

Understanding Cultural Omnivores: Social and Political Attitudes*

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October 17, 2013

Abstract

I use data from the British Household Panel Survey and Understanding Society to investigate the social and political attitudes of cultural omnivores. I report a threefold typology of visual arts consumption that is consistent with previous research. Then by linking data across the two panel surveys, I show that cultural consumption is associated with a wide range of social attitudes, the net magnitude of which is comparable to the associations with education. Specifically, omnivores are more trusting than visual arts inactives. They hold more favourable views about the European Union, and they tend to eschew subnational and ethnic identities. Omnivores are ‘greener’, and are more liberal on gender role and homosexuality. Although omnivores are less likely to belong to a religion, they are more likely to attend religious services, albeit infrequently. Omnivores are more politically engaged. But they are not more ‘class conscious’. Nor are they particularly left-wing or right-wing on distributional issues. When asked what is important to the sense of who they are, their profession or education does not appear especially salient. But omnivores are more extrovert and open to new experiences. Taken together, these results challenge the view that omnivorousness is just a new form of

*The research reported in this paper is supported by a British Academy Research Development Award. A draft of this paper was presented at the ISA RC28 meeting in Brisbane in July 2013. I am grateful to Richard Arum, Catherine Bunting, Philippe Coulangeon, Harry Ganzeboom, John Goldthorpe, Tim Liao, Paco Perales, Aaron Reeves, Mike Savage, Florencia Torche, Koen van Eijck, Alan Warde and Mark Western for helpful comments and suggestions.

distinction, and suggest a more nuanced relationship between cultural consumption and social stratification.

1 Introduction

Recent empirical research on the social stratification of cultural consumption has converged to several key findings. First, although individuals in advantaged social positions are more likely than others to consume high-brow culture, they do not have any general aversion against other cultural forms. Indeed, consumers of high-brow culture are just as likely to consume middle-brow or popular culture, leading Peterson and Simkus (1992) to describe them as cultural omnivores rather than cultural snobs (see e.g. also Peterson and Kern, 1996; van Eijck, 2001; López-Sintas and García-Álvarez, 2002; Bunting *et al.*, 2008; Bennett *et al.*, 2009; Chan, 2010).

Secondly, often a majority, or at least a substantial minority, of individuals in advantaged positions do *not* consume high-brow culture at all. Peterson (1992, p. 248) pointed out that ‘just 30% of those in the highest status group say they like classical music best and only another 6% say they like opera best. Thus, 64% of the top group do not fit the model of the aesthetically exclusive snob’ (see also Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007b, pp. 7–8).

Thirdly, cultural consumption is differentiated by age, gender, parental status and other demographic variables. It is also stratified by education, income and social status.¹ Taken together, these findings lend more support to the omnivore–univore argument (Peterson and Simkus, 1992) than the class–culture homology argument (Bourdieu, 1984) or the individualisation argument (Bauman, 1988; Giddens, 1991).

But who are the omnivores? A composite demographic profile can be gleaned from previous research. Omnivores tend to be well-educated, of higher social status, female, living in more urbanised areas, without young children at home, and so on (see the chapters in Chan, 2010). But beyond these socio-demographic characteristics, we know relatively little about them. To fill in this lacuna, this paper explores the subjective dimension of cultural consumption. Do omnivores and univores hold different social and political values? And do they have different personality traits? These questions are of considerable interest in themselves. But they also speak to an important but unresolved issue about the very meaning of cultural omnivorousness.

Peterson and Kern (1996, p. 904) argue that although omnivorous taste

¹There is also a bivariate association between social class and cultural consumption. But this association is explained away when social status and education are included in the model (see Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005, 2007b,c).

‘signifies an *openness* to appreciate everything,’ it does not mean that ‘the omnivore likes everything *indiscriminately*.’ Indeed, Bryson (1996) shows that individuals with tolerant musical taste have ‘a specific pattern of exclusiveness.’ Specifically, ‘[t]hose genres whose fans have the least education . . . are also those most likely to be rejected by the musically tolerant’ (Bryson, 1996, p. 61). This points to an ambiguity in the meaning of cultural omnivorousness. As Chan and Goldthorpe (2007b, p. 3) observe, ‘omnivores may be seen as essentially tolerant individuals . . . who have a general openness to other cultural styles . . . perhaps, a desire to experiment with different kinds of cultural consumption . . . [Alternatively,] omnivores may be seen as expressing a new aesthetics which, even if more inclusive and “cosmopolitan” than that of earlier cultural elites, is no less directed towards the demonstration of cultural *and* social superiority.’

Some other scholars have been more forthright and unequivocal. For example, in a study of an elite boarding school in America, Kahn (2011, p. 152) maintains that ‘[e]lites have incorporated some of the cultural attributes and tastes of those that they had previously excluded. Yet this new practice—omnivorous consumption—is itself a symbolic marker . . . this omnivorousness, become their own mark of distinction.’ Similarly, Ollivier (2008, pp. 122–123) argued that omnivorousness is ‘the new “aesthetics of elite status” which replaced highbrow snobbishness as a means of class distinction’ (see also Roose *et al.*, 2012). In other words, ‘plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.’ Is cultural omnivorousness a mask that conceals deeper and unchanging social and cultural snobbery, or perhaps even a ploy used by the elites to justify existing inequality?² By considering the way in which cultural consumption ‘is embedded in larger systems of meaning’ (DiMaggio, 1996), this paper seeks to address this core ambiguity.

1.1 Previous research on the social and political attitudes of omnivores

To the best of my knowledge, there are, until recently, only two surveys that collect information on both cultural consumption and social attitudes. As a result, there are only a handful of papers that examine the social attitudes of cultural omnivores. The two surveys are the 1993 General Social Survey

²In an article entitled ‘The New Elitists’ that appeared in the *New York Times* on July 7th, 2012, Kahn wrote that ‘[e]lites today must recognize that they are very much like the Gilded Age elites of old. Paradoxically the very openness and capaciousness that they so warmly embrace—their omnivorousness—help define them as culturally different from the rest. *And they deploy that cultural difference to suggest that the inequality and immobility in our society is deserved rather than inherited*’ (emphasis mine).

(GSS) and the 2003–04 Cultural Participation in Flanders Survey.

Using GSS data, Bryson (1996) reports an association between political intolerance and the number of musical genres disliked. In particular, intolerant individuals dislike more genres; and those with high racism score report more dislikes of those ‘genres that are disproportionately liked by Hispanic or Black respondents’ (Bryson, 1996, pp. 891–892).

Also using GSS data, DiMaggio (1996, p. 168) shows that visitors and non-visitors of arts-museum are significantly different on 44 out of 94 items. In particular, ‘[a]rt-museum visitors are somewhat more secular, trusting, politically liberal, racially tolerant, and open to other cultures and lifestyles, and much more tolerant and interested in high culture than are comparable non-visitors’ (DiMaggio, 1996, p. 161). These attitudes, according to DiMaggio, suggest ‘a distinctly *modern* disposition, evincing, first, a faith in progress and in scientific (and artistic) authority; and second, an open, cosmopolitan orientation to both people and cultures.’

More recently, using data from 2003–04 Flanders survey, van Eijck and Lievens (2008) explore the association between musical consumption and attitudes on social integration. They find that ‘omnivores are rather concerned with the well-being of others. They are neither isolated nor socially disoriented, but they are not likely to be very individualistic either . . . The eclecticism and openness attributed to cultural omnivores do not seem to imply a markedly self-willed attitude’ (van Eijck and Lievens, 2008, p. 235).

Do these findings hold for the UK? If they do, we would expect UK’s cultural omnivores to be relatively tolerant, cosmopolitan and others-regarding individuals who are more open to new experiences and, at the same time, have greater trust in scientific authority. And if omnivorousness is just a novel way to demonstrate social and cultural superiority, then we would expect omnivores to be more ‘status-conscious’. In particular, education and occupation, the two most important status-conferring attributes, would be especially salient to omnivores. Note that these expectations are not mutually exclusive: cultural omnivores could be both cosmopolitan *and* snobbish.

It is also important to recognise that the meaning and salience of social issues often vary across countries. For example, the Church of England and the evangelical churches in America are quite different in their values and politics. As a result, we might see different associations between religiosity and cultural consumption in the two countries. Also, values and attitudes in different social domains could have different underpinnings. For example, Chan and Goldthorpe (2007a) show that it is social status, *not* social class, which predicts ‘libertarian–authoritarian’ attitudes, while the opposite is true for ‘left–right’ attitudes. Given the strong association between social status and cultural consumption, we might expect cultural consumption to have net

association with some, but not all, social and political values. The upshot, then, is that the values, attitudes and personality traits of UK's cultural omnivores remain interesting empirical questions to be explored.

2 Data and analytical strategy

The data that I use come from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society. BHPS began in 1991 with a nationally representative sample of about 5,500 households. All members of these households and their children (when they reach the age of 16) have been followed in annual interviews in subsequent years. After 18 waves, BHPS was superseded in 2009 by a new household panel survey called Understanding Society which has a sample of about 30,000 households and over 54,000 individuals.³ Understanding Society is still a young panel survey. But since BHPS respondents have been incorporated into the sample of Understanding Society from wave 2 (2010–11),⁴ there is, for this group of respondents, quite detailed information over a broad range of topics going back many years.

Wave 2 of Understanding Society contains a set of questions on cultural consumption. My strategy is to relate these data to the attitudinal measures collected in waves 1 and 2 of that survey and, for the original BHPS respondents, also to the attitudinal data in the BHPS from 2005 through 2008. To be clear, the dependent variable of many of the regressions reported below predates the key independent variable, i.e. cultural consumption pattern. For this research strategy to work, I need to assume that individuals have fairly stable cultural consumption habits, at least over the period of several years. Of course, individuals do change their cultural consumption pattern over time, say, in response to change in health situation or parental status. To the extent that this is the case, the independent variable of interest, i.e. the latent classes of cultural consumption, will have more measurement errors, and its association with social attitudes will be weaker. In other words, this approach is biased *against* finding statistically significant associations between cultural consumption and social attitudes. Given this, we could be more confident of the significant associations that are actually found.

³More information about BHPS and Understanding Society is available from <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps> and www.understandingsociety.org.uk.

⁴The fieldwork of each wave of Understanding Society takes two calendar years. Thus, wave 1 took place in 2009–10, wave 2 took place in 2010–11, and so on.

2.1 Independent variable: visual arts latent classes

Our independent variable concerns cultural consumption in the visual arts. In wave 2 of Understanding Society, respondents were asked whether in the past 12 months they have been to the five types of visual arts events listed in Table 1.⁵ These indicators are very similar to those of the Arts in England survey (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007c) or the Taking Part survey (Bunting *et al.*, 2008), and the levels of participation reported in these surveys are broadly comparable.⁶

Most respondents would probably see items 1 and 2 as high-brow visual arts, with item 2 being perhaps relatively *avant-garde*. Items 3 and 4 refer to visual arts that are found ‘on the street’, including, say, sculptures of Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth, but also street graffiti, and displays of ethnic masks and carvings, batik and embroideries, and other folk crafts in cultural festivals. I treat these two items as representing ‘popular’ forms of visual arts.⁷ Finally, item 5 is problematic as it lumps together museums and galleries. As Chan and Goldthorpe (2007c, p. 173) observe, ‘some museums—for example, natural history, industrial or local or regional museums—while no doubt displaying many objects of visual interest may not contain much in the way of “works of art” as usually understood.’ For this reason, many respondents might see item 5 as representing visual arts of a middling kind.

In any case, the binary response to these indicators form a 5-way contingency table with 32 (i.e. 2^5) cells which I analyse with latent class models. The goodness of fit statistics of these models are reported in the top panel of Table 2. None of the models achieves a satisfactory fit with the data by the conventional criterion of 5% type I error. But given the large number of observations in the contingency table ($N = 28,657$), I accept model 4 as providing an adequate summary of the data.⁸

⁵To adjust for the complex sampling design of both BHPS and Understanding Society, all results reported in this paper are weighted.

⁶The Taking Part survey has six indicators of visual arts consumption, which are the five items listed in Table 1 plus ‘Craft exhibition’. The Arts of England survey contains the same visual arts consumption questions as the Taking Part survey except the item of ‘Carnival or culturally specific festivals.’ Following Chan and Goldthorpe (2007c) and Bunting *et al.* (2008), I have restricted my analysis to respondents aged 20–64.

⁷Note, however, that the participation rates of these popular forms of visual arts are not particularly high.

⁸It is well known that with a large N , small differences between the model and the data that are of little sociological importance are often statistically significant (Raftery, 1986). This seems to be the case here. Under the model with four latent classes, the smallest class 3 of model 4 would be split into two subclasses. Moreover, this four-class model has a higher BIC value of -50.40. Using BIC as the model selection criterion, I prefer model 4 of Table 2 (with three latent classes) to the four-class model.

Table 1: Percentage of Understanding Society respondents aged 20–64 who have been to visual arts events in the past 12 months ($N = 28,657$)

| | % |
|--|------|
| 1 Exhibition or collection of art, photography or sculpture or a craft exhibition (not craft market) | 28.6 |
| 2 Event which included video or electronic art | 7.5 |
| 3 Street arts or public art display or installation (art in everyday surroundings, or an art work such as sculpture that is outdoors or in a public place) | 16.5 |
| 4 Carnival or culturally specific festival (for example, Mela, Baisakhi, Navrati, Feis) | 14.2 |
| 5 A museum or gallery | 41.4 |

The bottom panel of Table 2 reports the latent class solution under model 4. It can be seen that members of the largest latent class, which accounts for 58% of the respondents, are quite inactive in the visual arts. Over a twelve months period, only one in nine (11%) had been to a museum or gallery; and one in twelve (8%) had been to a carnival. The participation rates at other visual arts events are even lower at 3% or less.

In contrast, although the smallest latent class accounts for only 13% of the sample, its members are keen consumers of the visual arts across the board. Almost all of them had visited a museum or gallery (95%), or an exhibition of art, photography or sculpture (97%); more than a third (38%) had visited a video or electronic arts event; and even for street arts and carnival their participation rate is still the highest of all. Finally, there is a third group that is intermediate both in terms of its size (29% of the sample) and the level of visual arts consumption of its members.

Overall, the pattern of visual arts consumption of Understanding Society respondents is very similar to that found in previous research. Following Chan and Goldthorpe (2007c) and Bunting *et al.* (2008), I label the three latent classes as inactives (I), paucivores (P) and omnivores (O) respectively (see also Alderson *et al.*, 2007). This threefold typology serves as the key independent variable in the analyses below.

Visual arts is just one form of cultural consumption, and a threefold typology is but a small step in the improvement over the binary contrast of ‘visitors vs non-visitors’ that DiMaggio (1996, p. 175) calls for.⁹ But, as we

⁹DiMaggio (1996) uses a dichotomous independent variable: whether someone has been to an art-museum in the past 12 months or not. DiMaggio points out that despite the crude nature of this variable, the results are quite impressive. He then speculates that if

Table 2: Goodness of fit statistics of latent class models (top panel), and latent class solution of model 4 (bottom panel)

| model | # latent class | G^2 | df | p | BIC | Δ |
|-------|----------------|----------|------|------|----------|----------|
| 1 | 1 | 19635.10 | 26 | .000 | 19368.46 | .000 |
| 2 | 2 | 972.39 | 20 | .000 | 767.28 | .043 |
| 3 | 3 | 238.07 | 14 | .000 | 94.49 | .116 |
| 4 | 3* | 61.25 | 12 | .000 | -61.82 | .154 |

| | 1 (I) | 2 (P) | 3 (O) |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| relative size | 0.578 | 0.290 | 0.133 |
| exhibition | 0.006 | 0.530 | 0.971 |
| video arts | 0.016 | 0.049 | 0.387 |
| street arts | 0.029 | 0.170 | 0.750 |
| carnival | 0.080 | 0.191 | 0.302 |
| museum | 0.114 | 0.769 | 0.946 |

Note: * In model 4, two residual local dependence terms are added between the indicators for ‘street arts’ and ‘carnival’, and between ‘video arts’ and ‘carnival’.

will see, this typology proves to have strong associations with a wide range of social and political attitudes.

2.2 Control variables

All regression models reported below control for respondent’s age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education, household income, social class (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992) and social status (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2004). It should be noted that the control variables are taken from the same year as the relevant dependent variable. Table 3 provides some descriptive statistics of the control variables.¹⁰

art-museum visitors can be differentiated further into, say, ‘art lovers’, ‘casual visitors’, etc., more revealing patterns could be discerned. The threefold typology used in this paper is a step in that direction.

¹⁰Because of the much larger sample size of Understanding Society and also because of oversampling of ethnic minorities, five ethnic groups could be distinguished for that study, namely ‘white’, ‘asian’, ‘black’, ‘mixed’ and ‘others’. For BHPS, I used the binary ‘white’–‘non-white’ contrast.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of control variables

| | BHPS | | | | Understanding Society | |
|----------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----------------------|---------|
| | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009–10 | 2010–11 |
| female | 53.0 | 53.1 | 52.8 | 51.9 | 50.6 | 54.6 |
| non-white | 5.1 | 5.4 | 5.5 | 5.6 | | |
| mixed | | | | | 0.9 | 1.0 |
| asian | | | | | 3.6 | 4.5 |
| black | | | | | 1.8 | 2.3 |
| other ethnic groups | | | | | 1.9 | 2.3 |
| couple | 72.0 | 72.6 | 72.7 | 71.6 | 55.7 | 52.1 |
| divorced/separated/widowed | 11.0 | 10.1 | 9.7 | 9.7 | 14.1 | 13.2 |
| single | 17.0 | 17.4 | 17.6 | 18.7 | 30.3 | 34.7 |
| no qualification | 11.0 | 9.6 | 8.6 | 7.4 | 18.5 | 19.0 |
| CSE | 6.6 | 6.1 | 6.0 | 5.4 | 8.7 | 8.4 |
| O-levels | 15.4 | 14.7 | 14.3 | 13.7 | 24.6 | 24.6 |
| A-levels | 11.2 | 11.2 | 11.4 | 11.8 | 10.5 | 11.6 |
| further education | 37.0 | 38.6 | 39.7 | 40.9 | 10.9 | 10.5 |
| degree | 18.9 | 19.8 | 20.1 | 20.9 | 26.8 | 25.9 |
| salariat | 39.1 | 42.5 | 43.2 | 43.8 | 41.3 | 42.0 |
| routine non-manual | 24.7 | 22.8 | 22.0 | 21.7 | 12.3 | 14.0 |
| self-employed | 7.5 | 7.0 | 7.1 | 7.0 | 8.9 | 9.2 |
| manual supervisor | 5.7 | 5.3 | 5.5 | 5.3 | 9.3 | 7.9 |
| working class | 23.1 | 22.4 | 22.2 | 22.2 | 28.2 | 26.9 |
| age (mean) | 43.4 | 43.4 | 43.4 | 42.6 | 42.9 | 42.0 |
| age (s.d.) | 12.3 | 12.2 | 12.2 | 11.8 | 12.4 | 12.6 |
| social status (mean) | .01 | .03 | .03 | .04 | .03 | .03 |
| social status (s.d.) | .35 | .36 | .36 | .36 | .36 | .36 |
| log income (mean) | 10.3 | 10.3 | 10.4 | 10.5 | 8.0 | 8.0 |
| log income (s.d.) | .73 | 1.01 | .94 | .85 | .78 | .78 |

Note: Percentages, except for age, social status and log-income

2.3 Dependent variables: social attitudes and personality traits

The dependent variables are derived from 93 questions taken from waves 15 to 18 (2005–2008) of the BHPS and waves 1 and 2 (2009–10, 2010–11) of Understanding Society. Some of them are stand-alone measures; others are used to form additive scales or composite outcome variables. Altogether we consider 44 dependent variables in this paper. The additive scales and

those stand-alone items with likert-type response categories will be used as dependent variables in OLS regressions; the rest will be analysed with binary or multinomial logistic regression models.

Thematically, the 44 dependent variables fall into ten domains, namely (1) risk-taking and trust, (2) the European Union, (3) national and subnational identities, (4) gender, marriage and sexuality, (5) environment and climate change, (6) faith and religion, (7) subjective social class membership, (8) political engagement and partisanship, (9) sense of self, and (10) the Big Five personality traits.

Before reporting the empirical results, three general remarks are in order. First, there is no good reason to think that visual arts consumption is a general cause of social attitudes. It is more likely that cultural consumption and certain attitudes and personality traits tend to go together. So the results reported below should be interpreted as statistical associations rather than causal relationships (see also DiMaggio, 1996, p. 174).

Secondly, due to the large number of regression models considered in this paper, the Tables below show the estimates of three key parameters only: those for omnivores and paucivores (with inactives as the reference category) and that of university graduates (with people with no qualifications as the reference category). Since ‘education is clearly the most powerful predictor’ (Davis, 1982, p. 585) for a wide range of attitudes and behaviour, the parameter for university graduates serves as a benchmark against which the omnivore and paucivore parameters are compared. Full regression results, question wordings, response categories, etc. are reported in the Appendix.¹¹

Thirdly, in evaluating the regression results, we need to consider not just whether the parameters are statistically significant, but also their substantive magnitude. To this end, I have, in addition to using the degree parameter as a benchmark, standardised the dependent variables of the OLS regressions (i.e. their mean and variance are normed to equal zero and one respectively). This means that the OLS estimates can be read as fractions of standard deviation of the relevant dependent variable. To aid the interpretation of the logit or multinomial logit parameters, I will report predicted probabilities of the outcome variables for selected combinations of education and cultural consumption.

¹¹Education is one of the most important predictors for cultural consumption (Chan, 2010). Readers should note that the estimates of the degree, paucivores and omnivores parameters reported below are *net* of each other and other control variables in the model.

Table 4: Trust and risk-taking

| Dependent variable | year | range or % | est. method | degree | P | O |
|--------------------|---------|------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| risk-taking | 2009–10 | -2.08/1.84 | OLS | .156** (.028) | .077** (.016) | .229** (.022) |
| trust strangers | 2009–10 | -1.45/2.59 | OLS | .349** (.028) | .147** (.016) | .353** (.024) |
| trusting people | 2009–10 | 35.9% | logit | .671** (.062) | .228** (.036) | .448** (.052) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests.

3 Results

3.1 Risk-taking and trust

Let us start with a set of questions on risk-taking and trust. In wave 1 of Understanding Society, respondents were asked the following questions.

- ‘Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?’ (risk-taking)
- ‘Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks in trusting strangers or do you try to avoid taking such risks?’ (trust stranger)
- ‘Generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?’ (trusting people)

For the first two questions, respondents chose an answer from a scale that ranges from 0 to 10, with higher values denoting a more risk-taking or trusting disposition. Table 4 shows that, compared to the inactives, omnivores and paucivores are significantly more likely to take risks and they are more trusting of strangers. The magnitude of these differences are quite large. For example, other things being equal, omnivores are about a quarter (.23) of a standard deviation more disposed to taking risks than inactives, while graduates are about one-sixth (.16) of a standard deviation more risk-taking than people with no qualifications. As regards ‘trusting strangers’, both omnivores and graduates are about one third of a standard deviation more trusting than their respective reference group.

Table 4 also shows that just over one third (36%) of the respondents think that ‘most people can be trusted.’ However, graduates, paucivores and

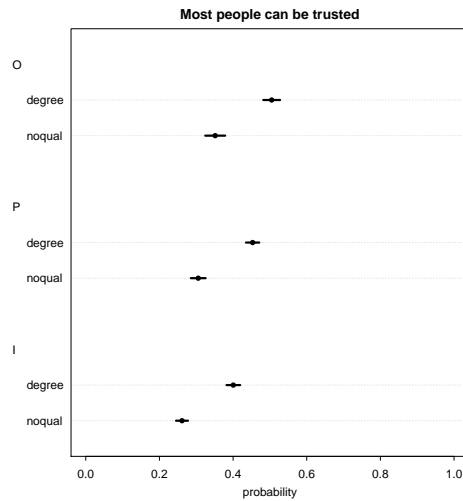


Figure 1: Predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of ‘trusting people’ by education and cultural consumption

omnivores tend to be more trusting.¹² The magnitude of these associations can be seen from the predicted probabilities of Figure 1: half of graduate omnivores think that most people can be trusted, compared to about one third (35%) of omnivores without qualifications, 40% of graduate inactives, and 26% of inactives without qualifications.¹³

The results reported in this section are consistent with those of DiMaggio (1996) in that paucivores and, especially, omnivores are more risk-taking and trusting than people who are inactive in the visual arts. But perhaps of equal importance is the finding that these associations and the associations with education are of comparable magnitude.

3.2 The European Union

There are interminable political debates in the UK about the European Union. Has too much power been ceded to the EU? What role should the

¹²To make the prose less clunky, I sometimes drop the reference to ‘inactives’ and ‘people without qualifications’. Readers can assume that it is in comparison to these two groups that the parameters of omnivores and paucivores, and that of graduates are discussed.

¹³The predicted probabilities are computed as follows. I first assume all respondents are graduates and omnivores, while all other covariates take on their actual values. I then calculate the predicted probability of each respondent ‘trusting people’, and the probabilities are then averaged. That is, this is the mean of the individual predictions, not the predicted probability evaluated at the mean of the covariates. Other combinations of education and cultural consumption and, indeed, other predicted probabilities reported below are computed in an analogous way.

Table 5: The European Union

| Dependent variable | year | range or % | est. method | degree | P | O |
|----------------------------|------|------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| EU membership a good thing | 2006 | 35.8% | logit | 1.346** (.211) | .220* (.090) | 1.014** (.129) |
| UK benefited from EU | 2006 | 44.8% | logit | 1.205** (.207) | .193* (.095) | .979** (.138) |
| long term policy | 2006 | -1.41/2.43 | OLS | .117 (.089) | .050 (.040) | .372** (.060) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests.

UK play in the EU? Or should the UK leave the EU altogether? In 2006, BHPS respondents were asked the following three questions.

- Generally speaking, do you think that Britain's/the UK's membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing or is it neither good or bad? (EU membership a good thing)
- Taking everything into consideration, would you say that Britain/the UK has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union? (UK benefit from EU)
- Do you think Britain's/the UK's long-term policy should be: (1) To leave the European Union, ... or (5) To work for the formation of a single European government? (long term policy)

Table 5 shows that Britons are on the whole quite sceptical about the EU: just over a third (36%) of the respondents think that EU membership is a good thing,¹⁴ and under half (45%) think that the UK has on balance benefited from being in the EU. It also shows that omnivores, paucivores, and university graduates are more pro-EU. Figure 2 illustrates the substantive magnitude of these estimates. The left panel shows that 70% of graduate omnivores think that UK's membership in the EU is a good thing, compared to 39% of omnivores without qualifications, 47% of graduate inactives and 19% of inactives with no qualifications. A similar pattern is found for the question of whether the UK has benefited from the EU (see the right panel).

The third EU question has five response categories, with higher values representing views that favour further integration with the EU. Consistent

¹⁴I have dichotomised the response categories, contrasting the first category against the second and the third categories.

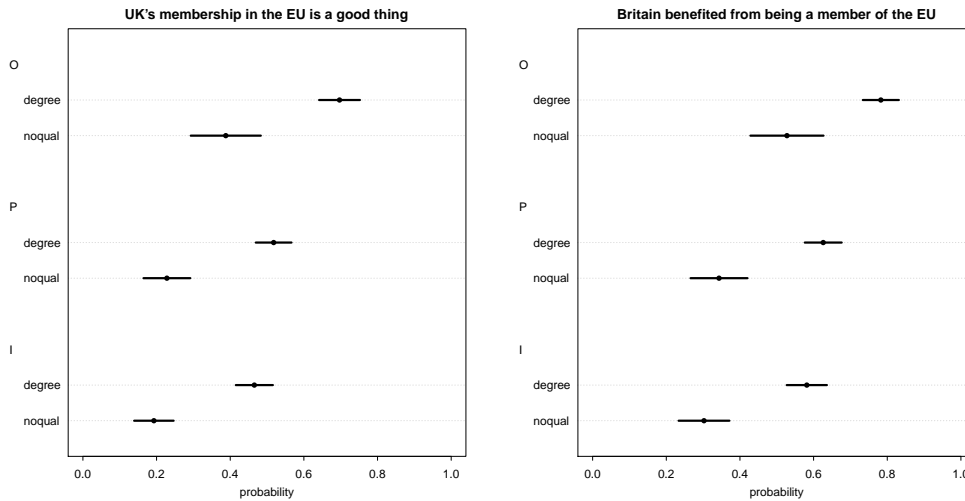


Figure 2: Predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of views about the European Union by education and cultural consumption

with what we have already seen, Table 5 shows that omnivores are a third (.37) of a standard deviation more likely to support further European integration.¹⁵ The parameters of graduates and paucivores are positive, but they fail to reach statistical significance. Overall, then, omnivores, graduates and, to a lesser extent, paucivores hold more favourable views about the EU. Euroscepticism in the UK is likely to have multiple roots. But to the extent that it reflects an insular, ‘keep the foreigners at bay’ mindset, the results of this section, again consistent with DiMaggio (1996), suggest that omnivores and paucivores are more cosmopolitan in their outlook.

3.3 National, subnational and ethnic identities

British people’s attitudes about the EU is partly a matter of national identity: ‘just how European are we?’ This suggests a tension between national and supranational identities. Similar tension might be found at the interface between the national and subnational levels. That is, Britons might identify with the UK as a whole, and/or with one of its four constituent countries: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Given the popularity of some nationalist parties in the UK and the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014, this is a potent political issue.

In wave 1 of Understanding Society, respondents were asked ‘Looking

¹⁵I obtain qualitatively similar results with an ordered logistic regression model. But Brant tests suggest the proportional odds assumption is violated.

Table 6: Distribution of national and subnational identity within the four countries of the UK

| | residents of | | | |
|--------------------|--------------|-------|----------|------------|
| | England | Wales | Scotland | N. Ireland |
| E/W/S/I-NI* | 39.7 | 50.2 | 57.3 | 46.6 |
| British | 26.7 | 19.6 | 12.5 | 33.0 |
| British–E/W/S/I-NI | 20.8 | 12.3 | 18.8 | 12.2 |
| Others | 12.8 | 17.9 | 11.3 | 8.3 |
| <i>N</i> | 20960 | 1134 | 1826 | 1130 |

Note: * English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish or Northern Irish as appropriate.

at this card, what do you consider your national identity to be? You may choose as many or as few as apply.’ As this question allows respondents to report multiple identities, I construct separate typologies of national *and* subnational identities for residents of the four countries. Each typology has four categories. For example, for people living in England, the four categories are: (1) English, (2) British, (3) British *and* English, and (4) Others.

Table 6 shows that about 40% of the residents in England identify themselves as English only; just over a quarter (27%) as British; one fifth (21%) as both British and English; and one-eighth (13%) choose other categories or other combinations of categories. Table 6 also shows that subnational identities are more common in Wales, Northern Ireland and, especially, Scotland, reflecting the strength of nationalist sentiments in those parts of the UK.

Using the fourfold typologies as dependent variables in multinomial logistic regressions, Table 7 shows that, in England, graduates are more likely to identify themselves as British, British and English, or even Others rather than just English. The same holds for paucivores and omnivores. A similar pattern is seen in Wales and Scotland, with two exceptions. First, in Wales cultural consumption is unrelated to national identities. Secondly, in both Wales and Scotland the dual national and subnational identity is unrelated to both education and cultural consumption.

The result for Northern Ireland is, however, quite different in that neither education nor cultural consumption predicts national identity. This might be related to the history of violent conflict between the protestant and catholic communities there. As a result, national and subnational identities have acquired a particularly negative salience: identifying yourselves as British, Irish or Northern Irish might, for some, carry a sectarian connotation.

Figure 3 illustrates the substantive magnitude of the associations. For example, the top-left panel shows that 49% of English residents identify themselves as English only if they have no qualifications and are inactive in

Table 7: National and subnational identity

| Dependent variable | degree | | P | | O | |
|---------------------------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| | β | <i>s.e.</i> | β | <i>s.e.</i> | β | <i>s.e.</i> |
| British v English | .657** | (.077) | .139** | (.046) | .356** | (.065) |
| British and English v English | .551** | (.081) | .157** | (.048) | .285** | (.071) |
| Others v English | 1.018** | (.104) | .330** | (.062) | .613** | (.086) |
| British v Welsh | 1.058** | (.314) | .311 | (.201) | -.073 | (.354) |
| British and Welsh v Welsh | .614 | (.380) | .206 | (.239) | .313 | (.396) |
| Others v Welsh | 1.195** | (.331) | .081 | (.211) | .135 | (.338) |
| British v Scottish | .862** | (.314) | .530** | (.200) | .814** | (.264) |
| British and Scottish v Scottish | .403 | (.263) | .030 | (.156) | .032 | (.223) |
| Others v Scottish | .982** | (.346) | .548** | (.208) | .855** | (.275) |
| British v (N)Irish | -.225 | (.300) | .213 | (.179) | -.289 | (.338) |
| British and (N)Irish v (N)Irish | .473 | (.436) | .201 | (.240) | .184 | (.403) |
| Others v (N)Irish | .497 | (.507) | -.092 | (.333) | .126 | (.486) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests.

the visual arts; compared to 33% of graduate inactives; 40% of omnivores without qualifications; and 25% of graduate omnivores.

In the previous section, we see that graduates, paucivores and omnivores are more supportive of the supranational European Union. We now see that, when asked to choose between national and subnational identities, these groupings also tend to eschew the more parochial subnational identities and go for the broader British identity. This lends further support to the view that omnivores and paucivores are more cosmopolitan in their outlook.

The question of identity is also especially salient to ethnic minorities. In wave 1 of Understanding Society, all respondents with a non-‘White British’ father were asked: ‘How important is being [father’s ethnic group] to you?’ In addition, members of the ethnic minority boost sample and the general population comparison sample were asked: ‘Most people who live in the UK may think of themselves as being British in some way. . . . how important is being British to you?’ In both cases, respondents chose an answer from 0 to 10, with higher values meaning greater importance. Table 8 shows that graduates, paucivores and omnivores tend to attach less importance to their father’s ethnic identity. They are also less likely to think that ‘being British’ (when considered on its own) is important. Again, these results confirm the association between omnivorousness and a more open, cosmopolitan attitude, the magnitude of which is comparable to the largest net difference by educational attainment.

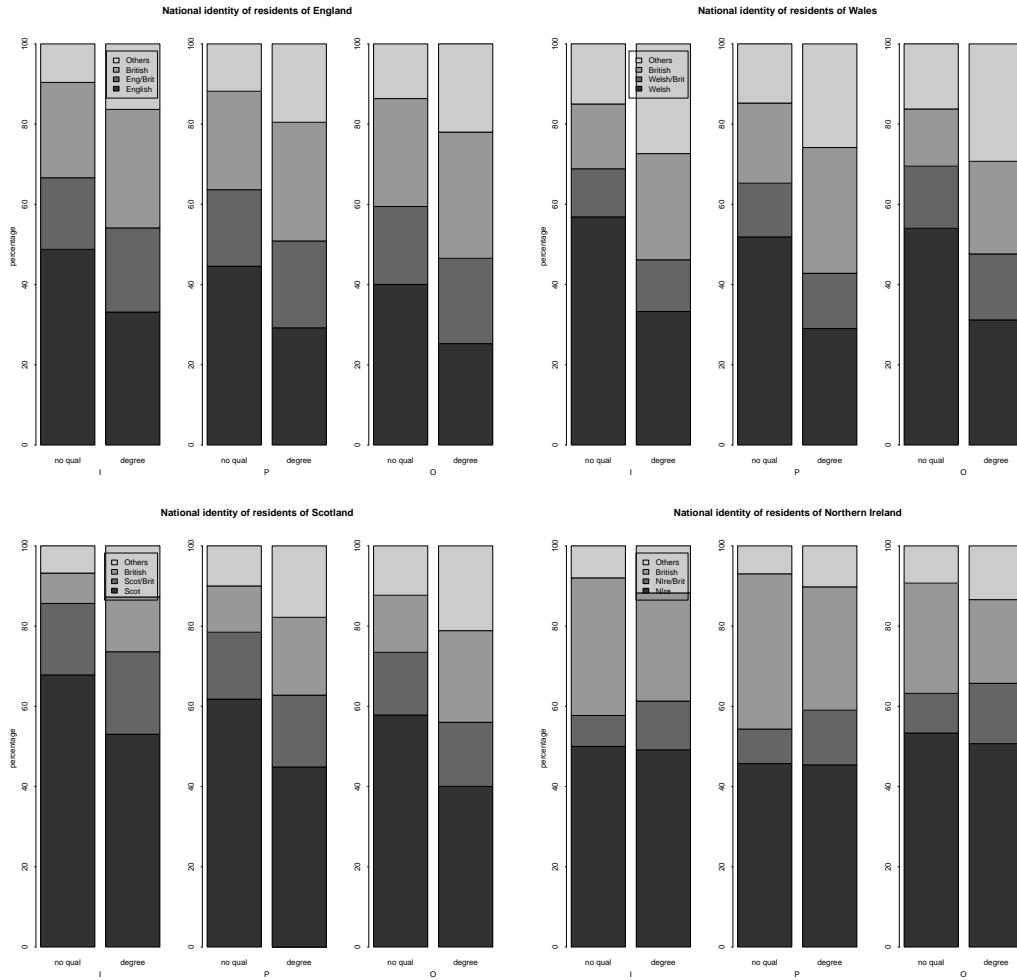


Figure 3: National and subnational identity of residents in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, by education and cultural consumption

Table 8: Strength of ethnic and British identity

| Dependent variable | year | range | est. method | est. | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | | | | degree | P | O |
| how important being ethnic | 2009–10 | -2.19/0.89 | OLS | -.173** (.060) | -.153** (.040) | -.283** (.066) |
| how important being British | 2009–10 | -2.45/1.05 | OLS | -.191** (.050) | -.062* (.028) | -.127** (.041) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests.

Table 9: Gender, marriage and sexuality

| Dependent variable | year | # item | α^\dagger | range | est. method | degree | P | O |
|------------------------------------|---------|--------|------------------|------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| gender role | 2010–11 | 5 | .58 | -3.97/2.32 | OLS | .066* (.031) | -.010 (.018) | .125** (.025) |
| marriage, divorce and cohabitation | 2008 | 4 | .69 | -4.45/1.80 | OLS | -.101 (.084) | -.025 (.038) | .003 (.063) |
| homosexuality | 2008 | 1 | | -2.41/1.29 | OLS | .307** (.080) | .134** (.038) | .328** (.057) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests; \dagger Cronbach's α .

3.4 Gender, marriage and sexuality

Wave 2 of Understanding Society contains a set of five questions (see the Appendix for details) on women's role at home and in the workplace, which I use to form an additive scale on gender role, with higher values denoting more egalitarian views. Table 9 shows that graduates and omnivores are significantly more egalitarian in their gender role attitudes than their respective reference group. Moreover, the substantive magnitude of the omnivore parameter is almost twice as large as that of the degree parameter.

In the BHPS in 2008, there were four questions on marriage, divorce and cohabitation (see the Appendix for details), which I use to form an additive scale. But it turns out that neither education nor cultural consumption predicts attitudes on this issue. Closer inspection of the data suggests that this might arise from the limited variation in the dependent variable, e.g. for three of the four items that make up the scale, liberal plus neutral answers account for 90% or more of the respondents. In other words, a large majority of the respondents are quite liberal on marriage and family issues, leaving relatively little variation to be explained.

But there is also an item which says '[h]omosexual relationships are always wrong.' On this issue, Table 9 shows that education and cultural consumption are associated with more liberal attitudes. Specifically, university graduates and omnivores are about a third of a standard deviation more liberal than their respective reference group.

3.5 Environment and climate change

There are many questions on the environment and climate change in Understanding Society and the BHPS. Some of these tap views on climate change and its impacts. Others are about the extent to which the respondent is

prepared to make lifestyle changes in order to minimise the risks of climate change, and so on. I use these items to form four additive scales, with higher values representing ‘greener’ or more environmentally friendly attitudes (see the Appendix for details).

Table 10: Environment and climate change

| Dependent variable | year | # item | α^\dagger | range | est. method | degree | P | O |
|-----------------------------------|---------|--------|------------------|------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| environment & lifestyle | 2009–10 | 14 | .69 | -3.25/1.72 | OLS | .523** (.030) | .214** (.018) | .453** (.024) |
| environment is a priority | 2008 | 4 | .63 | -4.28/2.40 | OLS | .368** (.089) | .145** (.039) | .369** (.054) |
| action to protect the environment | 2008 | 3 | .63 | -3.86/1.96 | OLS | .063 (.085) | .066 (.041) | .279** (.061) |
| consequences of climate change | 2008 | 6 | .78 | -2.79/0.93 | OLS | .226* (.097) | .071 (.042) | .136* (.060) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests; \dagger Cronbach’s α .

As Table 10 shows, omnivores are consistently greener than inactives, and graduates are greener than people with no qualifications. Furthermore, the magnitude of the omnivore parameter is substantial and, again, comparable to that of the degree parameter. For example, on the first item on ‘environment and lifestyle’, graduates and omnivores are both about one half of a standard deviation greener than their respective reference group. The paucivores parameters are all positive. But they are smaller in magnitude and are statistically significant for only two of the four scales.

There is an overwhelming consensus among climate scientists on anthropogenic climate change, a view that is endorsed by national academies of science from around the world (Anderegg *et al.*, 2010). Given this, it seems fair to say that many climate change sceptics are mistrustful of scientific authority. By showing that omnivores are significantly less likely to be climate change sceptics and thus, by implication, as having more trust in scientific authority, our results are again consistent with DiMaggio (1996).

3.6 Faith and religion

Britain is a fairly secular society. Table 11 shows that just under half (47%) of the respondents say that they ‘belong to a religion’ and only a third (34%)

Table 11: Religious membership, belief and attendance

| Dependent variable | year | # item | % | est. method | degree | P | O |
|--------------------------------|---------|--------|-------|-------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| belong to a religion | 2009–10 | 1 | 47.3% | logit | .160** (.057) | .132** (.034) | -.171* (.050) |
| religion makes a difference | 2009–10 | 1 | 33.8% | logit | .572** (.060) | .220** (.036) | .309** (.051) |
| attend service monthly v never | 2009–10 | 1 | | multi-logit | .837** (.077) | .324** (.046) | .298** (.067) |
| attend service yearly v never | 2009–10 | 1 | | | .524** (.078) | .371** (.045) | .529** (.062) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests.

think that ‘religious beliefs make a difference’ to their lives.¹⁶ In terms of attendance (not shown in Table 11), one sixth (17%) of the respondents attend religious services at least monthly; another sixth attend less often but at least once a year; two thirds (practically) never attend any religious service or would do so ‘only at weddings, funerals, etc’.

Although graduates and paucivores are more likely to belong to a religion than their respective reference group, the opposite is true for omnivores. However, as the left panel of Figure 4 shows, the difference in church membership by education or cultural consumption is relatively small. At the same time, graduates, paucivores and omnivores are all more likely to think that ‘religious beliefs make a difference’ to their lives; and these differences are larger in substantive terms (see the right panel of Figure 4): 45% of graduate omnivores think that religion matters, compared to 32% of omnivores without qualifications, 38% of inactive graduates, and 26% of inactives without qualifications.

Finally, education and cultural consumption are both positively associated with attendance at religious service. But, as Figure 5 illustrates, monthly attendance varies more by education than by cultural consumption. Where cultural consumption matters is over occasional attendance. For example, 22% of graduate omnivores attend religious services at least once per year, compared to 16% of graduate inactives.

In summary, omnivores are marginally less likely to belong to a religion. But religious beliefs matter to them, and they are more likely than inactives

¹⁶There are originally four response categories to the question ‘How much difference would you say religious beliefs make to your life?’ (1) a great difference, (2) some difference, (3) a little difference, or (4) no difference. I combine categories 1 and 2, and contrast them against categories 3 and 4.

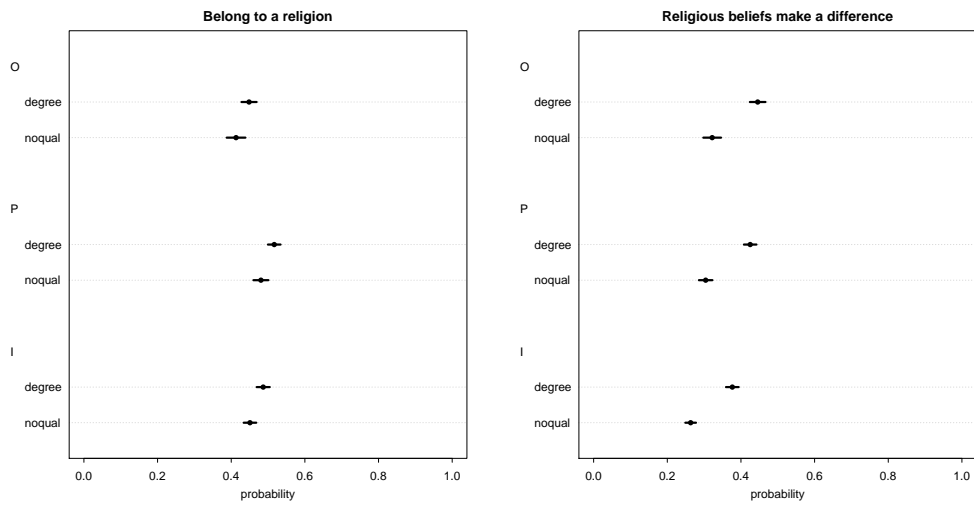


Figure 4: Predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of ‘belonging to a religion’ and thinking that ‘religious beliefs make a difference’ by education and cultural consumption

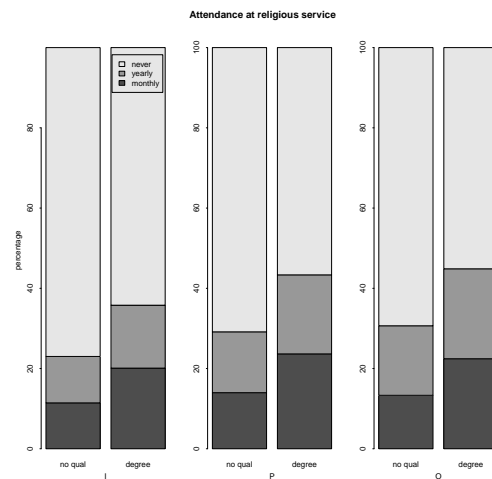


Figure 5: Predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of attendance at religious service by education and cultural consumption

to attend services, albeit infrequently. (After all, there are a lot of visual arts in places of worship.) Keeping in mind that Britain is a fairly secular society, the overall picture seems to be that omnivores are relatively sympathetic about religion, and they do not have strong views for or against it.

Table 12: Subjective class membership and ‘left-right’ politics

| Dependent variable | year | # item | α^\dagger | range or % | est. method | degree | P | O |
|-----------------------------|------|--------|------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| belong to a social class | 2005 | 1 | | 36.3% | logit | .719** (.177) | -.052 (.087) | .138 (.125) |
| member of middle class | 2005 | 1 | | 46.2% | logit | 1.142** (.202) | .102 (.094) | .322* (.140) |
| class affects opportunities | 2005 | 1 | | 66.6% | logit | -.173 (.183) | -.056 (.087) | .082 (.133) |
| left-right | 2007 | 6 | .57 | -3.30/4.20 | OLS | .218* (.086) | .110** (.040) | -.051 (.062) |
| maximum income | 2006 | 1 | | -2.47/1.29 | OLS | .201* (.080) | .084* (.037) | -.016 (.059) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests; \dagger Cronbach’s α .

3.7 Subjective social class membership and left–right attitudes

In 2005, BHPS respondents were asked: ‘Do you think of yourself as belonging to any particular social class?’ As Table 12 shows, just over a third (36%) of the respondents reply in the affirmative, with university graduates being significantly and substantially more likely to say ‘yes’. But there is no evidence that omnivores or paucivores differ from the inactives in this regard.

Irrespective of their answer to the previous question, respondents were then asked to name the social class that they belong to: ‘(If you had to choose) which social class would you say you belong to?’¹⁷ Just under half (46%) of the respondents call themselves middle class rather than working class.¹⁸ As might be expected, graduates are much more likely to see themselves as middle class, as are omnivores, but not paucivores. Figure 6 shows the predicted probabilities of self-reported middle class membership: 72% of graduate omnivores, compared to 65% of graduate inactives, 47% of omnivores without qualifications, and 40% of inactives without qualifications. In relation to subjective social class membership, it seems fair to say that the association with education is stronger than that with cultural consumption.

¹⁷I have repeated the analysis, restricting it to those respondents who think they belong to a social class, and the results are qualitatively the same as those reported in Table 12. Details are available on request.

¹⁸I dichotomise the seven response categories to this question, combining lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class as middle class, and grouping lower working class, working class, and upper working class as working class.

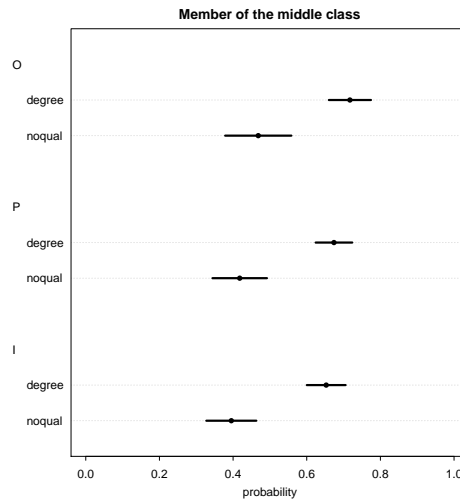


Figure 6: Predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of identification with the ‘middle class’ by education and cultural consumption

Respondents were then asked: ‘In Britain/the UK today, how much do you think a person’s opportunities are affected by the class into which they are born?’ Two thirds of all respondents agree that the class origin of individuals affects their life chances.¹⁹ But neither education nor cultural consumption predicts the response to this question.

In wave 17 of the BHPS, there is a set of six questions that tap opinions on the distribution of wealth, public services, trade unions, etc (see the Appendix for details). I use these to form an additive scale on ‘left–right’ political attitudes, with higher values denoting more right-wing views. Table 12 shows that graduates and paucivores are more right-wing. But omnivores and inactives do not differ on the left–right scale. The same pattern is found in relation to a question on income cap from wave 16 of the BHPS: ‘The government should place an upper limit on the amount of money that any one person can make,’ where higher values denote more right-wing views.

To recap, it is only when prompted that omnivores would say that they belong to the middle class. And although graduates and paucivores are more right-wing on inequality and distributional issues, omnivores are not different from the inactives on the left–right scale or on maximum income. But this is not to say that omnivores are oblivious to the influence of social class on life chances. Rather, they are just not different from most Britons in acknowledging the significance of social class in British society.

¹⁹There were originally four response categories, but I have combined ‘A great deal’ with ‘Quite a lot’ and contrast them against ‘Not very much’ and ‘Not at all’.

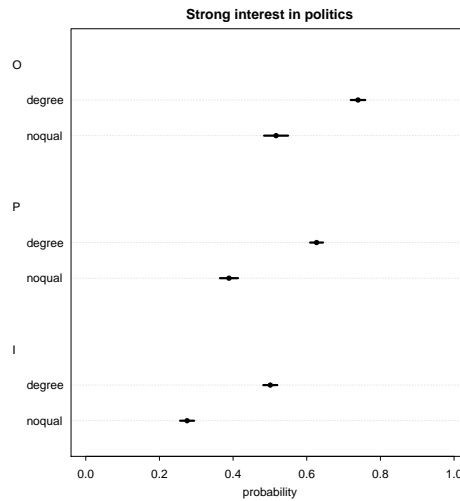


Figure 7: Predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of ‘interest in politics’ by education and cultural consumption

3.8 Political engagement and partisanship

In wave 2 of Understanding Society, respondents were asked: ‘How interested would you say you are in politics?’ Table 13 shows that about four in ten (42%) of all respondents say that they are very or fairly interested in politics. It also shows that graduates, paucivores and omnivores report a higher level of interest than their respective reference group. The magnitude of these associations is quite large and can be seen from Figure 7: almost three quarters (74%) of graduate omnivores are interested in politics, compared to about half of omnivores with no qualifications (52%) or graduate inactives (50%), and a quarter (28%) of the inactives without qualifications.

Furthermore, graduates, paucivores and omnivores report a stronger sense of civic duty (this is based on an additive scale formed from six items from wave 2 of Understanding Society, see the Appendix for details) and are more likely to say that they intend to vote in the next general election. The magnitude of the omnivore parameter is, again, comparable to that of university degree. However, it is only the paucivores who are more likely to say that their vote ‘will make a difference in terms of which party wins the election in this constituency at the next general election.’

Omnivores and paucivores also differ in the political party that they support. At the time of the survey, the shares of support among all respondents for the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, and other parties are 23%, 29%, 10% and 38% respectively.²⁰ Table 13 shows that omnivores are more

²⁰This variable is derived from a series of questions asking respondents whether they

Table 13: Political engagement and political partisanship

| Dependent variable | year | # item | α^\dagger | range | est. method | degree | P | O |
|----------------------|---------|--------|------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| interest in politics | 2010–11 | 1 | | 41.6% | logit | 1.038** (.067) | .550** (.037) | 1.106** (.056) |
| civic duty | 2010–11 | 6 | .58 | -4.09/2.91 | OLS | .308** (.073) | .120** (.043) | .255* (.060) |
| voting intention | 2010–11 | 1 | | -1.43/2.80 | OLS | .312** (.067) | .147** (.042) | .342** (.058) |
| perceived influence | 2010–11 | 1 | | -1.21/2.08 | OLS | .073 (.067) | .104** (.040) | .062 (.057) |
| lab v con | 2010–11 | | | | multi. logit | -.099 (.087) | -.035 (.050) | .524** (.070) |
| lib v con | 2010–11 | | | | | .708** (.129) | .123 (.066) | .507** (.089) |
| lib v lab | 2010–11 | | | | | .807** (.123) | .088 (.065) | -.017 (.084) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests; \dagger Cronbach's α .

likely to support Labour or the Liberal Democrats rather than the Conservatives. University graduates are more likely to support the Liberal Democrats rather than Labour or the Conservatives. Paucivores, however, seem indifferent between the three main parties, at least when compared to the inactives.

Figure 8 shows how the predicted probabilities of party support vary with education and cultural consumption. The share of Labour support varies not so much by education, but by cultural consumption. Thus, 38% of graduate omnivores support Labour, as compared to 36% of omnivores without qualifications and 29% of graduate inactives. The opposite holds for the Liberal Democrats who are supported by 17% of graduate omnivores, 7% of omnivores without qualifications, and 13% of graduate inactives. In contrast, the share of Conservative support does not vary much by either education or cultural consumption. What varies by both education and cultural consumption, though, is the level of support for other smaller parties.²¹

are supporters of a particular political party, whether they are closer to a party, and 'if there were to be a general election tomorrow', which party they would vote for.

²¹Respondents were also asked: 'On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about the Conservative / Labour / Liberal Democrat Party?' It turns out that graduates and omnivores like Labour and especially the Liberal Democrats. Moreover, despite their neutral position on the left-right scale, omnivores actually dislike the Conservatives. This would suggest that it is *not* over 'tax

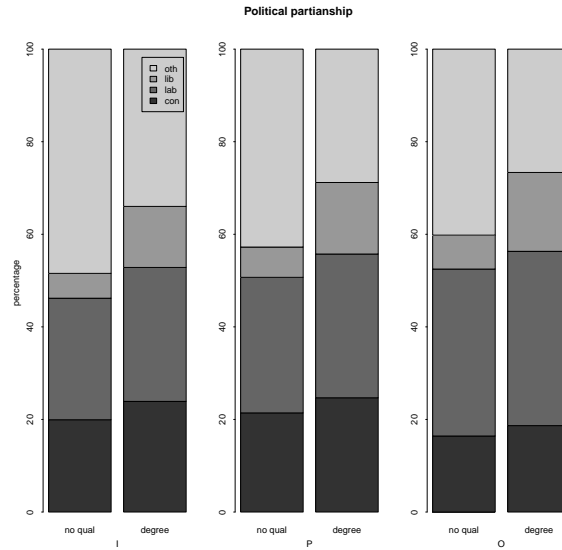


Figure 8: Political partisanship by education and cultural consumption

3.9 Sense of self

In Wave 2 of Understanding Society, respondents were asked: ‘We’d like to know how important various things are to your sense of who you are. Please think about each of the following and tick the box that indicates whether it is very important, fairly important, not very important or not at all important to your sense of who you are.’ In the analyses below, I have dichotomised the responses, contrasting the first two categories against the last two.

Table 14 reveals a good deal of variation in what people think is important to their sense of who they are. To begin with, almost everyone (95%) attach importance to their family, followed by their profession, age, gender, education, ethnicity and, finally, politics which is considered important by only 30% of the respondents. Against this overall ranking, graduates, paucivores and omnivores are quite distinctive in their reply. They are significantly less likely than their respective reference group to attach importance to their family or ethnicity. But as the top panel of Figure 9 shows these differences are quite small in substantive magnitude.

Moreover, although about three quarters of the respondents consider their profession or age are important parts of who they are, these two factors are not especially salient for graduates or cultural consumers. What is impor-

and spend’ issues that omnivores dislike the Conservatives. But paucivores like all three main parties. This suggests a degree of political ambivalence, and is consistent with their neutral stance over support for the three parties. See the Appendix for details.

Table 14: What determines the sense of who you are?

| Dependent variable | year | # item | % | est. method | degree | P | O |
|--------------------|---------|--------|-------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| profession | 2010–11 | 1 | 75.3% | logit | .125 (.084) | −.067 (.047) | −.056 (.069) |
| education | 2010–11 | 1 | 64.8% | logit | 1.630** (.077) | .022 (.043) | .056 (.063) |
| ethnicity | 2010–11 | 1 | 43.4% | logit | −.181* (.072) | −.098* (.041) | −.231** (.058) |
| politics | 2010–11 | 1 | 29.9% | logit | .151* (.075) | .228** (.045) | .601** (.059) |
| family | 2010–11 | 1 | 95.1% | logit | −.355 (.182) | −.258** (.098) | −.302* (.123) |
| gender | 2010–11 | 1 | 65.0% | logit | −.176* (.075) | −.091* (.041) | −.097 (.057) |
| age and life stage | 2010–11 | 1 | 72.1% | logit | −.017 (.077) | .013 (.044) | .040 (.062) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests.

tant to them is their politics, even though this item ranks bottom for the sample as a whole. The bottom left panel of Figure 9 shows that 44% of graduate omnivores think that their politics is important, compared to 30% of graduates inactives and 36% of omnivores without qualifications.

There is some difference between university graduates and visual arts consumers. Not surprisingly, education is especially important to graduates regarding their sense of self, and the magnitude of this association is very large (see bottom right panel of Figure 9). Paucivores or omnivores, however, do not attach greater importance to education than do inactives.

3.10 Big Five personality traits

Finally, in wave 15 of the BHPS, there is a set of 15 questions that measure the Big Five personality traits (Gosling *et al.*, 2003). Table 15 shows that, net of other predictors in the model, paucivores and omnivores are not different from inactives on agreeableness or neuroticism. If anything, omnivores are somewhat less conscientious.

But Table 15 also shows that paucivores and, especially, omnivores score significantly higher on ‘extraversion’ and ‘openness to experience’. And these net differences are quite large in magnitude. Thus, compared to the inactives, omnivores are over a quarter (.29) of a standard deviation more extrovert

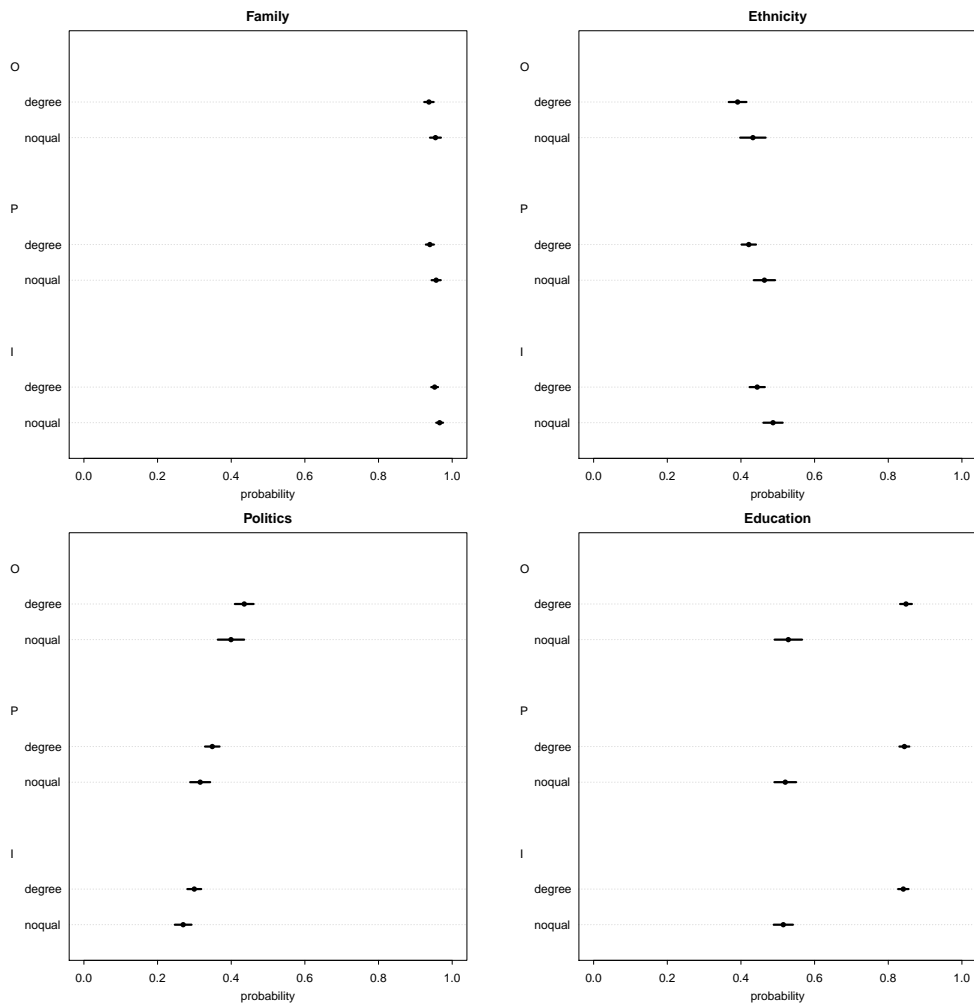


Figure 9: Predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of ‘what is important to the sense of who you are’ by education and cultural consumption

and over half (.57) of a standard deviation more open to new experiences. These results are, in part, consistent with those reported by Kraaykamp and van Eijck (2005, p. 1686) who argue that ‘[o]penness turned out to be the most important personality determinant of media preferences and cultural participation ... [pertaining to] not only highbrow activities, but also the reading of detective novels or the visiting of pop concerts.’

Table 15: Big five personality trait

| Dependent variable | year | # item | α^\dagger | range | est. method | degree | P | O |
|--------------------|------|--------|------------------|------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| agreeableness | 2005 | 3 | .56 | -4.26/1.61 | OLS | -.037 (.087) | .039 (.039) | -.083 (.057) |
| conscientiousness | 2005 | 3 | .54 | -4.36/1.64 | OLS | .013 (.087) | -.022 (.039) | -.172** (.057) |
| extraversion | 2005 | 3 | .61 | -3.08/2.18 | OLS | -.084 (.084) | .129** (.040) | .292** (.059) |
| neuroticism | 2005 | 3 | .69 | -2.14/2.59 | OLS | .035 (.079) | -.038 (.039) | .026 (.052) |
| openness | 2005 | 3 | .69 | -3.11/2.14 | OLS | .445** (.086) | .220** (.037) | .570** (.051) |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, std. errors in parentheses, two-tailed tests; \dagger Cronbach's α .

4 Summary and discussion

In this paper, I use linked data from the British Household Panel Survey and Understanding Society to explore the subjective meaning of cultural omnivorousness. It is clear that omnivores are quite distinctive in their social and political attitudes. Compared with visual arts inactives, omnivores are more trusting and risk-taking. They are also more supportive of the supranational European Union, and they tend to eschew subnational and ethnic identities, which suggests a more open and cosmopolitan outlook. Omnivores are more egalitarian in their gender role attitudes, and they are more liberal on homosexuality. Omnivores are greener regarding the environment and climate change which can be interpreted as them having more trust in scientific authority. And although omnivores are marginally less likely to belong to a religion, they are more likely to think that religion matters and are more likely to attend religious services, albeit infrequently.

These results are largely consistent with those reported by DiMaggio (1996). But as this point has not been brought out clearly in previous research, it also bears repeating just how strong these associations are, especially since the estimates of the omnivore and paucivore parameters are likely to be biased downwards.²² As ‘education is clearly the most powerful predictor’ for a wide range of outcome variables (Davis, 1982, p. 585), it is really quite striking that in many cases the omnivore parameter and the degree

²²This, in turn, is because the cultural consumption data and the attitudinal data are, in many cases, taken from different years (see the discussion on p. 5).

parameter are of comparable magnitude.²³

More importantly, our findings also speak to the link between cultural consumption and social inequality. Many sociologists see cultural capital as integral to the reproduction of inequality. This, of course, reflects the enormous and enduring influence of the work of Bourdieu (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973; Bourdieu, 1984). It is entirely possible that class–culture homology was an apt description of the situation in France in the 1960s. But the applicability of Bourdieu’s argument in other contexts has increasingly been challenged by more recent empirical research, including those which come out of France (see e.g. Coulangeon, 2005; Coulangeon and Lemel, 2007, 2010). In the face of mounting evidence that supports the omnivore–univore argument, some scholars (e.g. Ollivier, 2008; Kahn, 2011) have sought to reconcile Peterson with Bourdieu by claiming that omnivorousness is just a new form of distinction which masks or even justifies existing inequality.

Our findings, however, are not consistent with that interpretation. Rather, they support the competing view that omnivores are relatively tolerant individuals who are generally open to a range of cultural forms. Quite apart from the findings on the EU, national, subnational and ethnic identities (Sections 3.2 and 3.3) which suggest that omnivores have a more cosmopolitan outlook, we also see from Section 3.10 that a key personality trait of omnivores is that they are more open to new experiences.

Moreover, while omnivores are more politically engaged (Section 3.8), social class does not appear to be at the forefront of their mind when they were asked about class membership (Section 3.7). In this sense, omnivores are not especially ‘class-conscious’. Also, although university graduates and paucivores are more right-wing, omnivores are *not* different from the inactives on distributional issues (Section 3.7). This result is consistent with the finding of Chan and Goldthorpe (2007a) that ‘left–right’ attitudes and ‘libertarian–authoritarian’ attitudes have different social bases. Specifically, ‘left–right’ attitudes are linked to social class rather than social status, and the opposite is true for ‘libertarian–authoritarian’ attitudes. As omnivorousness has a net association with social status, but not with social class (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005, 2007b,c), it makes sense that omnivores are not particular left-wing or right-wing. In other words, cultural omnivorousness is rather orthogonal to social class in the classical Weberian sense.

Furthermore, when asked what is important to their sense of who they

²³Kingston *et al.* (2003, p. 53) observe that ‘[e]ducation is a great independent variable ... almost as a reflex, researchers include educational attainment as one of the normal “suspects” in multivariate analyses of almost any outcome of sociological interest. The common result is a significant increase in R^2 or its cognates and a decrease in the apparent “net effects” of other variables.’

are (Section 3.9), omnivores do *not* attach particular significance to their profession or education, the two most important status-conferring attributes (Chan, 2010, chap. 2). There is certainly a status gradient in cultural consumption. But omnivores are *not* more status-conscious than the inactives.

Finally, it must be said that, with survey data, it is difficult to assess whether deep down omnivores harbour some cultural and social snobbery. But recent qualitative research from the UK suggests that this is not the case. In particular, based on 30 qualitative interviews, Warde *et al.* (2007, p. 158) conclude that ‘[t]he evidence of our interviews is certainly that omnivorousness accompanies tolerance; there was no evidence of the drawing of cultural boundaries to exclude other social groups, and few indications of snobbishness when expressing personal cultural tastes.’ Drawing on the same set of evidence, Bennett *et al.* (2009, p. 66) observe that ‘those who were culturally engaged did not articulate a clear sense of cultural superiority.’ Indeed, they ‘find no one remotely corresponding to the figure of the snob . . . These observations imply dynamics [that are] different from those described by Bourdieu’ (Bennett *et al.*, 2009, pp. 70–71). In other words, qualitative research evidence supports the interpretation of the quantitative data analysis presented above.

Given this, it would be erroneous to see omnivorous cultural consumption as a new form of distinction or the symbolic expression of class domination. Instead, it might be more useful to think along the following line. There are individuals who have a relatively open, tolerant and cosmopolitan outlook or disposition. Such disposition, which might be cultivated by education, would then find expressions in different domains of social life, with cultural omnivorousness being an example in the cultural domain. I must stress that this view does *not* deny the social stratification of cultural consumption. For example, omnivores are much more commonly found among the relatively advantaged, say, university graduates. But we must also keep in mind that the majority of graduates (or other advantaged social groups) are *not* cultural omnivores. To be concrete, in the Understanding Society sample, just 2% of those without qualifications are omnivores, and the share of omnivores rises monotonically with education. But even among university graduates, only a quarter (26%) were omnivores. Education, social status and, in some instances, income are, indeed, powerful forces which structure cultural consumption. But it is those with a more open and tolerant outlook, whether they are in socially advantaged positions or not, who become omnivores.

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