign value based on the ability of the good to facilitate metaphorical experience. In contrast, LCCs value abundance and luxury because these objects, with material and symbolic attributes far beyond what they understand as appropriate “use value,” signify a seldom-experienced distance from material needs. For example, although HCCs tend to have higher incomes, they live in smaller houses than the economically secure LCCs, have smaller yards, and place little value on house size. Charles, whose yearly income is over $100,000, lives in a small ramshackle bungalow in a middle-class town; John lives in a tiny row house in the historic district of another nearby town; Kathryn, whose family income is nearly $100,000, lives in a nondescript townhouse with well-worn furniture. Sue and Margaret have both recently purchased smaller houses that are more manageable and livable than previous ones. This sense of material frugality is evinced throughout the day-to-day lives of this group. For example, Kathryn emphasizes several times that, because she was brought up in England during the war, she is very careful about her spending and is incensed when food is wasted. Though designer clothes very much appeal to her, she would never buy these items at full price, nor would she buy something that requires dry cleaning. Charles is a vegetarian whose standard lunch is some type of cooked grain (corn, wheat, barley, or oats) or soybeans with dried fruit and skim milk, and then some fruit or Jell-O for dessert. For dinner, he has rice, either plain or with some tomatoes or vegetables. Later in the evening, he eats raw vegetables, and he eats apples throughout the course of the day. He carries a briefcase and wears a leather jacket that he has owned for over 40 years.

Unlike the higher-income LCCs, HCCs never emphasize the extravagance of restaurants as a quality influencing their favorite places to dine. Rather, they use extravagance to contrast with their own tastes, which favor cuisines from other countries, often the peasant variety, eclecticism (interesting foods), artisanship, and casual atmospheres rather than the pretense associated with status-oriented restaurants. Since State College offers little in the way of such restaurants, HCCs expressed little interest in local dining. For example, Margaret denies the material symbolism of expensive restaurants connoting luxury and elegance and instead judges them on their ability to deliver experientially. Since none of the restaurants in the area deliver to her expectations, she occasionally dines at family-style restaurants but usually cooks at home. Similarly, Denise and her family usually go out for pizza and would only go to one of the expensive French restaurants “if one of my sons graduates from medical school or something.” Kathryn occasionally takes out-of-town visitors to this restaurant but prefers a local salad bar because she is always watching her figure. Anna and her husband tried a “nice” restaurant near their home, found
the food atrocious, and, so, they prefer going out for "bar food" instead.

WORK AND TASTE

Another central premise of cultural capital theory is that class reproduction occurs through acculturation in particular skills and dispositions required for occupational success (Willis 1978). These cultural capital assets not only allow for occupational success but also become valorized as ends in themselves and so serve as a currency to accrue status in the parallel symbolic economy of consumption (Bourdieu 1984; Collins 1975; DiMaggio 1987).

HCC careers are characterized by an emphasis on symbolic analysis, the necessity to synthesize and manipulate information, to understand and respond to new situations, to innovate rather than follow rote instructions. Structured by an ideology of meritocracy and entrepreneurialism, these knowledge-driven occupations place a premium on professional autonomy, peer competition, and the pursuit of an ever-changing knowledge base needed to maintain leverage in the labor market. Further, in the contemporary United States, HCC employment is characterized by a highly mobile national labor market for professional positions that requires frequent integration into new social networks with heterogeneous interests and values (DiMaggio 1987), structuring a cosmopolitan sensibility among HCCs (Hannen 1990; Merton 1957). In sum, the labor market conditions experienced by contemporary American HCCs structures their tastes, through the habits, to emphasize cosmopolitanism, individuality, and self-actualization.

In contrast, LCCs participate in a local labor market for highly routinized jobs (Leidner 1993). Work is a job, rarely a career. While many LCC informants like their jobs, particularly because of the social outlet they provide, and express pride in what they do, they also describe the tasks they are asked to perform as mundane, providing little intellectual or creative challenge. Instead, working-class jobs are characterized by rote application of technique, high levels of surveillance, and a low emphasis on creativity and problem solving. Consumption by LCCs, then, is often constructed in opposition to rather than contiguous with work, pursuing experiences more exciting and fulfilling than work provides (Halle 1984; Rubin 1976). This orientation results in consumption practices that have a more atomistic cast compared with the instrumental, achievement orientation of HCCs. There is little sense of a competitive job market in which improving skills is critical in maintaining labor market leverage. Rather than individual achievement, working-class positions emphasize local communal mores (such as found in collective workplace practices to resist managerial control; see Burawoy 1979). The work of LCCs, then, structures tastes that emphasize the local, the autotelic, and the collective (cf. Rainwater et al. 1959).

Cosmopolitan versus Local

The HCCs understand their social world to be much more expansive than do the LCCs. All of the HCC informants have lived in other states and five in other countries. They travel routinely throughout the United States and overseas to visit friends and family, for business, and for vacations. In contrast, only two of the LCC informants have lived outside the state in which they were born and raised; they rarely travel outside of the midwestern states, and rarely mention friends or family outside the immediate vicinity:

Lynn (LCC): I like State College because you're within an hour of everything here, or two hours if you want to go to Harrisburg, a mall, or something like that.

Interviewer: Do you take vacations?

Lynn: Usually, I'll go to my grandparents [in the county] and cook dinner and go out to eat. During the school year usually the days I take off there is something going on at her school—chaperoned a field trip. I don't take a whole lot of days off.

Interviewer: Any other places?

Lynn: Yeah, a little bit, especially during the summer we usually go out to all the little carnivals [around the county].

The HCCs talk frequently about the trade-offs of moving to a rural college town, comparing the physical beauty and peaceful way of life to the lack of cultural resources and demographic diversity. Some feel that the balance attained by a university town is just right, but many feel that they have made a significant lifestyle sacrifice because of the paucity of cultural resources. Because HCCs construct their reference groups on a national and even international basis, a common issue is how to maintain these relationships while living in a small isolated community. For example, Kathryn regularly invites out-of-town friends from Washington, Philadelphia, and New York to stay "out in the country," and these friends reciprocate by putting her up in the city in order to get needed exposure to city life. Charles spends several months of the year visiting friends in Europe and the western United States. Margaret chose weaving as an avocation because it did not require her to become too invested in the local community; it had to "be moveable, to be portable, because I knew that it was likely that we'd be moving around a lot. And I needed something that I could take with me, that I wouldn't feel resentful because I had to pick up and leave something there I had invested time and energy in."

Tastes for news offer another informative example since what one considers relevant news depends on the breadth of the perceived social world in which one lives. The LCCs strongly favor the local newspaper because it covers the nexus that concerns them: they read the local section, obituaries, and local sports. The HCCs view the local newspaper as a poorly written and parochial substitute for big-city papers. For example, Anna uses hunting articles featured in the local newspaper as a synecdoche standing for the parochial LCC mores that she disdains:
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Interviewer: Why do you choose to subscribe to the [New York] Times as opposed to local newspapers?

Ronald (HCC): Well, we subscribed to the local newspaper and we stopped our subscription for I guess two major reasons. One is we were sick of seeing the dead animals that hunters have caught on the front page during hunting season. In color, yeah, the bears. And two is we were... we felt that a lot of the editorials were really very... I just think very conservative and I just wasn't... when they withheld "Doonesbury,"... that was kind of the final blow.

Exoticism. The most powerful expression of the cosmopolitan-local opposition in the realm of tastes is through perceptions of and desires for the exotic—consumption objects far removed conceptually from what is considered to be normative within a category. Both HCCs and LCCs enjoy variety in their consumption to a greater or lesser extent, but they differ in their subjective understandings of what constitutes variety. What is exotic for LCCs is mundane for HCCs, and what is exotic for HCCs is unfathomable or repugnant for LCCs. And, while LCCs find comfort in objects that are familiar, HCCs seek out and desire exotic consumption objects.

Discussing food, LCCs offer conventional choices as their favorites for both home-cooked meals and restaurant meals, voicing uncertainty about or disdain toward more exotic choices. For example, while many HCCs eat Chinese food as a regular part of their diet and do not use this cuisine as a signifier of exoticism, LCCs understand Chinese cuisine as exotic and so tend to avoid it. They rarely cook Chinese at home, they order Chinese dishes conservatively at restaurants by always choosing the same dish or often choosing dishes most similar to American food such as sweet-and-sour pork, and some avoid it completely: "I'll walk past a Chinese restaurant in State College and the smell of walking past it about gags me" (David).

The HCCs, however, frequently emphasize preferences for what they consider to be exotic foods. For example, Ronald asserts his distinctive tastes by describing a business trip to France where he enjoyed dishes that Americans generally consider inedible:

Interviewer: Were there any dishes that you really liked when you were in France?

Ronald (HCC): I guess the morel mushrooms were the part that I remember the most because they had them on practically everything and they're really great. I also had some very good horsemeat of all things... It was a specialty of the house. It was a tateredine where they... one of these thick French sauces on it. It was really great... I've also been known to eat brains. If those are done properly by a French chef, they can be very good.

Similar differences were evident in entertainment choices as well. For whites who live outside of urban areas, one of the most culturally distant populations imaginable is the predominantly African-American ghetto. How informants position their tastes in regard to urban African-American cultural forms such as rap music, then, is revealing. The LCCs either adamantly dislike or express bewilderment about rap:

Interviewer: How about rap?

Lisa (LCC): No, that's one thing I don't like.

Interviewer: Why don't you like it?

Lisa: I don't know, I just never did, I just think it's silly, these people are talking or whatever you call it, rapping, I call it weird. Any fool can do that, that's my opinion of it when it came out.

Susan (LCC): I like all kinds of music. Classical... rap I hate. I shouldn't say I like all, because I do not like rap.

Interviewer: What don't you like about rap?

Susan: I can't understand it half the time. It's too noisy. Too confusing. I just don't like it. The beat... I don't like the talking all the time.

Among HCCs, however, showing respect for and interest in rap expresses cosmopolitan tastes—the tastes of a person whose social world is not only geographically but also racially and economically inclusive:

Interviewer: What do you think of rap music?

Sue (HCC): What little I know about it, is that I think it's the kind of music that's really kind of neat. I like the beat of it. It's very unique culturally. But some of the rap music that is on the radio, I don't care for some of it. But I don't want to denounce all of rap music because of the actions of a few. I think there is a place for it.

Interviewer: So you just heard a little of it here?

Sue: Yeah. Even like some of Sister Souljah and some of those things, I've seen some on MTV. Every so often I'll turn it on. And, as I said, I think it's... it seems to have a lot of potential. I know it's very popular among African-Americans and expresses their culture. But I don't like the violence of some of it. And what appalls me about some of the rap music is that it's done by African-Americans but it really degrades, particularly African-American women.

Interviewer: When you say you think it has a lot of potential, what...?

Sue: Well, it's... because I think it expresses emotion. I think the rhythm of it and the rhyming to it, is that you can get a lot of... what am I trying to say? The music kind of expresses what the words are trying to say. Because of that staccato beat to it. And that's what I find attractive about it. But it's what some of the words are saying that I don't like.

Consumer Subjectivity as Individuality versus Local Identity

Cultural historians and critics argue persuasively that the pursuit of individuality through consumption is a central characteristic of advanced capitalist (often "consumer") societies, the United States in particular (Baudrillard 1981; Ewen and Ewen [1982] 1992; Jameson 1991). This characterization aptly describes HCCs, but is inaccurate for LCCs. Daniel Miller's (1987) conception of the relationship between consumption and subjectivity
provides a framework that can be used to explain this difference. The process of consumption allows people to reappropriate meanings that have become objectified in consumption objects through mass production. In highly differentiated, monetized societies dominated by the proliferation and fragmentation of objectified culture (i.e., meanings inscribed in objects found in the public world such as material goods, services, places, media, architecture, etc.), this process of appropriation becomes increasingly problematic. So practical strategies evolve to allow for the construction of subjectivity through consumption.

Although consumer subjectivity is problematic for both HCCs and LCCs, they pursue different strategies to overcome this tension. Consumption practices always simultaneously express the contradictory tendencies of individual distinction and social affiliation, but HCCs and LCCs differentially reflect this dialectic. For LCCs, consumer subjectivity is produced through passionate and routinized participation in particular consumption activities. In most cases these subjectivities are explicitly collective, positioning one within an idioculture of other participants in the locality.

In contrast, given their cosmopolitan social milieu and their equation of subjectivity with individuality, consumer subjectivity for HCCs requires constructing what is perceived to be a unique, original style through consumption objects. The HCCs experience the potential for homogenization of commodity goods to a far greater extent than do LCCs and, thus, are far more energetic in their attempts to individuate their consumption. To express an individualistic sense of subjectivity through consumption is inherently contradictory in an era in which mass goods are mass produced and experienced as mass consumed (see Clarke 1993; Holt 1995; Miller 1987), yet HCCs attempt to produce individual subjectivity through authenticity and connoisseurship.

Authenticity. The HCCs locate subjectivity in what they perceive to be authentic goods, artisanal rather than mass produced, and auraic experiences that are perceived as removed from, and so minimally contaminated by, the commodity form. The HCCs tend to disavow mass culture even when mass-produced goods are of high quality, and they camouflage their use of mass-produced goods when using them is unavoidable. John expresses this perspective explicitly in describing a particular plate that has captured his imagination:

Interviewer: What really interests you about this type of pottery right now?
John (HCC): Well, it's very beautiful. It has... first of all, I guess good art pottery is probably part of the arts and crafts movement. It's not mass produced. Most of it is not machine made. It has individuality. There isn't very much of it, relative to something like say to Roseville or some of the later potteries where they stamped out millions of them, you know... I think that our culture is to homogenize people, homogenize their taste. And I think that, you know, you have subdivisions that are full of houses that all have vinyl siding and if you look at it in the right light, they all have a bulge in where they didn't do it right. They'll never be any different color. It will never weather. There's the sameness that I find really—I don't know—it's suffocating. I mean you go into shopping malls, you go into one shopping mall and it seems like every other shopping mall.

Similarly, Kathryn decorates her home with one-of-a-kind artisanal objects, which she views as personally meaningful, rather than mass-produced goods, which express exchange value:

Kathryn (HCC): Things that matter to me are things that remind me of things, rather than things that have their own intrinsic value. In other words, I'd rather put something on the wall that was painted by a friend... than something an interior designer had just written up... So I'd never hire an interior designer because I imagine living in someone else's stage set, you know...

She approaches her clothing in the same way, hunting through Washington, D.C., thrift stores, out-of-town friends' hand-me-downs, even deceased people's clothing, in order to find articles that are unique and so more personalizable in relation to mass-merchandised fashion. Decommodified authenticity is taken to the extreme by Charles, who completely dismisses all of mass culture and, hence, professes complete ignorance of it. When asked about his favorite movies, he has a hard time recalling the last time he's seen one and, out of desperation, dregdes up Casablanca as his favorite. He never watches television so he does not know of Roseanne, and he has barely heard of Madonna or Michael Jackson. Rather, he repeatedly redirects my questions to discussions of his own creations and those of his friends (such as the pieces of art he has scattered about his living room).

The desires of HCCs for decommodified authenticity are also prevalent in vacation preferences. Those LCCs who can afford to take a vacation uniformly favor popular destinations such as Disney World, Sea World, Atlantic City, and the beaches of New Jersey and Delaware. They also tend to prefer trips where the activities are planned by others and highly routinized (ocean cruises, "all-in-one" bus and plane tours, theme parks). In contrast, HCCs dislike and so tend to avoid what they perceive to be mass-produced (and, so, artificial) tourist activities and, instead, wherever they are, engage in a tourist style that seeks the "authentic" experience that is found through exploration and happenstance rather than routinized and popular activities (cf. MacCannell 1976). The authentic is achieved when one actually enters the "world" of a different social milieu, rather than gazing at it from outside:

Kathryn (HCC): When traveling, I go to see friends who know their way around. Two of my friends were artists from down in Manhattan, so we go and see them and eat with them. And it's sort of weird vegetarian restaurants in SoHo you know... So we look for those things. Or we go and see another friend who's in theater and we eat at a Chinese restaurant he knows. We go and see people who

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CULTURAL CAPITAL AND CONSUMPTION

know their way around. . . . If we go to Philadelphia, we stay with my sister and we go with them to their lives, which is kind of rather "Mainline." You know, sort of snooty, the Ivy League type. And that's fun for a change, too. And so we see friends and family and go with them into their lives.

The HCCs on occasion "do" popular tourist destinations such as Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco. But their understanding of these activities—they defensively admit to doing so and suggest that these activities are frivolous compared with other more interesting experiences on the trip—expresses their interests in authentic, decontextualized experiences in contrast with LCCs who view these same activities as highlights.

Country music provides another site for invoking tastes for decontextualized authentic cultural objects versus the popular. Country music is sharply divided into "traditional" and "contemporary" genres (see Peterson 1978). The most popular radio station in the area plays contemporary country, while the traditional variant (which is usually understood to include bluegrass, swing, and Appalachian "old time" music as well as the "hard" country music of the 1950s–1970s exemplified by Hank Williams, Merle Haggard, and George Jones) is much less popular, played occasionally on the local National Public Radio (NPR) station and in live performances at some clubs in the area. For LCCs, traditional country music is the music they grew up with, a style that, except for the eldest informants, they now view as old-fashioned and backward. All but one who likes country, then, invokes the distinction between this style of country—often describing it as "tawny" and critically stereotyping the lyrical content (Heather: "The guy talks about his dog dying")—and "new" or "contemporary" country. The LCCs strongly prefer the latter because it has a modern sensibility with lyrics that aptly express their self-understandings. The three HCCs who express a preference for country, however, have little interest in contemporary country. Instead they favor bluegrass and other much less popular traditional styles that are described as original, unique varieties of American music, rather than a music genre that speaks to their lives. (These different tastes for country also provide another example of LCC's referential vs. HCC's critical interpretations of cultural texts described above.)

Connoisseurship. While authenticity involves avoiding contact with mass culture, connoisseurship involves reconfiguring mass cultural objects. Applying a highly nuanced, often idiosyncratic approach to understand, evaluate, and appreciate consumption objects, connoisseurs accentuate aspects of the consumption object that are ignored by other consumers. Thus, personal style is expressed through consumption practice even if the object itself is widely consumed. This stylistic practice necessitates the development of finely grained vocabularies to tease out ever more detailed nuances within a category, the expression of opinionated and often eclectic evaluations of alternatives, and the ability to engage in passionate appreciation of consumption objects meeting one's calculus of "quality" within a category.

All HCCs have at least one category for which they have developed the requisite knowledge and interest of a connoisseur and many have several such categories. John, a quintessential connoisseur, expresses such tastes for virtually every topic in the interview. We spend about 20 minutes talking about oriental rugs, touring his house to admire and evaluate the dozen or so rugs spread throughout. He waxes enthusiastically about their qualities, such as the use of vegetable dye, that make a rug beautiful rather than ordinary.

John (HCC): By the way, these are all vegetable dyes as opposed to aniline dye, which is another level of sophistication that I've worked my way up to. I've reached the point where when I see something that's done with aniline dyes, I don't like it any more. . . . I mean this is a new Turkish carpet (points to a rug), but they're once again using vegetable dyes. Well. . . . I know we're running out of time but I want to show you something. Now is that (points to another rug) bad color or is that bad color?

Interviewer: It's different.

John: This is a very nice rug. But this is aniline dye and that's vegetable dye. And it says it all right there.

Similarly, Sue approaches going out to eat as a connoisseur. She purposely accumulates specialized knowledge about cuisines and restaurants that she uses to construct a distinctive style, leveraged as important interactional resource to interact with her HCC friends.

Sue (HCC): I really like going out to a good meal and having a glass of wine and making an event out of eating. And that's true when I travel, too. I'm one of these people. . . . I research restaurants when I travel and I pick out restaurants in various areas where I'm going if they have good reputations because when I travel I think food is as important as the sights I see. You know, I can skimp on a hotel, but I don't want to skimp on good food. And maybe it's because my lifestyle is so hectic that I enjoy being waited on. But that's something that I really do enjoy doing.

Interviewer: When you say it's like an event for you, what do you mean by that?

Sue: Well, it's something I look forward to. It's something I find relaxing. I have. . . . I love eating. I mean talk to my friends at work. I mean, you know, I have a reputation for loving to eat. And I do, I love to try new and different foods. With the exception of insects and octopus, there's very few things I don't like to eat. So. . . . I tell you, to me that's a very important recreational activity.

In addition to the application of detailed knowledge and the accompanying enthusiasm these minutiae bring forth, eclecticism is, in addition to an expression of cosmopolitanism, an important dimension of connoisseurship. Eclecticism allows connoisseurs to construct distinctive tastes in categories in which the use of conventional goods is difficult to avoid because choices are largely constrained to a limited range of mass-produced goods. In categories such as interior decor, clothing, and food,
in which consuming often requires combinations of goods (e.g., furniture and decorative items are combined to set up a living room or a bedroom, clothes are combined into an outfit), and so on. This is what food columns (e.g., turkey dinner "with all the fixings") such as stuffing, potatoes, a green vegetable, gravy, and cranberry sauce), HCC connossseurs break down these conventions. For example, Kathryn’s special meal is an intercontinental pastiche bearing no resemblance to normative combinations (all the more individualized due to the exotic components):

**Interviewer:** What would you prepare for a special meal?

**Kathryn (HCC):** Start with a cold soup like vichysoise or gazpacho, my husband makes a spicy Jamaican chicken with rice, or maybe trout sauced with red wine base with Cointreau, and make a big salad with bitter greens, and a different dessert such as a great big souffle or something like that. We have wine with meals and my husband makes planter’s punch.

The same pattern is also evident in discussion of interior decor. Whereas the LCCs who express design preferences favor conventional styles of “country” or “Victorian,” HCCs explicitly disavow following a style that is widely adhered to and, instead, talk about how they mix and match to create their own personal look.

For reception-oriented categories such as reading, television and movies, and music, people cannot actively combine different consumption objects, so eclecticism takes a different form: instead of eclectic combinations, connossseurs express eclectic tastes by crossing or subverting institutionalized genre boundaries. The LCCs typically identify their movie tastes (e.g., “drama” or “action/adventure”) their reading choices (e.g., “historical romance”), and music tastes (“contemporary country”) using a popularly constructed genre distinction. Compare this to John, who describes his music tastes as beginning in high school with chamber music (for which he continues to prefer to listen to particular recordings on record rather than compact disc), moving on to the Statler Brothers, George Harrison, folk music by artists such as Pete Seeger and the Weavers, Gilbert and Sullivan, the Beach Boys, and “lots of Vivaldi; lots and lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of Vivaldi.”

The HCCs’ regard for connossseurship is also evident when they discuss those categories in which they have not invested the resources to develop fine-grained tastes. For these, they evaluate their actions against a connosseur standard and discuss, apologetically or defensively, their relative neglect:

**Interviewer:** What are some of your favorite meals generally?

**Rebecca (HCC):** Okay. Well, this will be a real short section of your interview. I’m not a person who is picky about food. I’m not a person who can tell you necessarily what the ingredients in something are. I’m not a cook. I’m able to cook when I have to. But it’s not a priority for me. I can eat the same thing every day, you know.

In contrast, because LCC subjectivity is local and collective, consumer subjectivity depends on community acknowledgment of particular tastes and practices. Rather than seek out authentic decommodified goods and apply idiosyncratic tastes to mass goods, LCC subjectivity parallels the role of insider core members of consumer subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander 1995): they develop the requisite knowledge, skills, and social capital within a particular activity that then become key resources for the construction of subjectivity by self and others. For example, Nancy and her husband started a folk dancing club and spend most of their free time organizing events, going to dance practices, and socializing with some of the members who have become very close friends. From the interview, it is clear that she thinks of herself, first and foremost, as a folk dancer; it is through this avocation that she attains much of her subjective sense of self. Yet, she does not claim this as a distinctive identity. Instead, her sense of self vested in this avocation is a communal one, located in sharing great enthusiasm and development of skills with like-minded others. This is a particularly powerful source of identity for Nancy, not because she has carved out a qualitatively distinctive style, but because, through her devotion, she is located at the nucleus of this local group. Likewise, Katie and her husband have played cards with the same group of six or eight friends two or three times per week for many years. Card playing has become a central constitutive element of Katie’s identity, one that exists only to the extent that it is jointly constructed with local others.

Because for LCCs subjectivity does not require asserting individuality in relation to mass culture or normative local tastes, there is no contradiction between subjectivity, mass consumer goods, and the conventions of mass culture. In fact, mass goods and conventions often provide useful resources from which a local identity is constructed. For example, Heather prides herself on wearing clothes with a nautical theme, which she will buy whenever she comes across such clothing at a local department store. Even when describing individuated consumption objects, LCCs rarely camouflage their use of mass-produced objects:

**Interviewer:** What are some of your favorite meals for dinner?

**Lynn (LCC):** I like my chicken broccoli casserole.

**Interviewer:** How do you make that?

**Lynn:** You just put everything in a casserole pan, cut up your cooked chicken and your cooked vegetables and you can use mixed vegetables and potatoes, and you have a thing of broccoli soup and one thing of broccoli and one broccoli cheese and just throw that in with milk and put it in the oven for 15 minutes and cut out biscuits that come in a round metal can, cut them up and put them on the top and then throw it back in until it’s brown. It’s pretty good and it’s real easy.

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Since LCCs do not participate in social worlds in which subjectivity is constructed through individualized consumption, they seldom use the connoisseur's vocabulary of expertise and passion to talk about their preferences. Interview questions that HCCs use as opportunities to express fine-grained sensibilities provoke terse responses from LCCs, who understand these questions to ask for trivial expressions of preference rather than as an invitation for a consumerist performance. For example, Joseph has an impressive collection of 19 rifles hanging on his living-room wall. When I inquire about the guns, Joseph makes clear that he is not so much interested in talking about different models and styles of guns to express connoisseur tastes (he would add "almost anything" for the right price) as he is in telling stories about acquiring and using the guns, such as trading with a friend for a gun, hunting deer and wild turkey with friends, and teaching his sons how to hunt, which invest the guns with particularized local meanings.

Ruth's description of her antiques is particularly poignant in this regard. Through much determination and sacrifice over the last 20 years, Ruth and her husband have raised their income to the upper strata of the State College area. Now that they have reached this position, they are engaged in a project to evolve their lifestyle to match their economic position. Yet, even though Ruth lives in a nice neighborhood, has acquired a large collection of antiques, and entertains expensively, she does not convey an HCC style because she has not acquired the performative means to do so. Although most of her free time over the past five years has been devoted to antiquing, she has not developed the vocabulary of appreciation and evaluation to convey this interest as does an HCC connoisseur such as John:

**Interviewer:** How did you get into [antiques]?
**Ruth (LCC):** I always liked antiques, but I never had them. I would go to garage sales. I mean, like 10 years ago, when I was buying stuff at auctions and putting it in the garage, and after the children went and I said "We're gonna re-do the house." And so I started getting. I decided I was gonna do it. And I like Victorian and country and...so I went to the garage and started pulling these things out and then it just. I would buy more. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** You just got more, more involved in it?
**Ruth:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And so how'd you find out about where all this stuff is, and which pieces you wanted?
**Ruth:** Oh, just...if I like it, I buy it. I mean, I look. Every weekend I look. (laughs) I made some purchases last weekend. In State College at a garage sale that picture for $35.

**Interviewer:** What, what do you like about the picture?
**Ruth:** Oh, I just like. . . . It just has personality. Something like a . . . different than new things. (laughs). . . . Plus if it gives you a little more . . . a homey feeling. I think. I don't know, maybe it's my age. (both laugh) This sofa here, I paid $22 for it. But I ended up reupholstering it. It costs me like $700 to refinish it, so, still in all $722. Where can you get a sofa like that?

Instead of describing her antiques in connoisseur terms, she reverts to pragmatic evaluations (e.g., good prices). Throughout the interview, she is uncomfortable making any strong and specific evaluative claims about the qualities of her antiques compared to others; she just likes them. The interview was uncomfortable for both parties because we both understood that some of my questions encouraged her to express connoisseur tastes and that she was not able to respond as an HCC person might. She quickly became conscious of this inability and felt uncomfortable; likewise, I understood that my questions put her in an uncomfortable position because she had trouble responding as she wanted to, which made me feel uncomfortable.

By comparison, for HCCs, evaluating consumption objects is a primary, sometimes even dominant aspect of consuming. Thus, in many HCC interviews the mention of even the most mundane of consumption objects (e.g., water!) led with little prompting, to lengthy soliloquies elaborating in great detail the prized and disliked qualities within a category. In these interviews, I was often left with the impression that a primary attraction of many consumption objects is that they serve as resources for very detailed and opinionated conversations about the relative merits of different goods within a category. For HCCs, the interview itself was clearly an enjoyable experience since it closely paralleled this style of consuming.

**Leisure as Self Actualization versus Autotelic Sociality**

The HCCs place tremendous stock in self-actualizing experiences. So, while opposed to material abundance, experiential abundance is highly valued. The HCCs evince an orientation toward leisure that mirrors their approach to work: they seek out diverse, educational, informative experiences that allow them to achieve competence, acquire knowledge, and express themselves creatively (see Lamont 1992). This is not to argue that HCCs understand leisure as an instrumental pursuit but, rather, that the intrinsic satisfactions of leisure accrue from learning, achieving, and creating. For example, Rebecca is a history buff who has pursued this interest in a prototypically American HCC style. Following other family members, she joined the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), where she has risen through the ranks and now gives dozens of history lectures every year to DAR chapters around the state, does her own history research, and plans to write a book. Margaret offers a different example of the same phenomenon: rather than complement her work, she has constructed her leisure to substitute for the primary characteristics of HCC work that she
has forsaken. Educated at an elite university, she acknowledges considerable ambivalence in her “choice” to be a housewife and mother in order to support her husband’s academic career. But she is adamant in framing her primary avocation, weaving, as equivalent to a profession: “I do a lot of weaving. It’s basically what I did instead of a job.” She attends conferences, subscribes to numerous publications, participates in a study group to keep up-to-date on new techniques and styles, maintains an informal network of weavers with whom she shares such information, and constantly strives to improve her skills and her ability to create new patterns:

Margaret (HCC): I’m basically a student. I mean, I see myself that way. I do a lot of exploratory weaving. I gamble on certain challenges. Try new things. Win some, lose some. . . . There are a couple of ways of approaching weaving. One of them is to get into an area and push it. . . . The “pick-up” is specifically an area that I have really pushed both in terms of the design, in terms of the materials used, and in the technique that you use to do it. Previously to that, I spent about two years doing coverlet structures, where I was doing a lot of research and talking to people who had old drafts. And working out various kinds of structures. . . . So I would take these structures and rework them. Taking an idea and manipulating it.

Like HCCs, LCCs also participate in many hobbies in which they apply skills they have learned and further hone these skills. Yet, whereas HCCs understand these hobbies as reflections of and means to accumulate valued skills and knowledge, and as a site for achievement, LCCs emphasize their autotelic aspects—the intrinsic enjoyment that results from the knowledgeable application of skills and talents with others who also enjoy the activity. For example, Joseph enjoys talking on his citizen’s band radio, not primarily because it allows him to advance skills or express creative talents, but because it provides an interesting and routinized form of social interaction:

Interviewer: How about hobbies? What would you consider to be your hobby?
Joseph (LCC): I like my CB. I have a citizen’s band radio.
Interviewer: So what do you do with it? Do you have a home unit here?
Joseph: Yeah, it’s up in my radio home, yeah, I have a home unit. Oh, I talk everywhere on it. I talk to people all over it.
Interviewer: How much time a week do you spend talking on your . . .
Joseph: Four hours a day or something like that, you know. Off and on. It depends on what kind of . . . like if you got too much static in the air, you just can’t hear nothing. It’s just all noise. But then when it’s . . . like when you got skip. That’s people you know. . . . Say people down in Georgia talking. That’s called skip. They’re skipping up here. And then when you can get into them, you can sit and talk to them.
Interviewer: Why is that more fun?
Joseph: Well, it just makes contact. You know, it’s making contact just to see how far you can get out. And to see . . . it’s more or less like . . . I don’t know. What would you say, a long distance friend or something like that you know. To see if you can actually . . . you don’t realize how many people is out there on them radios. Oh, there are like millions. It’s just a challenge to see if you can get back to them, you know, some other date. But when I do, I keep a log of . . . with their call number and the state and what time it is and what channel it was on and the climate outside, the weather. So, you know, I guess it makes a lot of determination the weather and that.

An example that draws out the distinctiveness of HCCs and LCCs leisure practices is the consumption of nature. In part because of the locale of the study, both HCCs and LCCs engage in extensive consumption of nature—participating in activities such as gardening, hunting, fishing, and hiking. However, HCCs and LCCs nature dissumption differs considerably. The HCCs use nature as a resource that allows them to express their creative abilities:

Sue (HCC): Yeah, I like working in the yard. I find it creative and I also find it relaxing. . . . I don’t cut the grass. We have some guys that come and do that. And they do some of the heavy trimming too. I do everything else.
Interviewer: Why do you like working in the yard?
Sue: There’s just something nice about planting something and watching it grow. You know, it’s just—especially if you work with flowers or perrenials and trying to arrange things and work with colors. Because particularly when you work with perrenials you have something permanent. They come back year after year. And I really enjoy working with perrenials.
Interviewer: So what do you try and do when you say you’re planting them and working with colors?
Sue: It’s kind of like redecorating a house. About two years ago one fall, I decided to redecorate my yard and I dug up all of my perrenials and I split them and I moved them all over the yard. Then in the spring they all came up and I got to see the yard look very different.
Margaret (HCC): This is the most exciting place we’ve lived in that respect. Because this basically was our yard. It was basically a HCC yard to design. And I did. To a large extent there was some stuff here which we left when I looked around. But basically, I designed the beds, designed what went into them. Chose my plants, and filled it up.

Whereas HCCs use nature primarily as a site for the expression of individual creativity and achievement, LCCs tend to commune with rather than express themselves through nature. This communion is often social, "communitas" in Durkheim’s terminology. Describing their annual Canadian fishing trip, Katie is adamant that her practice is essentially “being in” nature, no more: “What I like about fishing is just sitting next to the stream, and watching the stream. It’s really relaxing.” Similarly, Lynn takes regular drives in the country, which she enjoys as a holistic experiential treat. Betsy and her husband have a trailer in a trailer park out in the country where they go every summer weekend to “watch the grass grow.” Joseph delights in the experiential qualities

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of his hunting trips, describing the peacefulness of being out by himself in the woods, interacting with animals:

**Interviewer:** What do you like about hunting?

**Joseph (HCC):** Deer hunting. I like to sit and hear the deer sneaking up, you know. Turkey, I like to hear them call, you know, when you call. I like to hear them call and how they work into you and how you work them in. But most of all, I like the way that you can just sit back and it gives you a peace of mind, you know, you can do a lot of thinking and there's nobody there to wake you up except for the turkey or the deer, you know. It's just relaxing out in the woods. You get closer to God out there, too.

HCCs and LCCs consume nature differently because they value different dimensions of the experience. For LCCs the value of leisure inheres primarily in the experience itself and the use of this experience as a social resource, while for HCCs leisure is valued, like other commodities, as a resource that allows for individual expression and personal achievement.

**DISCUSSION**

Contemporary American ideology holds that tastes are individualized and disinterested. “Be your own dog!” the Red Dog beer ad shouts. But tastes are never innocent of social consequences. To be “cultured” is a potent social advantage in American society, providing access to desirable education, occupations, social networks, and spouses. Conversely, to grow up in conditions that deny the accumulation of cultural capital leads to exclusion from these privileged social circles and condescension and demands of deference from elites, a form of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu 1984) that is rarely acknowledged because tastes are understood as idiosyncratic choices.

Butting this ideology, academic scholarship has often interpreted the oft-noted decline in the potency of consensus markers of class position as a democratic leveling of consumption into class-neutral lifestyles. From the perspective of Warnerian social class theory, the 20 interviews reported here would likely confirm this assertion. I find, like many other studies, that LCCs consume many of the same goods and participate in many of the same activities as HCCs. In fact, supposed consensus symbols of the middle class are sometimes mentioned more often by LCCs: the only two people who enjoy watching golf are from this group, as is the only person who wants to see an opera.

But, in advanced capitalist countries, overlap in the purchase of goods and participation in activities across classes does not necessarily imply the absence of class patterning of consumption (Holt 1997b). Using a reformulated version of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital and taste that emphasizes the boundary marking capabilities of mass consumption practices, I demonstrate that consumption patterns do vary by cultural capital across a variety of dimensions. I detail six dimensions of taste and consumption practice that distinguish HCCs from LCCs: material versus formal aesthetics, referential versus critical appreciation, materialism versus idealism, local versus cosmopolitan taste, consumer subjectivity as local identity versus individuality, and leisure as self-actualization versus autotelic sociality.

These six dimensions suggest an extension of the most important empirical finding supporting Bourdieu’s theory: that HCC “omnivores” tend to like and actively consume a much broader range of both popular and high entertainments than LCC “universes” (DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Peterson and Simkus 1992; Wilekinsky 1964). Sociologists have argued that since HCCs must interact successfully in heterogeneous social milieus, and since consumption serves as a primary interactional resource for such interaction, they tend to have more diverse tastes (DiMaggio 1987). I also find that HCCs consume a wider variety of genres and styles than do LCCs, but the explanation that these differences are driven by omnivorous versus univorous tastes glosses over a more complex phenomenon. Rather than tastes for diversity, these findings suggest that omnivore consumption is structured by a confluence of tastes—cosmopolitanism, self-actualizing leisure, exoticism, commodification, connosseurship—all of which contribute to diverse consumption patterns. In other words, these findings suggest that the widely used concepts of “omnivore” and “univore” tastes confute more specific dimensions of consumer tastes and practices that covary.

**Materialism as a Class Practice**

In consumer research, materialism has been defined as a value or trait characterizing those who use possessions to attain happiness and status (Belk 1985; Richins and Dawson 1992). In order to conceptualize materialism within the worldview of personality psychology, this literature extracts the term from the everyday social situations in which it is deployed and reconstitutes it as an idealist, individualist analytic construct. Such an approach cannot produce a theory of materialism that explains what we observe in everyday life: What are the conditions that have produced materialism as a potent cultural term and dominant practice? And what are the social consequences of its practice?

A defining characteristic of modern capitalist societies is that human relationships are transmogrified into the symbolic qualities of goods produced for sale, what Marx called “commodity fetishism.” The competitive dynamics of advanced capitalism have led to the ever expanding colonization by marketplace semiotics of experiences that have historically been enacted in social domains other than commodified material culture (e.g., consider religion, health, family relationships). The experiences of social life that create and sustain human subjectivity, such as love, prestige, security, fear, happiness, joy, and antici-
tion, are increasingly reconstituted as "benefits" in the world of commodities. Rather than material mediators of culture (as McCracken [1986] would have it), consumer goods now sit at the cultural epicenter. Postmodern consumer society is the logical culmination of this migration of meanings and values from relationships with people to relationships with market goods and spectacles.

Materialism is one important mode in which social identities are constructed through interaction with the marketplace. To understand materialism requires understanding who consumes in a materialist style, who uses the term "materialist" to characterize whom, and the social consequences that result from these practices. Reflecting their workplace ethos and relative advantage in the status marketplace, people whose capital volume is strongly weighted toward economic rather than cultural capital tend to consume using a materialist style of consumption. For economic elites, this means pursuing the newest fashions, the latest technologies, the most luxurious, pampering products and services. For the majority with relatively small and declining incomes, living in a society that so emphasizes material satisfactions constructs relative material deprivation as an intense lack, and, thus, their tastes are structured around attaining glimpses or simulacra of elite comforts.

But, with materialism as the dominant status game, how are cultural elites to distinguish themselves? The only option, structurally speaking, is to develop a set of tastes in opposition to materialism: consuming that emphasizes the metaphysical over the material—idealism—is prestigious currency in the cultural sphere. Hence, HCCs have constructed "materialist" as a pejorative term—synonymous with "showy," "ostentatious," "gaudy," and "unrefined"—to denigrate the practices of people whose tastes are formed by economic capital. It is a misnomer, then, to equate materialism with status seeking. Materialists are no more (or less) interested in prestige than HCC idealists. Instead, they seek to acquire prestige in a particular status game (materialism) structured around particular practices (acquiring goods and participating in activities that are inscribed with economic symbolism: luxury, leisure, pampering, extravagance).

From the perspective of HCCs, those who participate in this mode of status consumption seem particularly desperate to win prestige from their consumption. But, as I demonstrate in this study, cultural elites have their own set of exclusionary practices in which they invert materialism to affirm their societal position. Thus, psychometric scales that isolate materialism as a vulgar form of status claiming, while leaving uninterred the status claims embodied in the practices of cultural elites, serve to reinforce rather than challenge the exclusionary class boundaries erected by HCC consumption. Idealists are also investate status seekers who are just as capable of selfishness as materialists.

But what about the societal and environmental consequences of materialism? It is important to disentangle the socially beneficial aspects of idealism from its use as a pernicious symbolic boundary. To do so, we need to recognize that cultural elites are in a privileged position to pursue alternatives to materialism both because they typically are socialized in environments free of material scarcity and also because they reap prestige from idealist practices. Psychometric scales can be useful in weeding the negative social consequences of idealist consumption from its enormous positive possibilities, but they need to be informed by a social reflexivity that acknowledges that values, and social effects, are built into these measures. For example, to understand and ameliorate environmental degradation rather than perpetuate class boundaries, materialism research needs to examine the relationship between materialist and idealist consumption practices and the amount of material resources expended and pollution generated. I am not convinced that materialist consumption is necessarily more environment-friendly than materialist consumption. One can abhor the idea that happiness and identity can be derived through objects and still mail order an abundance of experience-facilitating goods that overload dumps with packaging materials. And, alternatively, one can be extremely materialistic as measured by psychometric scales yet consume many fewer material resources than those who profess to be idealist, as the status condensed in a single pair of Nikes worn by poor African-American urban teens attests.

Decommodification as a Class Practice

Cultural studies of consumption practice often describe how consumers physically and symbolically transform branded goods as they coproduce collective, family, and individual meanings (see, e.g., Miller 1987). Recently, Levy (1996) has challenged Wallendorf and Arnould's contribution to this literature in which they describe how people decommodfy branded goods to make "from scratch" Thanksgiving dinners. Outlining the orthodox marketing position, Levy argues that brands, because they are differentiated through the marketing mix, are already decommodified. Brands offer a diverse plethora of images and personalities. Levy argues, that individuals selectively combine to express a unique identity. Thus, securing subjectivity through consumption of the brand identities offered in the marketplace is a seamless process in which we all engage without tension or contradiction.

Levy's perspective mirrors the ideology of consumer society, one proffered by marketers but enacted only problematically by consumers. Wallendorf and Arnould's discussion of decommodification does not address the degree to which marketed goods are differentiated from generic products, as Levy would have it, but with the difficulties that people have in making use of the images and identities offered in the marketplace in constructing a personal sense of self. The foundational axiom of consumer society is that individual sub-
j ectivities are sustained by consuming products that carry, and thus bestow through consumption, distinctive identities (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 1972). But its continued expansion has yielded a cultural contradiction that is central to the current postmodern cultural condition: as marketed meanings proliferate exponentially and circulate at an accelerated rate, their semiotic potency, their vitality as "real" lived meanings that can be tapped through consumption, is sapped. Decommodification is one process through which people attempt to resolve this contradiction.

I argue that decommodification has become an important resource used in consumer societies to form class boundaries. The HCCs experience this contradiction of postmodern culture more intensely than the LCCs because individualized subjectivity is so central to their habits. The LCCs more readily accept the marketized meanings of branded products, but, in contrast to Levy's arguments, this is precisely because they are less concerned with the brand's claims to impart personalized subjectivities. Instead, they treat brands much as economists theorize, as signals of functional utility and economic scarcity. The HCCs, however, often seek to avoid market-constructed images because they view these subjectivities as contrived. The problematic for HCCs becomes how to distinguish one's consumption in a world in which market offerings have in some sense tainted the possible alternatives. One strategy is to leave the marketplace altogether or at least to consume in a manner that disguises the mass market.

This finding helps to explain the growing success of marketers who position products targeted to HCCs as authentic (as opposed to mass-produced). A good example is the recent popularity of hand-crafted microbrews among HCCs, which are understood as an artisanal product in comparison to megalithic brands such as Budweiser. Major brewers have responded both by feigning smallness and craft production to capture part of this market as well constructing a defensive counter-positioning as a macrobrew that opposes elite HCC tastes. Similarly, persistent opposition to Wal-Mart stores can be read as a class-marked debate. The HCCs, with access to and influence over the media, oppose Wal-Mart in favor of small, locally owned shops in the downtown areas of towns and small cities, while working-class LCCs are enthusiastic about Wal-Mart's presence, if the chain's market success in merchandising to this group is any indication. HCCs have strong feelings about small owner-operated local retail stores that sell artisanal hard-to-find goods. Such stores, often found in boutique shopping districts in gentrified areas of cities, are perceived as offering a decommodified retail experience that allows for individualization. Of course, these stores are just as implicated in the exchange nexus, but, in terms of signification, their relationship to commodity and mass culture is less apparent. If Levy was correct that brands are seamless "exten-
a potent cultural cue distinguishing HCCs from LCCs. One might speculate that postmodern theorists are embedded so deeply in the HCC habitus that they are unable to muster the requisite sociological reflexivity to note that the ability to playfully aestheticize a wide range of consumption objects is esteemed, and so has become naturalized, in their social circles, but not in those of lower social classes. As evidence, consider that Lyotard (1984, p. 76) describes eclecticism, conceptualized much the same as in this study, as a general characteristic of the contemporary postmodern condition, rather than as a significant characteristic of the HCC experience of postmodernity. Similarly, critical theorists draw upon their backgrounds as leading cultural producers as a baseline to group all those with less aestheticized practices together. Their class-centric lens does not provide them with the interpretive sensitivity to locate more subtle differences in class consumption. To promulgate their preferred view, they fall back on a model of object signification, correctly observing that objects of popular culture are increasingly distributed across all classes but ignoring that different classes can use the same popular cultural objects as resources for different lifestyles.

**Future Research**

While this study demonstrates that, when modified to account for sociocultural context, Bourdieu’s theory can be used to excavate social class differences in contemporary American consumption, several important lacunae remain. First, the theory suggests that consumption practices are used as a basis for affiliation and distinction in everyday interaction and so serve to perpetuate social stratification. This study provides only partial evidence describing how these tastes are used in everyday life (based on how tastes were used to interact with the upper-middle-class interviewer and through occasional evaluations of others’ tastes in the interviews). Field research is needed to investigate directly the micropolitics of consumption.

Second, this study focuses solely on cultural capital, setting aside other important issues in Bourdieu’s theory: the composition of capital (i.e., the percentage of capital that is economic versus cultural) and the trajectory of capital (i.e., the increases and declines in capital volume through one’s lifetime and intergenerational transfer of capital). In *Distinction*, Bourdieu analyzes both economic and cultural capital, discussing the difficult processes whereby one form is converted into the other. Adding analysis of capital composition structured by occupation and income would add considerable complexity and explanatory power to this typology. Similarly, it is important to consider how consumption patterns are shaped by trajectory. For example, a person raised in a high-cultural-capital family who drops out of college to practice a trade is likely to be a quite different consumer than a person raised in a low-cultural-capital family, is the first generation to attend college, and has embarked on a middle-level management career, even though their cultural capital resources are, quantitatively, about the same.

Third, for reasons of tractability and exposition, this study divides the cultural capital continuum into five discrete levels and then focuses on the top and bottom quintiles of cultural capital resources in a small city. Such a study leaves out other important class positions deserving of study: the middle three quintiles, where there tends to be more mobility than either in the high or low groups; the poor who live outside the formal economy and whom Bourdieu does not consider in his theory; and urban cultural producers who would rank even higher than the HCCs in this study and, based on previous research, are likely to have distinctive consumption practices of their own.

Fourth, this study examines social class differences apart from other important social categories such as gender and race. Yet, since W. E. B. DuBois’s seminal writings on race and class, social theorists have sought to understand the complex interpenetration of these categories (see Hall [1992] for a sophisticated recent example). For example, an interesting extension of this study would be to explore how class and gender interact. If American women tend to exhibit an “ethic of care” in their consumption practices (Thompson [1996] shows this is so for professional women), this would suggest that gendered tastes are congruent with class tastes for LCC women since both emphasize the use of consumption as a resource to foster local communal ties. For HCC women, in contrast, class and gendered tastes would be in conflict since gendered tastes emphasize a collective orientation while HCC tastes emphasize an individuating consumption style.

And fifth, to pursue further the empirical study of status and consumption requires investigation of the specific configuration of the field of consumption across sociocultural settings. For example, comparing these American findings to the field of consumption in Japan where consumers face semiotic pluralism similar to the contemporary United States (Tobin [1992]), yet where collectivist forms of identity may hinder stylistic strategies based upon individuation, would provide additional insight into how Bourdieu’s theory adapts to different sociocultural fields. In addition, this study takes a presentist “snapshot” approach to map the contents of cultural capital. Such an approach tends to naturalize these contents, imputing that they are a permanent, unchangeable feature of the American consumer landscape. But clearly, to have an effect, these categories must be continually reasserted. In everyday life these tastes are not only performed but also variously contested. To properly situate these categories, then, would require a genealogy, much as Foucault has done with modern sexuality, to chart their emerging and continued dominance in relation to other possible but silent alternatives.
# APPENDIX

## TABLE A1

### INFORMANT DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Father’s education</th>
<th>Father’s profession</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Cultural capital rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High cultural capital resources:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Senior administrator</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>School superintendent</td>
<td>Elite B.S., Ph.D.</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Elite B.A., D.V.M.</td>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
<td>Elite B.A., M.D.</td>
<td>Pediatrician</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Elite Ph.D.</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>B.A., some graduate school</td>
<td>Human resources manager</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>J.D.</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>M.B.A.</td>
<td>Vice-president of large company</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Chemist</td>
<td>Elite B.A.</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Florist</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Community specialist</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>Elite B.A.</td>
<td>Military officer</td>
<td>Elite B.A., M.A.</td>
<td>Administrator/playwright</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low cultural capital resources:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Sixth grade</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Skilled manual laborer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Mailman</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>Some college (community college)</td>
<td>Unskilled manual laborer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Unskilled laborer</td>
<td>High school + one year of business</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Eighth grade</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Former waitress</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Printer</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Teacher’s assistant</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>Skilled manual laborer</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Administrative assistant</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.—Education ratings: 1 = high school or less; 2 = some college; 3 = B.A.; 4 = Master’s/some graduate school; 5 = Ph.D. or elite B.A. (i.e., from a prestigious, selective college or university). Occupation ratings: 1 = unskilled or skilled manual labor; 2 = unskilled or skilled service/clerical; 3 = sales, low-level technical, low-level managerial; 4 = high-level technical, high-level managerial, and low cultural (e.g., primary/secondary teachers); 5 = cultural producers. Cultural capital rating = upbringing (father’s education + occupation)2 + education + occupation.

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