

Cultural Capital: Between Taste and Participation

by Tally Katz-Gerro (tkatz@soc.haifa.ac.il) and Meir Yaish
University of Haifa

Bourdieu's (1987 [1979]) theorization of cultural capital treats attitudes, preferences, and behavior as forms of embodied cultural capital.¹ As such, these are often considered parallel forms of embodied cultural capital that receive different empirical manifestations in various works (Lamont and Lareau 1988), without attention to the implications of choosing one operationalization of cultural capital over another. In this essay we focus on two dominant measures of cultural capital in research on cultural consumption: cultural tastes, which represent preferences and cultural participation, which represents behavior. We argue a need to clarify the theoretical distinction between the two by thinking of preferences as antecedents of behavior.

The literature on cultural consumption can be described as following three paths. First, studies that have used either cultural tastes or cultural participation as interchangeable indicators of cultural capital (e.g., Peterson 2005; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro 2007). Second, studies that have used tastes and participation in tandem without expecting them to perform differently (e.g., DiMaggio 1982; Lamont 1992; Erickson 1996; Kraaykamp 2002; Warde 2008). Third, more recently several discussions favor treating tastes and participation as two distinct dimensions of cultural capital (Lahire 2004; Silva 2006; Rössel 2008).

While most studies in this area ignored the distinction between tastes and participation, some discussed the implications and advantages of using either tastes or participation in measuring cultural capital. Two views have emerged. The first view argues in favor of using taste because it represents a category of engagement that is more refined than participation (Silva 2006). It speaks more directly to Bourdieu's notion of cultural disposition as a form of aesthetic appreciation that depends on a trained capacity cultivated by the family and the educational system. Bourdieu's empirical approach includes many more indicators of taste than indicators of participation (Bourdieu 1984, appendix 1) and by his theoretical approach symbolic knowledge plays a more important role than conspicuous consumption.

The most enthusiastic advocate of preferring taste to participation is Pete Peterson. He argues that taste is a direct measure of cultural self-construction while cultural activities are filtered through availability of arts, which varies widely by size of locality, life stage, and economic resources. Analysis of stated preferences avoids confounding participation with possible limits imposed on participation by availability and affordability (Peterson

PT¹ TPTwo other types of cultural capital are the objectified – transmittable goods, and the institutionalized – degrees and credentials.

and Simkus 1992; Peterson 2007). Another reason for preferring tastes over practices is that the latter may be instigated by obligations such as school mandatory activities or professional pressures (Lahire 2008).

The second view favors using cultural participation, for two main reasons. First, cultural participation is a public manifestation of social boundaries (e.g., Veblen 1960 [1989]), which "makes visible the categories of culture" and contributes to their stability (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). This manifestation is even more salient in contemporary society when cultural hierarchies are becoming increasingly blurred by the globalization of culture and the distinction between highbrow and popular culture is being eroded (Holt 1997). Consequently, active involvement in the arts is more meaningful in facilitating class solidarity and exclusivity than cultural preferences or aesthetic knowledge (Ostrower 1998). Secondly, participation is a form of social action that signals commitment, while taste is merely a statement (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007). Thus, reports on what individuals actually do are a more reliable measure than self-reported cultural tastes (Van Rees et al. 1999; López Sintas and Garcia Álvarez 2002). In addition, overt cultural choices are more closely related than tastes to the concept of lifestyle (López-Sintas and Katz-Gerro 2005) and more true to Bourdieu's emphasis on the *way* individuals consume in addition to *what* they consume, for example, in considering the temporal dimension of cultural behavior (Sullivan and Katz-Gerro 2007; Sullivan 2008).

Research on cultural stratification follows one of these two views by employing measures of taste or measures of participation. In addition, some studies employ both measures without particular attention to differences between them. Studies that employ measures of taste dominate the literature, possibly because research in this field, since Bourdieu, has developed theoretically and empirically around the study of tastes. For example, research on the omnivore thesis (Peterson and Kern 1996) has focused almost exclusively on musical tastes (Bryson 1997; Emmison 2003; Katz-Gerro et al. 2007; Garcia Álvarez et al. 2007). Studies that employed measures of participation are less prevalent. Such studies have used measures of leisure activities and cultural participation in the visual arts, the performing arts, and the fine arts (Warde et al. 1999; Holbrook et al. 2002; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro 2007) and also measures of involvement with arts organizations (Ostrower 1998). Note that most survey research conducted by national agencies focuses predominantly on measures of tastes. Studies that use both tastes and participation, without significant differences between them (Dimaggio and Useem 1978; Dimaggio 1982; Cookson and Persell 1985; Kraaykamp 2002), have built on Bourdieu's work, which combined preferences and behavior under the concept of embedded cultural capital. The lack of distinction between the two measures of cultural capital in these studies was perhaps justified by similar associations of preferences and behavior with socio-economic and demographic variables. That is, privileged positions in the social hierarchy, such as higher education or upper class position, produced both taste for the legitimate culture and participation in it.

Our position in the above debate on the distinction between preferences and behavior is that both tastes and participation are important, complementary measures of cultural capital that should be theorized such that tastes antecede participation. This claim is

motivated by psychological literature on the theory of planned behavior that has established attitudes or preferences as antecedents of behavior (Ajzen 1991). It is also motivated by sociological literature that emphasizes the difference in the ways dispositions and practices are organized, and in the way this difference can shape consumption research (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005). Applied to the field of consumption, theories of practice are concerned with practical activity and its representations. Individuals are carriers of practices in that they carry both patterns of behavior and ways of understanding, knowing, and desiring (Warde 2005). We propose to translate this general framework into an integrative analysis of tastes and participation. Because habitus is converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices (Bourdieu 1984:170) the distinction between tastes and practices, such that tastes antecede participation, is warranted (for a unique application see Rössel 2008).

In work in progress, we apply this framework to data on tastes in music, movies, and performing arts and on participation in the same domains. We find that habitus (respondent's education, parental education, and parental cultural participation) is strongly associated with tastes (more than with participation) and that tastes are strongly associated with practices. This means that modeling tastes as antecedents of participation, and thinking of the association between them as part of the general process of the production of cultural distinction, is a worthwhile theoretical direction.

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