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The Social Stratification of Cultural Consumption: Some Policy Implications of a Research Project

Tak Wing Chan & John H. Goldthorpe

The paper briefly describes a recently completed research project on the social stratification of cultural consumption, presents some major findings from this project, and considers their implications for public policy in relation to the arts. A central theme is the inadequacy of the 'homology' argument, claiming that social hierarchies and cultural hierarchies map closely onto each other. This argument is shown to be empirically unsound and to underestimate the complexity of the relationship between social stratification and cultural consumption, as this is determined by the combined effects of income, education and social status. One question that then arises is what policy response, if any, is required by the fact that many individuals do not participate extensively in the arts even though they have the economic and cultural resources required to do so (self-exclusion rather than social exclusion). And a second is that of how far, in attempts at increasing participation, status-linked motivations might be exploited.

Keywords: Cultural Consumption; Social Status; Omnivores

Introduction

This paper describes a research project that we have recently completed on the social stratification of cultural consumption, and then aims to present our main findings and to bring out their implications for certain aspects of public policy in relation to the arts. Our research is relevant in particular to policy issues that arise in regard to access to, and participation in, cultural activities and to the extent and causation of social inequalities in cultural consumption.¹

Until quite recently, there has been a serious lack of information on cultural consumption in Britain that (1) derives from well-designed samples of the national

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population; (2) covers most major cultural domains; and (3) allows individuals' levels and patterns of cultural consumption to be linked to a wide range of their socio-demographic characteristics.

A major step in remedying this deficiency, at least so far as England is concerned, came with the Arts in England Survey of 2001, which was carried out by the Office of National Statistics on behalf of Arts Council England. Our own research is based on the *secondary analysis* of the data-set that resulted from this survey. In addition, we have organised a comparative project in which researchers have undertaken analyses parallel to ours in six other countries on the basis of data-sets similar in essentials to that of the Arts in England Survey: that is, in Chile, France, Hungary, Israel, The Netherlands and the US.²

The Arts Council published its own report on the research it commissioned, entitled *Arts in England: Attendance, Participation and Attitudes* (Skelton *et al.*, 2002). In our own work, we have sought to go beyond the analyses presented in the Arts Council report in three main ways.

First, instead of focusing on particular items of cultural consumption that individuals may, or may not, have engaged in, we have tried to establish *patterns of consumption* and, in turn, *types of cultural consumer*. We have done this both *within* the three different cultural domains of (1) music, (2) theatre, dance and cinema, and (3) the visual arts, and also *across* these three domains.

Second, instead of using merely *ad hoc* measures of social stratification, or the one-dimensional and unduly crude measures used in market research, we treat social stratification as being *multidimensional*. We use separate measures of social class and of social status (the distinction between which we discuss further below) and also of education and income.

And third, instead of relying on primarily bivariate analyses—i.e., analyses relating forms of cultural consumption to individual characteristics taken one at a time—we carry out more powerful, multivariate analyses. These allow us to assess the effects of different individual characteristics simultaneously and *independently of each other*. For example, we can assess the effects of social class on cultural consumption independently of those of social status, or the effects of income independently of those of education.

Part 1: Research Result: 'Cultural Omnivores vs. Univores' Rather Than 'Elite vs. Mass'

Turning now to the findings of our analyses and their policy implications, we would say that their most general significance lies in the fact that they call into question an argument that appears to underlie much current discussion of cultural policy—implicitly if not explicitly. That is, what we label as the 'homology' argument. What this argument claims, or supposes, is that social hierarchies and cultural hierarchies map closely onto each other. Individuals in higher social strata are those who prefer, and predominantly consume 'elite' or 'high' culture; and individuals in lower strata are those who prefer, and predominantly consume, 'mass' or 'popular' culture—with, perhaps, intermediate situations being also recognized.

In some academic versions of the argument—for example, that developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984)—the arrogation of high culture by ‘dominant’ classes is seen as an important factor in the capacity of these classes to ensure the ‘reproduction’ of the *status quo*, and of their own dominant position within it. It would then appear that some, rather unsophisticated, reception of this thesis often lies behind criticism of public funding for the arts—insofar as the arts are associated with high culture. That is to say, this funding is seen as being unduly influenced by and biased towards the tastes and cultural practices of higher social strata and as thus serving to reinforce class and status divisions in society rather than contributing to greater social integration. New Labour policy in regard to the arts would appear to have been formed to a significant extent in response to such criticism (see, e.g., Long, Bramham, Butterfield, Hylton & Lloyd, 2002), leading in turn to governmental demands that public support for the arts should be linked to a requirement that the arts show a commitment to promoting social integration or, at least, to overcoming ‘social exclusion’.

However, perhaps the most notable result from our research is, in this respect, a negative one. Within present-day British (or at least English) society, we are unable to identify any numerically significant group of cultural consumers whose consumption is essentially *confined to* high cultural forms and who reject, or at least do not participate in, more popular forms. Any such group that may exist is, at all events, too small—at, say, something under 1 or 2 per cent of the population—to be reliably determined even within a relatively large national sample (the Arts in England Survey was based on a sample of over 6,000). And we can further say that this negative finding is largely replicated in the other countries in our comparative project.

What we do find, more positively, at least in the cases of music and of theatre, dance and cinema (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2005, 2007b), is the following (see Table 1). First, there *are* large numbers of individuals whose consumption is in fact essentially restricted to more popular cultural forms—that is, to pop and rock music and to cinema (as opposed to live theatre of any kind). But second, those individuals who consume most high culture in these domains—classical music, opera, live theatre, ballet etc.—tend to consume popular culture *as well*, and at least to the same extent as those whose consumption is limited to popular forms. In other words, instead of making a distinction between ‘elite’ and ‘mass’ consumers, it would seem more appropriate here, following the suggestion of the American sociologist, Richard Peterson (1992, 2005) to think in terms of ‘cultural univores’, on the one hand, and ‘cultural omnivores’, on the other.

However, there are also certain qualifications to this latter typology that may be necessary, as, for example, in the case of the third cultural domain that we consider, the visual arts (see again Table 1). Here, it would seem (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007c), the lack of popular genres, or at all events, of ones with an extensive institutional basis and media expression, means that in place, as it were, of univores, one has to recognize another substantial grouping, namely, that of inactives or of virtual *non*-consumers. And further, in addition to omnivores, we have to distinguish another type of consumer whom we label as ‘paucivores’: that is, those who consume

Table 1 Types of Cultural Consumer and Estimated Probabilities of Their Participation in Various Cultural Activities (Derived from Latent Class Analyses) in the Domains of (1) Theatre, Dance and Cinema, (2) Music and (3) the Visual Arts

| | TDC ^a | | | Music | | | | Visual arts | | |
|-------------------|------------------|------|------------------------|---------------|------|------|-------------------------|---------------|------|------|
| | U | O | | U | OL | O | | I | P | O |
| relative size (%) | 66 | 38 | | 66 | 24 | 10 | | 59 | 34 | 7 |
| | probabilities | | | probabilities | | | | probabilities | | |
| Ballet | 0.00 | 0.05 | opera (l) ^c | 0.01 | 0.04 | 0.39 | Video or electronic art | 0.09 | 0.25 | 0.63 |
| Other dance | 0.06 | 0.25 | jazz (l) | 0.03 | 0.08 | 0.27 | Cultural festival | 0.04 | 0.12 | 0.64 |
| Pantomime | 0.07 | 0.28 | classical (l) | 0.02 | 0.06 | 0.70 | Craft exhibition | 0.04 | 0.07 | 0.48 |
| Musical | 0.07 | 0.56 | pop/rock (l) | 0.23 | 0.23 | 0.28 | Exhibition of art | 0.00 | 0.42 | 0.92 |
| Play/drama | 0.06 | 0.67 | opera (m) | 0.01 | 0.42 | 0.54 | Museum or art gallery | 0.07 | 0.81 | 0.97 |
| Cinema | 0.48 | 0.87 | jazz (m) | 0.11 | 0.51 | 0.50 | | | | |
| | | | classical (m) | 0.29 | 0.95 | 0.98 | | | | |
| | | | pop/rock (m) | 0.90 | 0.91 | 0.75 | | | | |

Notes:

^aTDC: Theatre, dance and cinema

^bU: Univores, O: Omnivores, OL: Omnivore-listeners, I: Inactives, P: Paucivores

^cl: going to live concerts, m: listening through various media

in only a rather limited and somewhat unadventurous way in visiting museums and galleries while avoiding less 'mainstream' venues and events.

Part 2: Research Result: Substantial Number of Univores Found in Higher Social Strata

We move on now to our further findings regarding the social stratification of the types of cultural consumer that we can identify. And here again the misleading nature of the homology argument is brought out. It is true that in England, and similarly in the other countries in our comparative project, these types do appear, on an initial view, to be stratified on fairly straightforward lines. That is to say, cultural univores, as in music and in theatre, dance and cinema, and likewise the culturally inactive, as in the visual arts, are more likely to be found in lower than in higher social strata, while the reverse is the case with cultural omnivores (or paucivores). But, considered in greater detail, our findings reveal a rather more complex situation.

To begin with, it can be shown—for England and for the most part elsewhere—that the stratification of cultural consumption occurs more on the basis of social status than of social class (as is discussed in more detail below). This point calls for a brief excursus into academic sociology. *Class positions* can be seen as deriving from social relations in economic life: that is, from relations in labour markets and production units. As regards class, we therefore distinguish initially between employers, self-employed workers and employees; and then, among employees, we make further distinctions according to the form of their employment relationships—most importantly, between salaried employees and wage-workers. In contrast, *status positions* are seen as deriving from relations of social equality and inequality as expressed in more intimate forms of association and, in particular, in 'commensality' and 'connubium'—in who eats with whom and who sleeps with whom. Thus, through analysing patterns of differential association in close friendship or in marriage, a status order can be established (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2004).

The class structure and the status order are then to be understood as qualitatively different forms of social stratification, between which an important empirical correlation exists, but one that is by no means perfect (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007a). For example, salaried professional and managerial employees have similar class positions but professionals generally rank higher in status than do managers, and higher, especially, than managers working in industrial and other predominantly 'blue-collar' milieux. And indeed the latter, despite their more advantaged class positions, may rank lower in status than quite routine administrative and clerical employees who work in 'white-collar' milieux.

From this conceptual distinction between class and status and the empirical finding that cultural consumption is stratified more on the basis of status than of class, further difficulties for the homology argument then arise. As well as there being no recognizable 'dominant class' that is culturally elitist, neither can one convincingly link such a class with cultural omnivorousness. Cultural omnivores are most frequently found among professionals, reflecting the generally high-ranking

status positions that professionals hold, but even within professional groups, omnivores often do not constitute a majority. And among managers, with their generally lower status, omnivores tend to be a clear minority, with cultural univores and inactives predominating (see Table 2). Socio-economic advantage of any kind is not, in other words, all that *strongly* correlated with cultural 'distinction'.³

Table 2 Percentage Distribution within Status Group of Types of Cultural Consumer in the Three Domains of (1) Theatre, Dance and Cinema, (2) Music and (3) the Visual Arts

| Status group by rank order | TDC | | Music | | | Visual arts | | | |
|---|------|------|-------|------|------|-------------|------|------|------|
| | U | O | U | OL | O | I | P | O | N |
| 1 Higher professionals | 35.9 | 64.1 | 52.3 | 18.8 | 28.9 | 28.1 | 63.3 | 8.6 | 128 |
| 2 Associate professionals in business | 48.5 | 51.5 | 59.6 | 21.1 | 19.3 | 33.9 | 53.8 | 12.3 | 171 |
| 3 Specialist managers | 41.8 | 58.2 | 53.3 | 27.5 | 19.2 | 36.3 | 55.5 | 8.2 | 182 |
| 4 Teachers and other professionals in education | 39.5 | 60.5 | 46.1 | 24.0 | 29.9 | 23.4 | 57.5 | 19.2 | 167 |
| 5 General managers and administrators | 36.8 | 63.2 | 57.9 | 26.3 | 15.8 | 43.4 | 50.0 | 6.6 | 76 |
| 6 Associate professionals in industry | 58.2 | 41.8 | 61.8 | 25.5 | 12.7 | 54.5 | 42.7 | 2.7 | 110 |
| 7 Scientists, engineers and technologists | 55.9 | 44.1 | 51.5 | 30.9 | 17.7 | 41.9 | 52.2 | 5.9 | 136 |
| 8 Filing and record clerks | 57.1 | 42.9 | 69.6 | 19.6 | 10.7 | 53.6 | 41.1 | 5.4 | 56 |
| 9 Managers and officials, nec | 33.3 | 66.7 | 77.8 | 11.1 | 11.1 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 9 |
| 10 Administrative officers and assistants | 55.1 | 44.9 | 64.3 | 21.4 | 14.3 | 48.0 | 44.9 | 7.1 | 98 |
| 11 Numerical clerks and cashiers | 56.8 | 43.2 | 80.5 | 14.2 | 5.3 | 65.1 | 32.5 | 2.4 | 169 |
| 12 Associate professionals in health and welfare | 44.1 | 55.9 | 67.1 | 17.1 | 15.8 | 42.1 | 51.3 | 6.6 | 152 |
| 13 Secretaries and receptionists | 61.8 | 38.2 | 70.1 | 19.1 | 10.8 | 53.5 | 43.3 | 3.2 | 157 |
| 14 Other clerical workers | 70.5 | 29.5 | 72.6 | 23.2 | 4.2 | 64.2 | 28.4 | 7.4 | 95 |
| 15 Buyers and sales representatives | 62.1 | 37.9 | 69.0 | 20.7 | 10.3 | 41.4 | 50.0 | 8.6 | 58 |
| 16 Childcare workers | 52.8 | 47.2 | 76.4 | 16.9 | 6.7 | 55.1 | 41.6 | 3.4 | 89 |
| 17 Managers and proprietors in services | 62.4 | 37.7 | 62.9 | 23.5 | 13.5 | 54.1 | 37.1 | 8.8 | 170 |
| 18 Plant, depot and site managers | 58.1 | 41.9 | 64.0 | 25.6 | 10.5 | 45.3 | 47.7 | 7.0 | 86 |
| 19 Sales workers | 71.4 | 28.6 | 82.1 | 14.1 | 3.8 | 68.7 | 29.8 | 1.5 | 262 |
| 20 Health workers | 71.3 | 28.7 | 78.7 | 14.6 | 6.7 | 72.0 | 25.0 | 3.0 | 164 |
| 21 Personal service workers | 62.0 | 38.0 | 69.6 | 17.4 | 13.0 | 64.1 | 34.8 | 1.1 | 92 |
| 22 Protective service personnel | 78.5 | 21.5 | 75.9 | 17.7 | 6.3 | 63.3 | 35.4 | 1.3 | 79 |
| 23 Routine workers in services | 84.1 | 15.9 | 87.5 | 11.1 | 1.4 | 83.7 | 16.3 | 0.0 | 208 |
| 24 Catering workers | 75.0 | 25.0 | 70.6 | 22.1 | 7.4 | 72.1 | 23.5 | 4.4 | 68 |
| 25 Store and despatch clerks | 80.0 | 20.0 | 76.0 | 24.0 | 0.0 | 76.0 | 24.0 | 0.0 | 25 |
| 26 Skilled and related manual workers n.e.c. | 83.3 | 16.7 | 72.5 | 20.3 | 7.3 | 70.3 | 29.0 | 0.7 | 138 |
| 27 Transport operatives | 84.4 | 15.6 | 71.6 | 25.7 | 2.8 | 77.1 | 22.0 | 0.9 | 109 |
| 28 Skilled and related manual workers in construction and maintenance | 84.5 | 15.5 | 80.2 | 16.4 | 3.5 | 77.6 | 22.4 | 0.0 | 116 |
| 29 Skilled and related manual workers in metal trades | 81.0 | 19.0 | 76.0 | 21.5 | 2.5 | 69.4 | 28.9 | 1.6 | 121 |
| 30 Plant and machine operatives | 90.3 | 9.7 | 87.9 | 10.1 | 1.9 | 83.6 | 16.4 | 0.0 | 207 |
| 31 General labourers | 81.0 | 19.0 | 88.4 | 8.3 | 3.3 | 73.6 | 24.8 | 1.7 | 121 |
| Overall | 64.2 | 35.8 | 70.4 | 19.1 | 10.4 | 58.2 | 37.1 | 4.7 | 3819 |

Note: For examples of occupations within each status group and other details of the occupational-based status scale, see Chan and Goldthorpe (2004).

Conversely, then, it appears unhelpful to discuss limited cultural consumption simply in terms of 'social exclusion'. If a low level of cultural consumption is in fact to be regarded as a problem for public policy—an issue taken up further below—it cannot be seen as one that is restricted to the most disadvantaged groups in society. Rather, it must be recognized as a fairly common feature of the lifestyles of those who are clearly in the social mainstream.

Part 3: Research Result: Cultural Consumption is Chiefly Stratified by Education and Status, Not by Class

In the light of these findings, then, rather wide-ranging questions arise of the relative weight that should be given in explaining differences in cultural consumption to resources (or constraints) as against motivation (or choice). In this regard, the multi-dimensional approach to social stratification that we adopt is, we believe, of further value. As earlier noted, as well as distinguishing between class and status, we also include in our analyses of cultural consumption separate measures of income and education; and in this way some further interesting results of evident policy relevance are produced.

First, it turns out that the independent effects of income (i.e., independent of class, status and education) on cultural consumption are quite limited, at least so far as consumption *within* particular domains is concerned (see Table 3). Only in the case of theatre, dance and cinema—but not in music or the visual arts—are income effects on consumption statistically significant, and even then they are not very powerful. When we look at consumption *across* these three domains (see Table 4), income does appear to be somewhat more important, and especially as regards individuals' chances of attaining a moderate rather than a minimal level of such consumption. But, even then, income has no effect on determining whether individuals move beyond a moderate to a high level of cross-domain consumption—to being, say, omnivores not just in one but in two or all three of the domains we consider.⁴

Secondly, and in some contrast, the independent effects of education tend in all respects to be quite marked. The higher individuals' educational qualifications, the less the probability of their being cultural univores or inactives and the greater the probability of their being cultural omnivores—both within particular domains and across domains.

Thirdly, though, what has to be emphasized is that, despite education having such strong effects, including education (and income) in the analysis *does not remove* the effects of social status. Status effects on cultural consumption for the most part persist within different levels of education: that is, the higher the individual's status, the higher the level of his or her cultural consumption, and the more omnivorous it is likely to be. Thus, for example, the tendency for professionals be relatively active and omnivorous cultural consumers is not to be accounted for in terms of their educational attainments alone. In contrast, it is evident (Tables 3 and 4) that, under our multivariate models, individuals' class positions only rarely exert a significant effect on their patterns of cultural consumption, whether within or across domains.

Table 3 Determinants of Type of Consumer in the Domains of (1) Theatre, Dance and Cinema, (2) Music and (3) the Visual Arts (Multinomial Logit Model, N = 3819)

| | TDC | | Music | | Visual arts | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
| | O rather than U | | O rather than U | | O rather than I | |
| | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. |
| Female ^a | 0.615** | (0.092) | 0.156 | (0.137) | 0.223 | (0.192) |
| Married ^b | 0.148 | (0.112) | -0.321 | (0.176) | -0.200 | (0.239) |
| Separated | 0.188 | (0.139) | -0.065 | (0.214) | 0.180 | (0.295) |
| Age | 0.005 | (0.004) | 0.066** | (0.006) | 0.026** | (0.009) |
| Child (0-4) ^c | -0.562** | (0.113) | -0.391 | (0.214) | -0.639* | (0.285) |
| Child (5-10) | 0.070 | (0.100) | -0.340 | (0.188) | 0.260 | (0.232) |
| Child (11-15) | 0.088 | (0.105) | -0.397* | (0.191) | 0.039 | (0.252) |
| The North ^d | -0.231 | (0.124) | -0.470* | (0.193) | -0.089 | (0.253) |
| Midlands | -0.207 | (0.123) | -0.198 | (0.184) | -0.880** | (0.279) |
| South East | 0.083 | (0.135) | 0.060 | (0.198) | -0.150 | (0.270) |
| South West | -0.189 | (0.153) | -0.224 | (0.238) | -0.174 | (0.321) |
| Income | 0.026** | (0.005) | 0.012 | (0.007) | 0.006 | (0.009) |
| CSE/others ^e | 0.169 | (0.152) | 1.006** | (0.276) | 1.220* | (0.499) |
| O-levels | 0.668** | (0.128) | 1.109** | (0.242) | 1.072* | (0.462) |
| A-levels | 1.130** | (0.145) | 1.523** | (0.265) | 1.849** | (0.471) |
| Sub-degree | 1.027** | (0.160) | 1.851** | (0.266) | 2.219** | (0.469) |
| Degree | 1.223** | (0.151) | 2.367** | (0.256) | 3.260** | (0.450) |
| Class 2 ^f | 0.078 | (0.126) | -0.135 | (0.172) | 0.613* | (0.241) |
| Class 3 | -0.161 | (0.160) | -0.329 | (0.247) | -0.396 | (0.376) |
| Class 4 | -0.205 | (0.203) | 0.299 | (0.291) | 0.699 | (0.411) |
| Class 5 | -0.134 | (0.218) | -0.253 | (0.382) | 0.073 | (0.554) |
| Class 6 | -0.199 | (0.195) | -0.107 | (0.317) | -0.480 | (0.514) |
| Class 7 | -0.507* | (0.230) | -0.109 | (0.387) | -0.325 | (0.646) |
| Status | 0.631** | (0.179) | 1.047** | (0.287) | 1.229** | (0.402) |
| Constant | -2.118** | (0.292) | -5.906** | (0.472) | -5.461** | (0.688) |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ ^aMale as ref.cat.^bSingle as ref.cat.^cChildless as ref.cat.^dLondon as ref.cat.^eNo qualification as ref.cat.^fClasses refer to ONS socioeconomic classification.

Class 1 (ref.cat.) is higher managerial and professional occupations, Class 2 lower managerial and professional occupations, Class 3 intermediate occupations, Class 4 small employers and own-account workers, Class 5 lower supervisory and technical occupations, Class 6 semi-routine occupation and Class 7 routine occupation.

Overall, then, we would suggest that in determining cultural consumption, resources and motivations *combine* on something like the following lines (cf. Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007d). Economic resources, as proxied in our analyses by income, are chiefly important for the ability of individuals' to engage in moderate levels of cultural consumption 'across the board'. But high levels of economic resources do not in themselves imply high levels of cultural consumption. Cultural resources, as proxied by education, have a more general importance. A high level of education is the best prophylactic against minimal levels of cultural consumption. Moreover, the higher

Table 4 Multinomial Logit Model: Level of Cross-domain Cultural Participation as the Dependent Variable

| | Contrast between level ^a | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
| | 2 rather than 1 | | 3 rather than 1 | | 4 rather than 1 | | 3 rather than 2 | | 4 rather than 2 | | 4 rather than 3 | |
| | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. | $\hat{\beta}$ | s.e. |
| Female | -0.253* | (0.110) | 0.487** | (0.109) | 0.497** | (0.154) | 0.741** | (0.116) | 0.751** | (0.156) | 0.010 | (0.146) |
| Married | 0.007 | (0.133) | 0.212 | (0.130) | -0.196 | (0.192) | 0.205 | (0.143) | -0.203 | (0.196) | -0.408* | (0.185) |
| Sep/div/wid | -0.004 | (0.164) | 0.122 | (0.162) | 0.150 | (0.232) | 0.126 | (0.179) | 0.154 | (0.238) | 0.028 | (0.226) |
| Age | 0.031 | (0.005) | 0.018** | (0.005) | 0.054** | (0.007) | -0.013* | (0.005) | 0.023** | (0.007) | 0.036** | (0.007) |
| Child (0-4) | 0.002 | (0.131) | -0.546** | (0.129) | -0.661** | (0.223) | -0.548** | (0.142) | -0.663** | (0.227) | -0.115 | (0.220) |
| Child (5-10) | 0.070 | (0.123) | 0.166 | (0.114) | -0.107 | (0.192) | 0.096 | (0.127) | -0.177 | (0.197) | -0.274 | (0.186) |
| Child (11-15) | -0.101 | (0.129) | -0.016 | (0.120) | -0.069 | (0.196) | 0.084 | (0.136) | 0.032 | (0.202) | -0.052 | (0.190) |
| The North | -0.191 | (0.155) | -0.373* | (0.149) | -0.280 | (0.211) | -0.181 | (0.156) | -0.089 | (0.211) | 0.093 | (0.199) |
| Midlands | -0.219 | (0.155) | -0.288 | (0.148) | -0.412 | (0.211) | -0.069 | (0.155) | -0.193 | (0.211) | -0.124 | (0.197) |
| South East | -0.241 | (0.178) | -0.025 | (0.164) | 0.108 | (0.224) | 0.216 | (0.174) | 0.349 | (0.226) | 0.133 | (0.205) |
| South West | 0.106 | (0.186) | -0.159 | (0.183) | -0.182 | (0.266) | -0.265 | (0.189) | -0.288 | (0.264) | -0.023 | (0.251) |
| Income | 0.008 | (0.006) | 0.029** | (0.006) | 0.029** | (0.008) | 0.021** | (0.006) | 0.021** | (0.007) | -0.000 | (0.007) |
| CSE/others | 0.439** | (0.150) | 0.325* | (0.164) | 1.005** | (0.325) | -0.114 | (0.186) | 0.566 | (0.335) | 0.680* | (0.338) |
| O-levels | 0.563** | (0.139) | 0.848** | (0.141) | 1.326** | (0.283) | 0.286 | (0.161) | 0.764** | (0.291) | 0.478 | (0.290) |
| A-levels | 0.806** | (0.174) | 1.388** | (0.166) | 2.069** | (0.306) | 0.582** | (0.185) | 1.263** | (0.314) | 0.680* | (0.306) |
| Sub-degree | 0.877** | (0.199) | 1.135** | (0.192) | 2.427** | (0.308) | 0.258 | (0.205) | 1.550** | (0.313) | 1.292** | (0.305) |
| Degree | 1.384** | (0.196) | 1.670** | (0.190) | 3.231** | (0.303) | 0.286 | (0.192) | 1.847** | (0.301) | 1.561** | (0.294) |
| Class 2 | 0.032 | (0.190) | 0.078 | (0.173) | 0.152 | (0.209) | 0.046 | (0.162) | 0.120 | (0.195) | 0.074 | (0.174) |
| Class 3 | 0.010 | (0.222) | -0.141 | (0.204) | -0.374 | (0.284) | -0.151 | (0.206) | -0.384 | (0.281) | -0.233 | (0.261) |
| Class 4 | 0.035 | (0.265) | -0.210 | (0.255) | 0.300 | (0.335) | -0.244 | (0.261) | 0.266 | (0.332) | 0.510 | (0.316) |
| Class 5 | 0.309 | (0.273) | 0.067 | (0.262) | -0.292 | (0.457) | -0.242 | (0.272) | -0.601 | (0.457) | -0.359 | (0.445) |
| Class 6 | 0.026 | (0.257) | -0.150 | (0.241) | -0.168 | (0.363) | -0.176 | (0.251) | -0.194 | (0.364) | -0.018 | (0.347) |
| Class 7 | 0.198 | (0.278) | -0.446 | (0.276) | -0.160 | (0.451) | -0.644* | (0.288) | -0.358 | (0.453) | 0.286 | (0.446) |
| Status | 0.800** | (0.223) | 0.849** | (0.213) | 1.675** | (0.318) | 0.049 | (0.228) | 0.876** | (0.321) | 0.827** | (0.306) |
| Constant | -2.245** | (0.369) | -2.335** | (0.355) | -5.801** | (0.529) | -0.089 | (0.373) | -3.555** | (0.531) | -3.466** | (0.504) |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

^aRespondents at the highest level, i.e., level 4, are omnivores in at least two of the three cultural domains that we distinguish. Those at level 3 are omnivores in one domain, while those at level 1 have the lowest level of cultural participation, i.e., they are univores in the domains of theatre, dance and cinema and of music and they are visual arts inactive. Finally, respondents at level 2 are not omnivores in any domain, but neither do they have the lowest level of cultural participation in all three domains. Reference categories same as Table 3.

individuals' educational level, the higher, one might say, is their capacity for cultural consumption, which then seems always to be exploited to some extent or other. There is, in other words, and not surprisingly, support for the idea that much cultural consumption is engaged in 'for its own sake'—for the intrinsic satisfactions and rewards that follow from the realisation of the capacity for such consumption. However, the fact that status still often exerts an effect on the level and form of cultural consumption *over and above* the effects of education and income, further suggests that consideration of status is an important motivational factor that operates independently of resources.

This does not necessarily imply, we would stress, that cultural consumption driven by status motivations is in some sense spurious—that it is engaged in *simply* for reasons of status—as, say, with bored executives sitting in hospitality boxes at the opera or with tourists 'ticking off' famous museums or galleries without perhaps getting beyond the café and giftshop. Nor need it imply that such consumption is aimed primarily at demonstrating status superiority through exclusiveness. Rather, status motivations in cultural consumption may be directed chiefly towards confirming an individual's membership of a particular status group or network, characterized by a valued lifestyle in which cultural activity has some particular importance. That is to say, effective membership of the group or network depends, in part, on the individual's ability to share cultural interests and experiences, and not only in the actual venues or settings in which these interests and experiences are realized but, more generally, in everyday social intercourse—or, as our American colleagues would say, 'around the water-cooler'.⁵

At the same time, though, it is important to recognize that cultural consumption is not the only way of thus confirming status and status group membership. In some cases—that is, in relation to some lifestyles—such confirmation may be sought, and sought more effectively, through *material* rather than cultural consumption: for example, through the value of the house one owns, the kind of car one drives, the clothes one wears, the holidays one takes and so on. At least in modern societies, the cultural sphere has no monopoly over the criteria and symbols of status. Indeed, in this regard, it faces direct and powerful competition from the provision and marketing of material goods and personal services.

Conclusion: Two Policy Questions

In conclusion, then, we would like to pose two—perhaps rather awkward—questions, or sets of questions, of policy relevance that are prompted by our research, and ones that would be unlikely to arise against the background of the homology argument. First, given that, in present-day British society, rather restricted levels of cultural consumption are found not only among individuals in lower social strata but also among at least substantial minorities of those in higher strata, what kind of policy response, if any, is called for? If individuals do not participate much in the arts, even though they have the resources, economic and cultural, required to do so—if they are in effect *self-excluded* rather than socially excluded—should this be a matter of public concern?

Second, if it is in fact the aim of public policy, or of arts organizations, to increase general levels of cultural consumption, should not the link with social status—the role of status as a motivating force in cultural consumption—be more readily recognized? Should not the aim be to exploit this link with status rather than, as seems the present tendency, to play it down or, insofar as it is acknowledged, to seek to undermine it? Can one remove well-known status-related barriers to wider participation in the arts, while at the same time encouraging participation as offering, in addition to its intrinsic rewards, symbols of status alternative to those that are provided by material consumption?

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Notes

- [1] More detailed accounts of our research can be found in a series of papers that we cite in the text below. All are available at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~sfos0006>
- [2] For some results from this project, see a special double issue of the journal *Poetics* in 2007, volume 35, issues 2–3.
- [3] A quite elementary statistical error often here arises. Because cultural omnivores tend to be very largely drawn from more advantaged classes and status groups, it does not of course follow that most members of these classes and status groups are omnivores.
- [4] Our findings in regard to income effects should, however, be understood as being more specific to England than most others we report either in this section or earlier. From our comparative project, we know that the strength and pattern of income effects on cultural consumption can vary quite widely in relation to the general living standards of a society, the prevailing degree of economic inequality, the extent of public subsidy to the arts, and so on.
- [5] In other words, Robert Kelly's distinction (1991)—drawn in regard to museum visitors—between those who visit 'because they love being there' and those who do so 'in order to attain a state of having been', while neat and suggestive, need not be taken as a hard and fast one. Given that some kind of arts appreciation is a feature of the lifestyle of a particular status group or network, mixed motivations may well be quite common.

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