



Janna Michael

**Negotiating Normalcy and Difference:  
Discourses on cultural taste and symbolic boundaries**

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Erbij horen of eruit springen?  
Discoursen over culturele smaak en symbolische grenzen

This research has been funded by the sustainable humanities program of the NWO.  
My research visit to the United Kingdom has been supported by the Erasmus Trustfonds.

ISBN: 978-90-76665-29-0

Publisher: ERMeCC - Erasmus Research Centre for Media, Communication and Culture  
Cover design & Layout: Lynn Freund  
Printed on FSC and PEFC certified paper by GVO drukkers & vormgevers B.V.

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Thesis

to obtain the degree of Doctor from the  
Erasmus University Rotterdam  
by command of the  
rector magnificus

Prof.dr. H.A.P. Pols

and in accordance with the decision of the Doctorate Board.  
The public defense shall be held on

Thursday 19 January 2017 at 13:30 hrs  
by

Janna Michael  
born in Henstedt-Ulzburg, Germany

## **Doctoral Committee:**

Promotor:	Prof.dr. C.J.M. van Eijck
Other members:	Prof.dr. M.S.S.E. Janssen
	Prof.dr. G.M.M. Kuipers
	Prof.dr. A. Warde
Copromotor:	Dr. L. E. Braden



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## Preface

*All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation.*

*(Becker, 1982, p. 1)*

What an obvious though true quote for a sociologist. After being properly socialized into cultural sociology, I have to call this dissertation an outcome of cooperation. First, I cannot thank Koen van Eijck enough for guiding me during this process, commenting patiently, and supporting me throughout the years.

I was very lucky to have Laura Braden as my second supervisor. Her sharp mind and optimism helped me carrying this project through the critical last months.

I would like to thank everyone who was an interviewee in this study. Their willingness to share their thoughts and experiences made this dissertation what it is.

I am truly thankful for my colleagues at the Arts and Culture Studies department and ERMeCC of whom many turned into friends. Their engagement with research and teaching as well as their support in various ways helped me to feel at home in academia. Pauwke has been an inimitable mentor for teaching and enjoyment of the academic lifestyle as well as my favorite librarian right from the start. Annemarie has been one of my most valuable alliances in this PhD process as well as lecturing. The PhD Club was a great team-spirited safe-space that helped my find my way at this university and helped to improve my work throughout. I particularly thank Jiska, for her help and support. Marc, Maloe, Filip, Ton, Niels, Liesbeth, Jaco, Simone, Stijn, Erwin, Christian, Aldo, Arno, Marielle, Mariangela, Marilena, Dorus, Julian, Sabai, Marije, Anna, Balazs, Frank, Yosha, Leonieke, Nicky, Abby, Ruud, Siri, Naomi, Thomas, Pawan, Ellen, Min, Michaël, Henry, Rosa, Débora, and Apoorva (in estimated order of appearance in my life) were great companions in the process and supported me in various ways.

Over the years, there were many moments when I was quite overwhelmed by the support of the people surrounding me and I cannot thank them enough. My mother, Sarah, Koen, Marie and Sina helped me with the transcriptions. Marie and Leonie even ran from shop to shop in Hamburg and Rotterdam-Zuid with me

when I was uncomfortable doing it by myself. Both of my parents, Peter as well as many colleagues and friends thought along when I had issues finding enough interviewees and many of them inquired in their workplaces and asked additional people. Yet others were giving me great advice and offered their help where needed. Friends like Johanna, Bruno, Djiga, Rhythma, Emy, Marlene, Lynn, Amber, Anne Elise and Katharina had open ears in the ups and downs of this project and helped in countless ways. I thank my friends for grounding me, distracting me when necessary and being ready to help in whichever way possible.

I have had an incredibly supportive and encouraging German-speaking family. Die Fockbeker, die mich immer ermutigt haben und von deren scharfen Diskussionen ich glaube einiges an kritischem Denken mitbekommen zu haben. Opa Richard mit seinen scharfen Beobachtungen und Neugier, Oma Ilse mit ihrem Verständnis für Andersartigkeit, Oma Marianne und meine Großtanten mit ihrer Wärme und ihrem Enthusiasmus.

Mama und Papa, vielen Dank für eure Unterstützung bei allem was ich anstelle.

Floyd, I thank you for everything you have done and everything you are.

Rotterdam, September 2016

## 1. General introduction

In this thesis, I investigate differentiating discourses on cultural taste and consumption. Thereby, I also examine the boundaries created and reinforced by these discourses. By analyzing interviews about clothing, music, visual arts and people, I will explore which underlying values connect these domains and how different social groups distance themselves from others in these discourses. Symbolic boundaries are often difficult to put in words, yet they are implicitly understood and recreated in discourse:

*It's all too plebby (trashy), and it is too... I don't know. Mostly you can see from the style of people, how they dress, how they are, mostly you can recognize what kind of music they listen. And eh, these kind of people, who, how they are dressed I simply don't like it, they are unsympathetic to me. When they wear baggy-pants or something, that's terrible, well for me. And I can, with them, from my experience, maybe that's a lumping everyone a bit together but.. ahm, I simply cannot identify with them, that's how it is, they are different. Different, I don't know, for me also a little primitive if I can say it this harshly. Well, the people that I met in the past, in school and such, they were all, oahh, gosh, noo, really not.*  
(Gerda, geriatric care nurse)

This example typifies how connections are made between the looks of a person, the music he or she listens to and other characteristics. Gerda's judgment is intertwining aesthetics, symbolic meaning and moral assessment of personality. Cultural products such as clothes and music express values (e.g. Hebdige, 1979), and are often connected to socio-economic class. In the example above, we see a reference to plebby or chavvy, primitive and proletarian or trashy, originally 'prollig' in the German interview, which is a rather common, derogatory word to describe something as lower class.

One of the central quests of sociology in the last decades has been the question how lifestyles and tastes are structured and in what ways they are structured by socio-economic positions of actors. At least since Bourdieu (1984), the relationship between socio-economic status and cultural taste and consumption has consistently been the object of sociological investigation. The relationship between culture and social class links to social exclusion and thereby fosters the reproduction of social inequality across class lines (Bourdieu, 1984). Symbolic boundaries separate 'high'

culture, associated with upper classes, and 'lowbrow' or 'popular' culture, which is associated with lower class-taste. Yet, this theory is also complicated by the fact that, as Bourdieu (1989) has himself observed, the content of 'high', legitimate culture is subject to symbolic struggles and therefore changing over time. From the discussions on changes in the constitution of legitimate or socially accepted 'good taste', we know what is considered good taste is socially constructed and related to time- and class-specific norms and values. Lamont (1992) famously pointed out connections between moral and cultural boundaries. Woodward and Emmison (2001) further emphasized the connection between taste and moral codes of interpersonal conduct.

While still leaving the idea of social stratification through taste in place, further nuance has been added by the discovery of the cultural omnivores, people who combine elements of high and low culture (e.g. Peterson & Kern, 1996). The discussion has pointed to the fact that consumers do not need to be cultural snobs in order to demonstrate prestige or high status in their taste. The discussion about cultural omnivores has opened the debate for a range of other status-distinction mechanisms. The crossing of cultural boundaries between legitimate or highbrow and popular culture (omnivorousness) is often linked to the increasing relevance of openness and cosmopolitanism as desirable traits among today's (cultural) elites and therefore as effective means of distinction (e.g. Bellavance, 2008; Buchmann & Eisner, 1997; Ollivier, 2008; Peterson, 1992; Warde, Wright, & Gayo-Cal, 2007). In addition to breadth of taste, frequency of engagement in cultural consumption<sup>1</sup>, voraciousness, has been proposed as another way of distinguishing oneself culturally as it demonstrates a deep cultural involvement (Sullivan & Katz-Gerro, 2007). Ever-changing cultural trends and a high turnover of goods and experiences that characterize much of post-industrial consumerism (Bauman, 1996; Bell, 1976), led Taylor (2009) to introduce the 'logic of trendiness' as a structuring principle of social prestige. He argues that symbolic capital is gained by discovering and appreciating new cultural items quickly. What matters is being up-to-date, well informed about the latest cultural developments and eager to discover new things. It has therefore been argued that social prestige can be gained by being 'in the know' of new developments in the cultural field, which may thus offer an alternative to status hierarchies based on social class as Bourdieu described them (Thornton, 1995). Alternative status hierarchies are likely to exist simultaneously (Bellavance, 2008; Holbrook, Weiss, & Habich, 2002). Therefore, it is of interest to

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural consumption here refers to receptive cultural participation and includes activities such as listening to music, watching movies or television, visiting museums or attending theater plays.

assess how, if at all, being ‘in the know’ of trends or being perceived as authentic or open minded are related to the more traditional status hierarchy ranging from highbrow to popular and to understand the links of these hierarchies to social stratification.

To study discourses on cultural taste as well as how they are used for cultural ‘boundary work’ (Lamont 1992) in different social fields, I compare the perceptions of people from a similar age group that differ in their cultural and economic capital. I use semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the instrument of data collection. Taste, though often perceived as natural and inherent to a person, is something we learn and consequently a performance, something one ‘does’ (Kuipers, 2006; West, 2010). As people consume the same cultural goods in many different ways, the mode of consumption is possibly even more socially relevant than ‘what’ is being consumed (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014; Holt, 1997a; Peterson & Kern, 1996). Performing taste by embedding it in discourse that demonstrates expertise can make the consumption style itself distinguished. Different ways, or modes, of consumption can be very distinctive in different ways, ranging from great commitment and expertise to distancing through irony (Holt, 1997b; Jarness, 2015b; Peters, Van der Jagt, Van Eijck, Michael, & Berkers, 2015; Van Eijck, 2013). Consumption therefore should be understood in the context of discourse on taste, which is inherently social and relates taste to norms, values and social positioning. Accordingly, the focus of this analysis is not only people’s cultural consumption behavior, but how they choose to present this behavior and their practices in the concomitant discourse. The discourse I will focus on in the context of this dissertation is the way people talk about, and thereby perform, their cultural taste and consumption practices. Understanding the performance of taste requires engaging with the discourses that structure the performance of taste and its evaluation. This study thus follows Daloz (2010) in his call for inductive theorizing of distinction practices by attempting not to fall into the trap over over-generalizations of existing theoretical notions. This also fits with the arguments above for shifting the research focus to consumption practice and meaning. Yet, in this dissertation, I will also build upon existing approaches to explain distinction and boundaries, while building closely on interviews with different cultural consumers.

This dissertation combines the objects of consumption (the ‘what’) and the mode by considering ‘how’ people engage in and talk about their cultural preferences and activities. Specifically, I focus on music, fashion and visual arts as elements of lifestyle. Further, I consider their outlook on their own careers and future, other leisure activities and what kind of character-traits they appreciate in other people.

Not all of these themes are addressed in detail for each group studied, yet give important context to how individuals talk about their cultural taste.

Studying normalcy and difference might suggest a Foucauldian approach. Yet, I am using the term normalcy with a different intention here. A lot of the discourse on cultural consumption presented in this dissertation balances fitting into a group on the one hand, and individuality, which implies difference, on the other. Normalcy is capturing the state of being normal, the desire to blend in with a collective, without carrying such negative connotations as ordinariness. By positioning her- or himself as normal, the individual enforces the very definition of normalcy. In this dissertation I am engaging theoretically mostly with the meso-level as epistemological site. Mid-range theories are central to understanding how power, and with it social inequality, translate from the individual to larger social structures and vice versa.

## **1.1 Why study music, visual arts and personal clothing style?**

This dissertation focusses on three cultural domains. First, the visual arts have functioned as a common and widely shared high status marker in western societies (Roose, 2015, p. 558). While traditional highbrow culture may be in decline, there are still many different ways to appreciate visual arts and it may remain a relevant field of status distinction (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014; Hanquinet, Roose, & Savage, 2013).

Second, music, together with painting, has been described by Bourdieu (1984) as the most legitimate area (p. 14). At the same time, different forms, genres and creators of music span all symbolic positions. While most people engage with music in their everyday life, it can be used in various ways and relates to social life in manifold ways. It can offer a sense of belonging or community but also be 'used' for individual mood management (DeNora, 2000). Music is probably one of the most widely investigated but also most dynamic and widely spread cultural forms. Much of cultural lifestyle research in the last decades has built its conclusions on the analysis of musical taste (Coulangeon & Lemel, 2007; Coulangeon, 2015; Peterson, 1992, 1997b; Van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). Depending on genre, music covers very prestigious highbrow culture to mass culture and everything in between. As these categories are also changing over time, assessing how music taste is discussed by different social groups can reveal a lot about form of cultural capital and cultural value.



Thirdly, fashion and clothing are also deeply connected to the everyday, yet we know relatively little on status distinction in fashion discourse. Trendiness and fashionability were suggested more recently as rendering prestige; clothing is the field where these are rather obviously relevant. Fashion can symbolize very high levels of cultural capital and prestige, while mass fashion is often seen as a superficial form of expression, associated with mass consumption.

Individual in-depth interviews provide opportunities for capturing subtle ideas and meaning-construction of the interviewees. The data is approached using a discourse analysis. Language is “a domain in which our knowledge of the world is actively shaped” (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 246). As it mirrors, constructs and organizes social reality at the same time (ibidem), language offers an important means to study cultural hierarchies and distinction mechanisms. In this dissertation, I am thus looking at what is constructed by the discourse and how it is embedded in the social context in order to understand how cultural hierarchies and boundaries are perceived and constructed. Discourse analysis looks at manifest content and rhetoric and moves “through and beyond that to the social foundations of the rhetoric” (Hall, 1975, p. 16). This enables me to explore how arguments are constructed and offers a means to look beyond the first impression, into the ideology and meaning attachment to cultural taste and consumption.

## **1.2 Research questions and overview**

This dissertation aims at exploring the relevance of alternative status hierarchies. In addition to assessing which alternatives exist among specific social segments, I will analyze discursive processes underlying the constitution and maintenance of such hierarchies within the relevant fields. Building on the idea that traditional status hierarchies are shifting and taste patterns are no longer necessarily homologous with positions in social space, the current literature gives reason to explore how status distinction works in a time when cultural hierarchies and symbolic meanings are changing. In this dissertation I provide preliminary answers to the following research questions:

- (I) What are central boundaries emerging in the discourse on taste?

- (II) Which status hierarchies can be observed in discourse on taste in fashion, music and visual arts?
- (III) How do 'emerging forms of cultural capital' (e.g. omnivorousness, trendiness, authenticity) relate to the traditional cultural hierarchies to which Bourdieu referred?
- (IV) How do socio-demographic background characteristics relate to the way people draw cultural boundaries and negotiate their identity with taste?

Each of these questions is vast enough to invite multiple research projects. Yet, especially as these questions are mutually related, this dissertation aims to contribute to answers on all these questions. Within the scope of this dissertation, it was evidently necessary to limit the amount of empirical studies as well as theoretical concepts. For this reason, I chose to focus this research on the cultural forms of music, clothing and visual arts. I draw on semi-structured interviews with three samples of people living in North Western Europe. Below, I will provide an overview of these groups, introduce my research methods and remark on the relevance of this study.

Cultural taste and practices are found to be structured by age (Bellavance, 2008; Bennett et al., 2009; Savage et al., 2013). In order to get a clearer picture of current discourse of relatively young people, this research deals with people in their 20s and 30s. This age group thus shares a similar life stage; most have chosen a direction for their career but are not fully settled yet. For example, most interviewees do not have children yet and many are still considering moving cities. They represent relatively young cultural consumers that mostly have their own income and might be potentially taking part in the newest trends in music or fashion (Crane, 1999). The scope of this study are people in their 20s and 30s living in urban centers of North-Western Europe. From this wide population, sub-groups were selected according to occupation as well as cultural capital possession. In order to analyze the meaning of respondents' positions in the social field, they were recruited from three different 'class fractions'.

The first group are people in possession of a great amount of cultural capital, deeply involved in urban cultural life. These people are expected to engage with traditional as well as innovative, avant-garde art and style, possibly being modern "hipsters", trendsetters and potential members of the (future) cultural elite. These participants are of particular importance for exploring the relevance of trendiness as a status distinction mechanism.

The second group are business professionals in the early stages of a business-career, 'high potentials' as they are often called in management; highly educated people with the potential to become part of the economic elite. This group is relevant to study in order to capture recent distinction and inclusion mechanisms based on economic capital and the cultural logics in the field of management.

The third group are people with relatively low social status as they have relatively low institutionalized cultural capital and relatively low social-economic status. Here, notions of culture, dominance and field-struggle are to be explored more in-depth. As this group tends to be a little less mobile within Europe (Verwiebe, Wiesböck, & Teitzer, 2014) and potentially more oriented towards local culture, it involves interviewees from only two cities, one in the Netherlands and one in Germany.

The first two groups are providing an interesting comparison of an orientation towards cultural and economic capital. Understanding the meanings these groups attach to style, cultural boundaries and art will provide deep insight into the logic of their fields, their value-systems and strategies of distinction. This comparison enables me to assess whether people's 'aesthetics' are traced to the predominance of cultural or economic capital and the concomitant orientations that are more avant-garde (and liberal) or bourgeois (conservative). Is the longing to be trendy more prevalent among the cultural segment, or does it merely take another form in the economic segment where it reveals itself in, for example, clothing, electronic gadgets, or other novel consumer goods?

Group 3, the lower status group, is expected to bring different insights into recent strategies of actors in the social space. This group has been identified by survey research as culturally rather inactive or univorous. Yet in what ways this group relates to for instance highbrow culture or how they spend their leisure time often remains vague (Bennett et al., 2009).

Studying this group can fill in a number of blind spots, as every activity that is regularly studied in survey research is positively linked to (cultural) capital. Interviews with 'everyday people' of lower social status can show us what leisure activities are relevant to them, how they engage with culture and how they look at the type of taste and cultural items that are considered more prestigious. In addition, comparing the discourse on culture of this group with the other two can reveal how symbolic boundaries are drawn among these groups.

This study attempts to go beyond methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) by considering people in several North-Western European cities. Intra-European migrants are disproportionately in their mid-20s to early-30s and tend to be highly educated. Considering thus the culturally very involved group as well as the business professionals, these two groups are likely to be relatively mobile especially between or towards urban centers (Verwiebe et al., 2014). Within this dissertation, I interviewed people currently based in cities of North-Western Europe with a focus on the Netherlands and Germany, yet including interviewees that were, at the time of the interview, based in Austria, Denmark, Switzerland and the UK.

In the following chapter, I first introduce a brief theoretical framework of contemporary discussions on status distinction and cultural capital. I outline the central theoretical concepts for this dissertation and highlight central issues in current discussions. This chapter further speaks to the theoretical relevance of this work.

Chapter 3, 'Research design and methods', discusses the methodological approach and considerations in this research. It explains the choice for interviews and discourse analysis as well as the rationale behind the three different groups that are considered in the empirical analysis.

Chapter 4, titled 'It's really not hip to be a hipster: Negotiating trends and authenticity in the cultural field', addresses the relative unimportance of trendiness in contrast to authenticity and openness as central markers in the discourses on taste among the culturally involved group. A similar version of this paper has been published in the *Journal of Consumer Culture* (Michael, 2015).

Chapter 5, 'Highbrow culture for high-potentials? Cultural orientations of an economic elite in the making' explores the cultural taste of young business professionals and the relevance highbrow cultural taste has in their everyday lives and social connections. (A similar, shorter version of this chapter is currently, after minor revisions under review for publication in *Poetics*.)

Chapter 6, 'Me, I am busy with very different things' is an exploration into pastimes, music and apparel taste of everyday people, engaging with a comparatively low educated group and their cultural taste. While there is little access to fine arts and popular music is preferred, many interviewees engage in leisure activities that involve extensive knowledge on cultural 'niches'. This raises the question to what extent we can regard this niche expertise as cultural capital.

Chapter 7, 'Negotiating difference and taste in style: Comparing Northern European class fractions', compares the different groups in their discourse on clothing and dress. It explores orientations on trends in their clothing choices and contrasts notions of bad taste.

I conclude by returning to the research questions above and provide a more elaborate discussion on a theme that is connected to a range of central issues in this dissertation: emerging forms of cultural capital.

## 2. Relevant contemporary issues in cultural capital theory and research

Extensive research during the past forty years has shown the importance of cultural consumption and cultural preferences for boundaries in social space (Katz-Gerro, 2011; Van Eijck, 2001). A lot has been written about the association between social class and cultural consumption, cultural taste and lifestyle. Research in this field is highly dynamic and struggling with a number of central issues on which there is quite some disagreement. Central questions are: Is cultural capital still important? If so, which shape does it take? What role do openness or cosmopolitanism play as forms of distinction? What relevance does authenticity have in the evaluation of cultural goods? Are symbolic boundaries more a matter of *how* culture is consumed than of *which* cultural goods it concerns? Is distinction going 'underground' by being increasingly subtle? If so, does that indicate anti-elitists sentiments? Do people actually like to mix cultural genres, or cherry-pick quality within each genre? Which criteria are used then to evaluate goods?

In this chapter, I will focus on a few central concepts and ongoing discussions to which this dissertation attempts to contribute. By doing this, this chapter will elaborate on the theoretical relevance of this dissertation.

Before I provide a brief overview of the most central current approaches to cultural hierarchy and social stratification through taste, I want to clarify the use of a few terms. In this dissertation I explore the discourse evolving around taste and consumption in music, fashion and the arts.

Studying discourses and their relation to social life tells us a lot about the social relevance of cultural lifestyles and their relation to social inequality, an issue that has been on the agenda since Marx and Engels (1848/2011), Veblen (1899/1991) and Weber (1922/2005). How cultural capital becomes relevant in social life is mainly through everyday life discourse on cultural taste. Interested in the connection between discourses in these domains and their relation to social life at large, I explore how people talk about their cultural preferences, their activities, and the boundaries they draw in these domains. I am studying discourse about everyday life preferences and habits; this encompasses both taste and consumption.

Cultural practices and preferences can differ quite a bit from each other (cf. Lahire, 2008, p. 182). Some scholars have argued that measuring consumption practices results in the most accurate data as they assume behavior to be more significant as it requires actual commitment instead of socially desired talk (Chan & Goldthorpe,

2007a). However, while practices might be just as defining as preferences, not all practices are necessarily self-chosen. Some may be imposed by an individual's social surroundings (Lahire, 2008, p. 181) and some preferences might not be turned into practices because of other constraints. Others argue that cultural preferences are more central to indicate underlying dispositions as they are not affected by structural constraints that might hinder participation and allow for more nuance, capturing both preferences and dislikes (Peterson, 2007)<sup>2</sup>. As Yaish and Katz-Gerro (2012) demonstrate for Israel, cultural resources (measured as parental characteristics and education) shape cultural preferences more than they shape actual participation. Economic resources influence cultural practices more than taste, and the association of cultural resources and practices is mediated by cultural taste. This dissertation includes both, as it involves questions on preferences as well as habits and experiences. It thus overcomes the necessarily partial focus on either preferences or practices that characterizes much other research. Bourdieu (1984) as well as Bennett et al. (2009) have also included consumption and taste while adding cultural knowledge as an additional dimension.

As I do not only consider how individuals evaluate objects, the sociology of consumption is an important starting point of this research. Following a rather broad notion of consumption, it involves the "process of consumption, conceived as the appropriation and use of goods and services" (Warde, 2015, p. 118). This conceptualization of consumption pays attention to the social organization of activities through which things are integrated in everyday life or organized. Some scholars prefer the term cultural participation, yet this notion is often equalized with participation in formally organized, highbrow culture while missing other forms of cultural engagement. It then implies a dichotomy between participants and non-participants, which is not very productive for this research<sup>3</sup>. As I am studying discourse, taste, consumption and participation are intertwined. I am neither studying the actual habits or 'real' taste, but the performance and thereby self-presentation of both. I therefore use either of the terms where appropriate.

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<sup>2</sup> See Yaish and Katz-Gerro (2012) for a more complete and detailed overview of the arguments for measuring preferences or practices

<sup>3</sup> Many surveys on cultural participation seem to use a rather narrow definition of culture, ending up defining lower classes as culturally inactive (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007b). Yet, there are indications that if we widen the notion of what counts as cultural participation, (Kahma & Toikka, 2012), there might be very few to no culturally inactives left. If we think of cultural participation in a broader manner though, and consider all participation equally, we need to still consider the clustering of certain forms of participation, the homology of lifestyles and social class, otherwise we run the risk of disregarding the stratification of activities in relation to specific social groups. It is the association between social class and culture that makes it a distinction mechanism.

## 2.1 Cultural capital and its contemporary contestations

Perhaps the most central focus of lifestyle research since Bourdieu (1984) has been the relationship between cultural capital and structures of power and inequality in society. Cultural knowledge, intertwined with cultural taste and consumption, is conceptualized as embodied cultural capital. In connection with the habitus, cultural capital is one of the most pertinent factors used to explain the reproduction of social inequality in the global North. Bourdieu (1986) highlighted that capital should not only be considered in its often dominant, economic form, but that other forms are very relevant for the reproduction of social inequality. Under specific circumstances, different forms of capital are transferred into each other. Embodied cultural capital has been described by Bourdieu as “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (1986, p. 17). Accumulated from early childhood on, they result in cultural competence (p. 19), cultivation, or *Bildung* of a person (p. 18). In addition to the studied embodied form of cultural capital, the objectified form of cultural capital refers to the possession of cultural products such as books, musical instruments and works of art. Bourdieu’s third form is institutionalized cultural capital, which he describes as academic qualifications. The embodied form of cultural capital has received extensive study. It is assumed to be accumulated (quite unconsciously) from early childhood onwards and is thereby the most hidden form of transmission of capital from one generation to the next (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 19).

Cultural capital expresses class differences, without giving away their rootedness in economic inequality. Cultural capital stands in relation to the legitimate culture of its time, yet remains a rather abstract concept, which may require operationalization in different ways according to context and domain. Often though, it has been measured as a set of cultural tastes or attributes (Kraaykamp & Van Eijck, 2010). As Warde (2008) summarized, the cultural capital concept is criticised as somewhat imprecise and overloaded (p. 323). Apart from issues with the original concept, scholars have noted that as culture changes, new forms of distinction may emerge. What was legitimate culture in Bourdieu’s 1970s France may be rather different in contemporary Europe, the US or Britain. Yet, following Prieur and Savage (2013), we should not read Bourdieu as a description of ‘how societies are’, but rather as an orientation of how we can analyse modern societies in order to grasp mechanisms of social differentiation (p. 249).

Cultural competence as Bourdieu described it initially referred mostly to the ‘right appreciation’ of high or legitimate culture. Yet, what legitimate high culture entails, thus what culture renders most prestige and is symbolically dominant, is



likely to have changed through the years and may be rather context dependent. Cultural capital, as Bourdieu's sociology in general, is relational. This implies that what constitutes prestige within a field, how different resources are valued, is subject to change (e.g. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 282–283). While the content of cultural capital may thus alter, its function as resource and therefore its relevance for social reproduction may remain intact (cf. Roose, 2015).

Scholars have investigated which cultural capital renders most prestige and how cultural objects render symbolic distinction. A common distinction is drawn between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' culture (Levine, 1988 pp. 221-222). Highbrow, or legitimate, culture is associated by Bourdieu (1984) most to the cultural elites (e.g. intellectuals and artists). A 'disinterested', pure aesthetic (p. 176), pursued in serious, austere leisure activities (p. 286). On the opposing pole of the dominant class he finds a bourgeois taste, involving a denial of the social world and an inclination towards a hedonistic aesthetic (p. 176), including a luxury taste for the most expensive and prestigious activities (p. 286). Opposed to these tastes of the class fractions richest in economic and cultural capital are the cultural consumption practices of the poorer fractions, stigmatized as vulgar as they are "both easy and common" (p. 176). The 'popular aesthetic' is associated with mass culture for 'ordinary people' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 32). Moving away from a strictly class specific taste, scholars have recently used ideal-typical categories such as highbrow, folk and pop (cf. van Eijck & Lievens, 2008) to describe different taste schemes groups. Here, highbrow is associated with cultivated, serious and complex enjoyment (Van Eijck & Lievens, 2008, p. 221), while pop is associated with action and entertainment (p. 222), and folk with coziness and harmony (ibidem).

The concept of cultural capital is inherently connected to concepts of cultural hierarchies that define the legitimacy of cultural capital. Cultural hierarchies reflect the positioning of cultural artifacts or practices vis-a-vis one another according to their position on a dimension of legitimacy. Prieur and Savage (2013) suggest highbrow culture does not have a very important role in marking class distinctions today. In addition, Turner and Edmunds (2002) find that Australian elites, despite their high education, lack the cultural capital to appreciate highbrow cultural activities. They further found no indication Australian elites understand cultural capital or symbolic goods as strategically important. Instead, they display an eclectic taste without much sense of distinction (p. 234).

Cultural hierarchies have been in flux during the last decades because they are challenged by individualization, social mobility, changing norms and values

and changing means of cultural production. Such changes can be inferred from phenomena such as cultural omnivorousness, a declining interest in legitimate culture among young, highly educated people, blurring boundaries in cultural production (e.g., blockbuster art exhibitions, highbrow TV-drama), and the legitimation of formerly 'lowbrow' cultural forms (world-music, comic books). These changes are evident in everyday life and reflected in contemporary cultural consumption patterns and lifestyles. The homology between cultural hierarchies and socio-economic positions, as well as the clarity of distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture, have been questioned throughout the last decades (e.g. Bennett et al. 2009; Peterson & Kern, 1996). Not only definitions of 'high' and 'low' culture are changing, but also a range of alternative status rendering mechanisms have been proposed (Bellavance, 2008, 2016; Bennett et al., 2009; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Prieur & Savage, 2013, 2015; Taylor, 2009).

Omnivorous cultural taste, an inclusive or eclectic taste crossing the cultural boundaries between legitimate or highbrow and popular culture, has been proposed as more prestigious than a narrow, univorous taste (cf. Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson, 1992; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005). The omnivore thesis does, however, not imply the end of cultural distinction but rather that breadth of taste can mark a boundary in itself. Bourdieu's concept of homology, the association between class position and cultural taste remains relevant, as Koen van Eijck (2001) argues, "as long as we are able to discern specific taste patterns (even an omnivorous one) within specific social groups" (p. 1166). Cultural omnivores are often described as highly educated and middle class (Warde et al., 2008), and seen as particularly open and inclusive in their mind-sets (e.g. Emmison, 2003; López-Sintas & Katz-Gerro, 2005).

The discussion is ongoing on what omnivorousness exactly implies and how it should best be measured. Initially, omnivorousness was often operationalized as a mixture of traditional high- and lowbrow cultural genres (e.g. opera as highbrow, rock/pop as lowbrow). These categories were then defined a priori which made them less sensitive to cultural change or nuance within genres (Prieur & Savage, 2013).

Recently, scholars identified other legitimacy-structuring principles: new versus old (Bellavance, 2008; 2016), authentic versus inauthentic (Goldberg, Hannan, & Kovács, 2016; Peterson, 1997a) and local versus global (Bellavance, 2016; Prieur and Savage, 2013). Building on these various dimensions of taste, research increasingly acknowledges the multidimensionality of cultural capital. Combining highbrow and lowbrow cultural taste is often linked to openness and cosmopolitanism, desirable

traits among today's business elites and seen as effective means of status distinction (Bellavance, 2008; Prieur, Rosenlund, & Skjott-Larsen, 2008; Warde et al., 2007).

In a society requiring social and geographical mobility from its skilled workers, openness and flexibility are likely to serve as important resources (Van Eijck, 2000, p. 221). Openness, among other cultural resources such as flexibility, tolerance, and the search for self-improvement, is widely appreciated among upper and middle classes and can serve as a status marker in its own right (Ollivier, 2008, p. 124). Related to openness, cosmopolitanism has recently received attention as a source of distinction. Prieur and Savage (2013) suggest it is a form of emerging cultural capital and Bühlmann et al. (2013) propose considering cosmopolitan capital as a supplementary form of capital, linking to social as well as cultural capital (p. 215). Participation and knowledge of highbrow culture are therefore questioned as a predominant marker of status distinction. Warde et al. (2008, p. 150) further argue the possibility "that this reflects a new cultural sensibility in which culture matters more and cultural engagement has been recast as a search for personal identity, with multi-cultural and cosmopolitan identities particularly valued".

Despite the discussion on alternative structuring dimensions of cultural taste and their associated emerging forms of cultural capital, the relation to the older cultural hierarchies and forms of cultural capital remain rather unclear to this point (Bellavance, 2016). In this dissertation, I will therefore consider both, 'traditional', 'emerging' and potentially less widely accepted types of capital to compare their meaning and relevance for boundary work.

## **2.2 From 'what' to 'how' in cultural consumption?**

Sociological research has long tended to capture cultural taste in surveys involving different preferences for musical genres and cultural participation. Increasingly, scholars are critical of measuring the cultural objects consumed, the 'what' of cultural taste, instead advocating a focus on the ways in which culture is being valued and consumed (Braden, 2016; Daenekindt & Roose, 2014; Holt, 1997a; Jarness, 2015b; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Van Eijck, 2013). Holt (1997a, p. 103) argues: "As cultural hierarchies have blurred dramatically in advanced capitalist societies, objectified cultural capital has become a relatively weak

mechanism for exclusionary class boundaries. But, that cultural objects no longer unproblematically signal the cultural capital invested in consumption does not mean that cultural capital differences in consumption no longer have social classificatory power". He concludes that cultural objects no longer serve as representations of consumer practices. Instead, scholars should pay closer attention to modes of consumption, the way objects are used or appreciated.

The critique on researching preferences for cultural objects while not paying attention to the mode of consumption has become increasingly prevalent in recent years (e.g. Daenekindt & Roose, 2014; Jarness, 2015; McCoy & Scarborough, 2014; Peters et al., 2015). These studies refer to a specific cultural genre or context in which different social groups consume culture in different ways, for example more or less ironically. If we would be, hypothetically, able to map the entire cultural diets of two people and these would overlap entirely, it appears rather unlikely that these two people differ a lot in how they consume these items. This is however not likely to happen. It might thus be wise to continue exploring objects of consumption as well as the associated consumption practices. Therefore, the increased attention for modes of consumption opens new space for exploratory work and theorizing on cultural capital. Accordingly, this study explores how people talk about their cultural taste and practices, which furthers our understanding of how capital is valued, how cultural capital blends with other forms of capital and how consumers use it in everyday life to distinguish themselves from others.

### **2.3 Cultural capital and social connections**

As class identities are nowadays fragmented into diverse consumer identities (Katz-Gerro, 2004), as well as boundaries between legitimate and popular culture seem to blur, cultural capital's relation to social class can be rather complicated. If, as Lamont and Lareau (1988) put forward, cultural capital should be defined as "widely shared, legitimate culture made up of high status cultural signals" (p. 164) used for social and cultural exclusion, we need to assume that there is a widely shared sense of legitimacy. Yet, different social groups might deem different cultural forms legitimate and might require different cultural skills (Erickson, 1996). Van Eijck and Mommaas (2004) found private sector employees to be more avid consumers of popular culture in contrast to civil servants who consume more highbrow culture, even after controlling for cultural and economic capital. Different

sectors thus appear to emphasize different forms of culture. Different roles within an organization also seem to correlate with different forms of culture, as Erickson (1996) showed. Similarly, Lizardo (2006) provides evidence that popular culture taste has positive effects on an individual's weak ties, while highbrow culture may increase strong ties. Comprehensive taste may therefore be useful, especially in the upper-middle class, where people deal with a broad professional network or international colleagues. Cultural capital might be used to emphasize open-mindedness and cosmopolitanism among the new middle classes (Kraaykamp & Van Eijck, 2010; Prieur & Savage, 2013; Van Eijck & Bargeman, 2004).

As cultural capital signals proximity to some, and allows distancing from others, it connects with social capital<sup>4</sup>. Relatively few studies have investigated the intersection of cultural and social capital (Erickson, 1996; Li, Savage, & Warde, 2015; Lizardo, 2006; Mark, 1998). As informal, social factors can be of central importance for career advancement (Tharenou, 1997), we should consider the connections between cultural and social capital in order to increase understanding of social distinction practices.

Current theorists agree cultivating social relations often requires resources (Li, 2015, p. 11). Cultural taste is important for building and maintaining these social relations. Exploring how cultural taste affects social relationships, Edelman and Vaisey (2014) find that shared music taste as well as non-consumption (not listening certain genres) can facilitate the development to strong relationships. Erickson (1996) argues it is highly relevant in the private sector to coordinate a wide range of people from different classes and such coordination might encourage an interest in 'common' culture. These findings indicate that we can expect differences in what kind of capital is valued among the different groups under study. People working in corporate culture might draw on very different forms of capital than people in the cultural field.

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<sup>4</sup> Social capital, following (Bourdieu, 1986), is the aggregate of the resources linked to a person's social network. Volume depends on the size of the network one can mobilize and overall capitals (e.g. prestige, power, wealth) of one's network.

## 2.4 Cultural capital and symbolic boundaries

Cultural capital is inherently connected to boundary drawing. Symbolic boundaries are defined by Lamont as “conceptual distinctions that we make to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (1992, p. 9). She builds on Durkheim, assuming that symbolic boundaries presuppose inclusion of the desirable and exclusion of the repulsive (*ibid.*). She is mostly interested in subjective boundaries that people draw between themselves and others. Boundary work then is a central element of the process that constitutes the self. She distinguishes three types of symbolic boundaries: Moral boundaries, socioeconomic boundaries, and cultural boundaries (Lamont, 1992, p. 4). Moral boundaries are based on moral character, i.e., honesty, integrity, or consideration for others. Socioeconomic boundaries evolve around social position and include wealth, power and professional success. Finally, cultural boundaries are “drawn on the basis of education, intelligence, tastes, and command of high culture” (*ibid.*).

Lamont (1992) argues researchers must consider how people demarcate themselves from others by drawing not only cultural, but also moral boundaries. Lamont criticizes Pierre Bourdieu for, among other things, underestimating the importance of “moral signals” (p. 181) and translating all differentiation to hierarchization (p. 182). Instead, her findings indicate that high moral status can be a crucial resource that is valued in itself.

Skjott-Larsen (2012) confirms, in a Danish mixed-method study, that symbolic boundary-drawing on the basis of cultural distinctions exists, yet boundaries on the basis of politico-moral differences are more pronounced. In contrast to Lamont, however, he argues, “it is important to note that cultural and moral boundaries seem to be working together. Rather than one hierarchy replacing the other, politico-moral attitudes seem to be structured according to the same logic as cultural preferences and practices. They are ordered according to the logic of the space of social positions and they are used for drawing symbolic boundaries towards the same social positions” (Skjott-Larsen, 2012, p. 680). Cultural and moral boundaries could therefore contribute to similar exclusion mechanisms. Similarly, yet more critical of Lamont’s approach, Jarness (2015a) suggests to use the study of symbolic boundaries to supplement other approaches to studying social boundaries.

Following Lamont (1992), this research considers the intersection of cultural and moral boundaries. Cultural taste becomes most relevant for distinction and social closure when it has an impact on other domains such as career advancement or

social connections (social capital). As Holt (1997b) points out: “Symbolic boundaries are, by definition, socially consequential because they include and exclude, bringing people together as friends, colleagues, and lovers while denying these possibilities to others”(p. 340).

## **2.5 The habitus as connection between the social and the symbolic space**

A central concept to understand the connection between the symbolic space where legitimacy is assigned and cultural capital is the habitus. According to Bourdieu (1984), cultural capital is an expression of underlying dispositions and the habitus that structures how people perceive and evaluate the world. He described it as “practice-unifying and practice-generating principle [...] the internalized form of class conditions and of the conditionings it entails” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101). For Bourdieu, the habitus thus captures underlying dispositions which are embodied as well as manifest in the way a person thinks.

As Crossley (2013) notes in his review of different definitions of habitus and their conceptual underpinnings, it remains an ambiguous concept which has been described in slightly different terms by Bourdieu throughout his works. Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the habitus as a class habitus that proposes a unified and coherent set of dispositions towards culture has been heavily critiqued in recent years (Coulangeon & Lemel, 2007; Lahire, 2003, 2011; Warde, 2008). Lahire (2011) argues Bourdieu’s theory of habitus is built on a traditional, weakly differentiated society (pp. 19-21), while contemporary societies offer less stability in the conditions of socialization (p. 22). They cover larger geographical space and demographics and are highly differentiated by “spheres of activity, institutions, cultural products and models of socialization” (ibidem). Lahire thus warns for treating the habitus of individuals as unified, consistent wholes, representing entire classes and generating homogenous reactions and practices. Yet, Jarness contests Lahire arguing that “What may appear to be heterogeneous dissonance at the analytical level of opus operatum due to a seemingly eclectic taste for a wide range of goods (both between and within cultural domains, genres and brow categories), may in fact be highly homogenous and coherent at the level of modus operandi. There is no reason why an inclination for hybridity and eclecticism cannot be embodied in the habitus” (Jarness, 2015b, p. 68). He



further points that this is precisely how Bourdieu himself has portrayed artists and intellectuals' distinction strategies. While indeed a non-substantialist reading of Bourdieu would allow the option of eclectic and hybrid tastes, Jarness might be a little too quick defending Bourdieu against Lahire. As Lahire suggested (Lahire, 2011), passing through multiple social contexts combining at times contradictory experiences, "the actor is undoubtedly the most complex of social realities to grasp" (p. 204).

As other scholars have noted, class is not (and has never been) the only relevant identity to form a person's habitus. Consumer identities such as gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and political beliefs may be increasingly important for taste groupings (cf. Katz-Gerro, 2004).

Irrespective of whether the habitus is fragmented or can incorporate or consists of an inclination for eclecticism itself, scholars seem to agree that the same person can demonstrate great variety in what they appreciate in different contexts. What remains to be seen is how consistent people are in the discourses they draw upon when elaborating on their cultural practices.

## **2.6 Summary: Why this dissertation?**

Research on cultural consumption and the distinction mechanisms that come with it remains a contested and urgent field of research in order to help understanding social inequality. While North-Western Europe is often perceived as rather egalitarian, social inequality has all but disappeared in the last decades (Geißler, 2002; Hradil, 2004; Skeggs, 1997). Next to social differences between people with and without immigration backgrounds, gender, rural and urban populations, socio-demographic variables such as age but also education and income as well as occupational status structure lifestyles, and life chances. Symbolic boundaries appear omnipresent in today's societies.

Bourdieu's theory of taste and his concepts of field and habitus are among the most influential contributions to cultural theory of the last decades. Still, his theory is largely formulated at the level of social class fractions and many of his ideas and concepts do not seem immediately applicable at the individual level (e.g. Lahire, 2003). This study attempts to look at taste formation at a more individual and



small-group level in order to understand how the interaction between dispositions and the social context leads to taste differentiation and hierarchy formation. Exploring promising new perspectives on cultural hierarchies in depth will provide a more thorough and contemporary understanding of taste-negotiation within and between social fields.

The larger share of the research on cultural hierarchies is of quantitative nature. This allows for capturing broad changes in taste and life-styles, while the negotiation of hierarchies, boundaries field dominance are within the discourse about culture. What is considered legitimate, high or even cool, is often negotiated in people's everyday interactions. It is therefore relevant to explore the underlying logics of these negotiations. Similarly, Holt (1997b) argues that we need to look at practices and discourse in order to understand the meaning of any object or activity. This dissertation aims at contributing to this line of research by adapting a qualitative approach. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the logics of cultural appreciation and consumption, it is important to understand *how* culture is consumed, which modes and manners of appreciation exist.

In democratic, meritocratic societies, researching cultural hierarchies is highly relevant for policy-making. Knowledge about the mechanisms of social stratification and distinction is vital for understanding subtle power-relations. The work of Bourdieu provides an important foundation for understanding the role of culture in the formation and persistence of social inequality. His description of power relations within and between social fields is rich and abstract. Understanding these mechanisms on an individual, micro-level, explaining how actors in the field position themselves today and which strategies are applied in order to succeed is a central aim of this study.

Research on cultural consumption can provide the knowledge that will be necessary to deal with changing cultural demand. The declining interest in traditional highbrow culture among younger generations poses a serious threat to the viability of established cultural institutions. In order not to disappear together with the aging traditional, highbrow cultural elite, arts institutions everywhere are obliged to attract a larger, and preferably also more socially diverse, audience.

Finally, a central contribution of this dissertation lies in engaging with the current discussion on cultural capital and exploring the relevance of the prominent concept of cultural capital in distinct social groups in order to assess its substance and relevance today.

### **3 Research design and methods**

While the methodological particularities of each sub-study will be addressed in the subsequent chapters, this chapter provides an overview of the general research design and methodological considerations. It will also address some points of critical reflection more extensively.

During the last decades, the larger part of cultural stratification and consumption research has been of a quantitative nature, capturing which cultural goods people consumed and which activities they participated in (e.g. Bellavance, 2008; Lahire, 2008; Peterson, 1992, 1997b; Roose, 2015; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005; Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012). In response to earlier quantitative research, there have been calls to pay more attention to the different ways of participation and consumption, highlighting that we need to know more about the 'how' of cultural consumption instead of the 'what' (Holt, 1997b; but also Peterson & Kern, 1996; Van Eijck, 2013). Subsequently, a bulk of qualitative and mixed methods studies engaging with these questions have been published in recent years (Atkinson, 2011; Bennett et al., 2009; Friedman & Kuipers, 2013; Jarness, 2015b; Lamont, 1992; van den Haak, 2014). Many of these works have greatly contributed to a more in-depth understanding of the meaning assigned to different forms of cultural consumption and cultural discourse. The methodological approach of this dissertation is inspired by this literature. It thus draws on the growing realization that the meaning and significance of product, context, and way of consuming are mutually constitutive.

In order to understand such subjective aspects of cultural consumption or lifestyles more in general, with a focus on individuals' perceptions of culture, the data of this research consists of talk as elicited in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Qualitative interviews are especially suited to grasp cultural differentiation as they allow mapping the ways in which people perform their taste, and how they classify and evaluate in their own words. It allows to capture explicit as well as implicit criteria with nuance since, as Lamont (1992, p. 18) argues, boundaries are often enacted on the discursive level. Three different samples were drawn for this qualitative study. All participants live in North Western Europe and are in their 20s and 30s. In this age, most people have chosen a direction for their career and have finished or are close to finishing their education. Yet, the choices they made in their career are still relatively recent and they are not necessarily fully settled. This provides a good chance that interviewees can quite explicitly reflect on their choices and socialization into an occupational field. I drew three samples of different social groups. The first was selected on the basis of people's deep cultural involvement

in the cities they are based in. Most people in this sample work in the cultural field and can be considered aspiring cultural elite. The second group consists of business professionals working for large corporations. The third group was a lower educated group, working in service, health or manual labor. I will elaborate on these three samples and the rationale behind choosing them below.

This research is driven by theoretical interest and takes a social constructionist approach. This implies the understanding that meaning making and the way we categorize aspects of the social world are not direct reflections of an external, objective world. Instead, they are “product[s] of historically and culturally specific understandings of the world and therefore contingent. These understandings of the world are created and maintained through social interaction between people in their everyday lives” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 102). As lifestyles and the way people talk about them are inevitably performative, they are crucial in this research concerned with status. At the same time, analyzing discourse helps us to understand interests that lie below or may inform impression management. Discursive practices are part of social practice and can reproduce or change other dimensions of the social while other social dimensions shape discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 19). In other words, if we want to understand lifestyles and cultural consumption as a social practice, it is particularly relevant to study its discursive practices.

A central concern of this research is to take consumers seriously as social actors and take a close look at the discourses they employ and the meanings they assign to music, the arts and their apparel. A central advantage of using qualitative methods is their openness for new interpretations and inductive theorizing. By paying attention to how interviewees describe their life-world and by being open to their perceptions of value and cultural worth, this research is open towards alternative interpretations and meaning making. While I thus build on findings and theories from earlier research, I aim to stay close to the discourses laying at the heart of the talk used in the interviews. Starting out with the existing theories and the expectations to which they give rise, I was nevertheless often surprised by new insights that the interviews brought. The interviews were covering areas frequently explored in cultural sociology, yet remained open towards other activities, interests and focus points.

The navigation between existing theory and inductive reasoning can also be recognized in the analysis, which draws on sensitizing concepts from existing literature on the one hand, and strives towards openness to diverse discourses on

lifestyles on the other. A discourse analytic approach allowed me to navigate these demands. Following Wood and Kroger (2000), the concern of discourse analysis is not so much with exhausting categories, but rather with identifying the ways people use language to and understanding these in detail.

### **3.1 Interviews**

To understand the meaning and relevance of arts appreciation and the different status rendering criteria in taste performance, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews allow one to cover specific topics while remaining flexible (e.g. Wengraf, 2001). The interviews evolved around leisure time activities, cultural taste with a focus on music and the arts, as well as their apparel. Further, the interviewees' current position, their education and what kind of people they appreciated or disliked were also discussed during the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews resemble conversations more than surveys, even though they are different from everyday life or 'naturally occurring' conversations which has caused quite some discussion among scholars (De Fina & Perrino, 2011; Koven, 2011). They are, however, emblematic of everyday life and fundamentally social settings in which versions of reality are constructed in interaction (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 14) and narratives are constructed and performed. People in research interviews are very aware that they are selected for meeting a particular category which might encourage a particular performance of the self (De Fina & Perrino, 2011). This discursive performance of the self, taste and boundaries is likely to be more general to social situations. Rather than very specific for the interview situation, existing in the context of this study only, it is likely that elements of the data presented here would occur in similar ways in other social settings such as encounters with strangers in bars, conversations at dinner or at work-breaks (see also Woodward, 2006). Interviews are specific, possibly unusual social situations. In consequence, dispositions and reflections that surfaced in these interviews may be specific to the interview situation. At the same time, interviewees draw on their knowledge and experience of other social situations (Engelbert, 2014) and the discourses on which they draw are likely to appear in other social settings in which the interviewees would discuss aspects of their cultural taste, consumption practices and perspective on career development.

Approaching interviews from a discourse analytical perspective implies eliciting talk and encouraging participants to speak fully, yet it is not assumed that there is a single, correct answer to a question. Rather, one possible version of talk is produced in the interview (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 72). The interviewer as well as the interviewee are active partners in a conversational encounter, constructing meaning in the particular interview situation (ibid.; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In this line of thought, the idea of a neutral and uninvolved interviewer is problematic. Instead, the encounter requires an active interviewer and an active interviewee who co-construct meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Consequently, interviewees are partners in the discovery process and interview answers or talk are not simply 'there' but also produced in the moment.

Despite the characteristics of an active interview, I relied on an interview guide in order to keep focus and some degree of comparability in the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, which implied that I was drawing on an interview guide that I slightly adjusted to the individual interview situation. Depending on, for example emphasis that an interviewee gave to a topic, I would ask additional questions on a subject or change the order of questions in order to adopt to topics that would emerge from the conversation. The core of the interview guide was very similar throughout all interviews. Yet, they were kept flexible to give room to the particular interests of the interviewees. Depending on the interviewee, some other interests were explored in more or less depth. When the interview was finished and the recording stopped, I encouraged interviewees to ask questions about the research or about me. Often, these conversations stimulated a more free process of shared discovery in which I could also discuss my interpretations and findings from other interviews. Without steering original answers into specific directions, I was able to share impressions and interpretation attempts with interviewees that resulted in a more collaborative construction of meaning which strengthened the analysis. It made the interview more balanced in regards to power by enabling interviewees to ask questions back and provide feedback on my interpretations. It also often resulted in more detailed and deeper elaboration of subjects or additional examples. The interview practice can thus be located between a more traditional semi-structured and an active interview.

The discourses I identified as surfacing in the interview situations and presented in this dissertation are not exhaustive. As discourse is ever-changing and adapting, this study cannot present an exhaustive inventory but present a range of prominent ones on cultural taste that became evident in the interview context. As discourse analysis is not aiming to identify one single, 'true' story but to explore patterns in and

across texts, I work with what has been said and explore the social consequences of different representations of that constructed reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 21).

All interviews started with a brief explanation about myself as the interviewer, a brief outline of the research project and informed consent. Interviewees were informed how I would proceed with the data processing (the recordings of the interviews) and that their names and identifiable information remained confidential. I encouraged interviewees to think of a pseudonym that could be used for this research. Further, I encouraged the interviewees to voice their own opinions freely and openly.

Before the actual interview, I discussed the procedure and informed consent with the interviewees. I also informed them how I would handle their personal data and the audio recordings. Usually, I asked interviewees to think of a first name that I could use for the analysis. I started the actual interview with asking some general information on occupation and background. Subsequently, the main topics were addressed: leisure activities, music taste, fashion taste, interest in other arts, and which characteristics they like or dislike in people. All themes consisted of different questions about taste, importance, genres or styles that are less liked, and interviewees' own habits. Additionally, interviewees were asked about their plans for the future. The interview guides can be found in the appendices (see Appendix D for the English, Appendix E for the Dutch and F for the German version). The semi-structured interviews in all three languages and for all three samples cover in essence the same themes. Yet, what one individual appears to prioritize will be foregrounded in one interview and possibly shape the interviewer's focus for the next interview. Noticing, for example, that business professionals seemed to enjoy elaborating on their career-plans with great passion and detail, I started to ask a few more questions about this domain to this group and added these additional questions to the interview guide.

Interviews with the culturally involved group and the business professionals were held in English and German, depending on which language the interviewee felt most comfortable. As their English was rather strong, I did not try to interview in Dutch given that my skills were rather limited in the first years of this research. During the last round of interviews with the lower educated group, my Dutch language skills were sufficiently proficient to do the interviews located in the Netherlands in Dutch, and the ones in Germany in German. The language used calls for some critical reflection. Speaking in different languages encouraged slightly different dynamics within the interviews. The interview guide was carefully translated from

English into German and Dutch, asking advice from native speakers and discussing the exact wording with them. Interviewing in my mother-tongue German probably enabled me to ask more focused follow-up questions and understand cultural references more quickly. Yet, not having lived in Germany for several years also made me a bit of a professional stranger, enabling me to ask for explanations and elaboration while having a good excuse for not knowing all references to, for example, popular culture, even though I had a similar age and reference points as many of the interviewees.

The interviews in English were easy for me as an interviewer, often sharing the experience of not speaking in a native language with the interviewees. Yet there were a few participants who may not have been fully at ease in English and their expressions may have been a little less eloquent or nuanced than if they had spoken in their mother tongue. Yet, all of the people I interviewed in English did speak English on a regular basis. Finally, the interviews held in Dutch were personally challenging to me as an interviewer as my vocabulary is somewhat limited. On the one hand, this probably encouraged interviewees to elaborate more clearly, and not take my understanding for granted. Yet, the downside might have been that the warming-up was putting them a little less at ease and my follow-ups were less focused and 'natural', revealing that the conversation cost me a little more effort. This might explain why the Dutch interviews in Wave 3 are on average shorter than the German ones. These different interview conditions may result in differences in the knowledge created in the interview situation and make for instance the Dutch interviews less rich. Yet, some interviewees clearly enjoyed explaining and elaborating, while others remained rather short despite probes and follow-up questions.

The interviews can only be fragments of the self-presentation of the interviewees. Being a female interviewer from a university in Rotterdam already has an impact on how people respond to me and leaves marks in the conversation. Yet, accepting that social reality is constructed and that there is never only one story to be told in the first place, leaves me confident that the discourses represented in the interviews are nevertheless relevant and valid in their own right.



### 3.2 Sampling and recruitment

In order to understand how symbolic boundaries in taste and cultural consumption are negotiated among young people in Northern Europe, three social groups were selected that differ in their possession of cultural and economic capital. Overall, 59 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Yet, as the interviewees differ in their interests, their occupation, education, and geographical location, there is plenty of variety and not all of the differences can be meaningfully accounted for. In contrast to Grounded Theory approaches which generally aim for theoretical saturation, a discourse analytic approach does not necessarily aim for comprehensiveness (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 81).

Throughout, interviewees were 21 to 37 years old, currently living in North-Western Europe and I achieved an almost equal representation of men (31) and women (28). As I mentioned above, being between 21 and 36 years old, the interviewees have started their careers rather recently or are about to finish their educational trajectory. They are likely to be relatively reflexive about the choices they made for their education and aware of the particularities of the occupational field they are being socialized into.

All interviewees were asked for a name that they would like me to use for this research. Accordingly, none of the first names used in this research are the full original names of the interviewees. To draw three different, purposive samples, criterion sampling was applied (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 112-113). As we are dealing with rather different social groups, different criteria and recruitment strategies were used.

In the following elaboration on the recruitment strategies, I follow Kristensen and Ravn (2015) who call for more attention to the often overlooked recruitment strategies in qualitative research. They argue that, “[t]he ways in which we as researchers recruit our informants influence who we end up interviewing and, hence, the knowledge we are able to produce” (p. 725). Recruitment is thus an important step in the research process and should be included in descriptions of the research. Especially after having moved away from the fears of biases that often come with an orientation on the dominant idea of statistical representativeness (close to impossible for qualitative research in the first place), qualitative research should explore implications and strategies in reflexive and explicit ways.



### **3.2.1 Sampling and recruiting the ‘culturally involved’**

The main purpose of the sampling was to gain a deeper understanding of a group that can be seen as avant-garde, as loosely related to the cultural elite but neither institutionally nor financially established (yet). What makes them an especially interesting group to study is that they are ahead of ‘hip’ urban developments and contribute to the creative industries and networks of their cities. Being either innovators or early adopters, they are at the verge of setting and following cultural trends, which is where trendiness and authenticity are expected to be negotiated most vehemently. Considering their cultural capital, they also build towards more established positions in the cultural industries, and therefore help us to understand the deeper logics of this field.

In order to create a diverse sample that covers a range of cultural fields, I used criterion sampling. The most central criterion, next to the ones applied to the other groups (age and place of residence), was that the interviewees had to be deeply involved in the cultural field of the city they lived in. The aim was to find voracious cultural consumers, people who ‘know what’s going on’ in their own cultural scene or niche. Interviewees were approached in the field, in concert venues of different cities, which resulted in a concert-booker, a musician, a fashion photographer, and a volunteer at a venue being interviewed. From there, personal contacts and snowball recruitment were used. The cultural fields interviewees were involved in varied on purpose, including electronic and ‘indie’ music, fashion, theater and photography next to some side interest my interviewees had in other fields. While a few of my interviewees were (only) voracious consumers, most of them were actively involved in the field. A couple made a living in the cultural sector; Arne, for example, is a booker of a concert venue; Fred makes a living as a DJ and Mary combines her theater-passion and marketing knowledge. Others hope that their cultural involvement will pay their bills at some point. In the meantime, many sustain themselves with part-time jobs as bartenders, stock clerks or office-assistance jobs. At the time of the interviews, none of the interviewees had a highly paid, full-time job. This leaves them with incomes around welfare level. I aimed for about equal representation of both genders and interviewed 8 men and 9 women. A full list of the people participating in this project with a number of identifying characteristics is shown in Appendix A. They are actively taking part in the cultural life of their cities, they attend events, visit exhibitions (some because of the arts, others merely because of their social networks), and explore new music, fashion or theater. Finally, they originate mostly from middle-class families with well-educated parents that were able to at least partially

support their study-period. Being below 40 years old and highly educated, the interviewees' characteristics resonate with what Schulze (1992) has described as an emerging self-fulfillment milieu.

### **3.2.2 Sampling and recruiting young business professionals**

The next wave of interviews aims to understand the cultural life-worlds of people with an orientation towards economic capital. Young business professionals who are in the early stage of a management career. As with the other groups, criterion sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 112-113) was applied. Interviewees worked in a multinational company<sup>5</sup> have graduated from a European university, hold their occupational position less than five years and be currently based in North-Western Europe. In order to create a sample that covers a range of business fields, alumnus of a prestigious international management program (at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam) were approached first. This program has consistently been ranked among the worldwide top 10 masters in management of the *Financial Times* since 2011 ("Business school rankings from the Financial Times - FT.com," 2016). As contacting them through their university's alumni network was not permitted, I used several social media platforms and my personal network to establish initial contact. Snowball sampling, which Lindlof and Taylor (2011, p. 114) have described as "sometimes the best way to reach an elusive, hard-to-recruit population", has been used additionally. It enabled me to recruit further participants from the networks of the interviewees by recommendation.

In the sample, I aimed for a variety of business sectors and about equal representation of men (11) and women (10). All interviewees hold at least a Bachelor's degree (most obtained a Masters) in business, economics, tax and financial law, business administration, a management program or a combination of the above. A full list of the participants is provided in the Appendix B. Fifteen interviewees have completed an international management program, which involved going on student exchange and an international internship. Within the program, they specialized in different areas such as finance or marketing. Several completed a double master degree; others first completed a different master degree and added the international

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<sup>5</sup> Multinational companies in order to increase the likelihood that they are part of a 'typical' corporate environment.

management afterwards. The others hold similar degrees in economics, financial or tax law. I will discuss the sample in more detail in chapter 5.

### **3.2.3 Sampling and recruiting ‘working class’ people**

The population that has neither a high amount of economic nor cultural capital would be considered working class in classical sociology. Traditionally, the working classes would perform manual labor or production work. In the last decades, however, the traditional share of manual labor working-class occupations has decreased, giving rise to the service sector (Bell, 1976; Hradil, 2004). The concept of class has been further complicated by the fact that a relatively large share of people in Europe self-identify as middle-class.

Even sociologists have started to question the relevance of class as a social concept. Ulrich Beck for instance, famously declared the end of class already in 1984 (Beck, 2007). Yet, the term remains contested in sociology and receives currently a lot of attention in the United Kingdom (Mills, 2014; Savage et al., 2013, 2014). In Germany and the Netherlands, the term seems even less socially accepted and seems avoided in public discourse apart from a few sociologists and politicians of the left (Nolte, 2001; Van Eijk, 2012). This research thus draws on established notions of class (in the sociological context) and educational attainment as a widely accepted manifestation thereof. In this study I focus on one often classed dimension of lifestyle, cultural capital, and its affordances which, as numerous studies have shown, are most prominently predicted by education (e.g. Bennett et al., 2009; Van Eijk & Bargeman, 2004).

Lower status people tend to be less geographically mobile within North-Western Europe (Verwiebe et al., 2014) and are often found to be rather local in their cultural activities and preferences (Bennett et al., 2009; Skjøtt-Larsen, 2012). I therefore chose to focus only on two cities within this group. As I wanted to remain consistent in the transnational design, I chose two cities in two different countries, in which I had interviewed people of the other groups before: Hamburg in Germany and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Both are ‘second’ cities, and have been shaped by their large harbors. Further, Hamburg is the city in which I grew up, I this speak German and know the city relatively well. Rotterdam has been my home in the last years and my Dutch had just reached a level in which I felt relatively confident to interview.

As I discuss in chapter 6 more elaborately, educational systems in the Netherlands and Germany differ in many ways. In order to find comparable occupations that are rather of relatively low status but also rather common in both, Germany and the Netherlands, I considered vocational trainings in both countries. As I elaborate in chapter 6, based on national statistical information, I identified three common, relatively low status occupational fields: care, technique, and service. Following these considerations, the call for interviewees aimed at people trained in each of the three sectors. As the sectors are permeable in reality, and especially lower wage jobs are often short-term and not necessarily specialized, training in these sectors was not a strict criterion but used for the project description to recruit people working in these fields. Most importantly, interviewees had to be currently based in Hamburg or Rotterdam respectively, be between 21 and 37 years old, and their educational attainment level at highest upper secondary education (only because lower and upper secondary education are considered mid-level education in Germany).

### **3.2.3.1 On the difficulties in finding interviewees online and offline**

Difficulties in recruiting people with low education for research have long been noticed by researchers (see for example Kahma & Toikka, 2012, p. 118; Korkeila et al., 2001; Kristensen & Ravn, 2015; Bryman, 2012, p. 204 for quota sampling). Also in this project, recruitment turned out a difficult and time-consuming task despite the rather broad criteria.

In order to create a diverse sample, the calls for interviewees were distributed through diverse channels. I explicitly aimed to have interviewees in the sectors outlined above with an educational attainment of upper secondary at highest. The calls were carefully formulated and discussed with others to make them as clear and inviting as possible. I was alerted by the difficulties in recruitment and therefore continuously discussed the calls with a colleagues and professionals as sounding board to make sure it sounded inviting and also tried different formulations. Specifically aiming for one occupational field at the time (care, technical or service), calls were describing the project and conditions of the interview and offered 15 Euros compensation for an in-depth interview.

I contacted several companies in the sector via email or in person. While contacting companies via email and phone was little successful, I also contacted sales people

in shops of Hamburg and Rotterdam, posted the call on websites and social media, and additionally used my personal network.

To spread the call online, I used 'Marktplaats' and 'Ebay Kleinanzeigen' (Dutch and German versions of eBay Classifieds). These are advertising sites for second hand, local goods and small services in the Netherlands (Marktplaats) and Germany (Ebay Kleinanzeigen). Several interviewees found the call on these sites, but for instance of about 160 views that my 'Marktplaats' post had, only a few contacted me. Of these few, only two fitted all sampling criteria. Further, calls were posted on social media platforms Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. On Facebook, I posted in large city-related groups with a wide reach or in groups that specifically cater to these occupational groups such as school-alumni sites. I also posted on many Facebook groups that are about trading or exchanging second hand items and services in the region of Rotterdam. Here, in theory, several thousand people could be reached, yet few people commented, liked or reacted to the post. While I complied with the rules and regulations of the groups, the call was often treated with distrust by the group-administrators and at times I was removed in consequence. Lastly, I also used websites that were designed to help find respondents for research in Germany.

In order to recruit interviewees that might not be that active online, I posted flyers on supermarket pin-boards in different areas of the cities and in break-rooms for employees in companies. Further, I approached countless people working in shops in different areas of both cities. Interestingly, several people who agreed to be interviewed were later not reachable or did not show up for the appointment even if it was scheduled for the next day.

Lastly, I spread the call in my personal networks of which several people approached others they knew for me. I also used snowball sampling starting with the interviewees, to find further people who fitted the criteria mentioned above. Not only did some interviewees recommend others to me, some also posted my call on their Facebook wall and thereby helped to recruit more interviewees. Through each of the efforts outlined above, I found a relevant and diverse group of interviewees.

These strategies taken together may sound unsystematic and selective, yet, aiming for a diverse sample in specific occupational fields, no single strategy would appear more efficient or trustworthy for an unbiased result. As Kristensen and Ravn (2015) have highlighted, indirect approaches to recruit research participants such as leaflets or email-lists are often not very successful, while people are more inclined to respond positively when they are approached through their personal

network, especially as many companies were not interested in collaborating. Given a company has no commercial interest in their employees' personal lives being researched; they were not inclined to use their resources. Individuals working for companies were often very willing to help and support the research.

Ten people in Rotterdam and eleven in Hamburg were interviewed. At the time of the interviewee, they were between 21 and 36 years old. A full list of interviewees and their occupation can be found in Appendix C. After I specifically aimed for people in technical professions, care and service separately, several interviewees actually have experience in two of these fields and not all are currently employed. For example, Sylvie (Rotterdam) is trained as a security guard and has worked in a vegetable-packaging factory in between jobs. While Maurice (Hamburg) completed a vocational training as a care-worker for elderly people, yet works since several years as a promoter for a software company where he earns more money. Overall, fourteen of the interviewees had at least some experience in the service sector, most often as shop assistants. Eight had at least some experience in the care sector and six had at least some experience with manual or technical labor. While many interviewees have had many different jobs and move between sectors, others such as William and Nick (both with a completed vocational training) in Rotterdam continue working in the company they first started their occupational trajectory with.

### **3.2.4 Implications of these sampling strategies**

The first group, the culturally involved, were selected as they were assumed to possess high amounts of cultural capital. As they were recruited on the basis of their cultural interest we might say they were recruited on the basis of their lifestyle. The second group, business professionals in multinational corporations was initially selected on the basis of occupation. Further, I suspected that they would possess different forms of cultural capital than the group of the cultural field. Third, the service sector, care workers and manual laborers were selected in comparison with lower educational groups. In much survey research, lower educated respondents are found to display a lower level of cultural involvement (e.g Katz-Gerro & Jæger, 2013), even though this notion is questionable, as I will address in chapter 6. With these choices, the culturally involved group (1) is the only group where participants were not selected based on their occupation but rather on their lifestyle, even

though the majority of interviewees were working or aiming to work in the cultural field. This selection explains how there can be a few overlaps between group 2 and 3 with group 1, yet clear distinctions between 2 and 3. There are however relatively few people that would fit two groups in terms of selection criteria. In group two, especially Rafiqué could also be seen as deeply involved in urban culture. In group 3, James, Joey and possibly Anna have a culturally rather active lifestyle.

### **3.3 Analysis**

My approach to discourse analysis is situated in the field of Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discursive psychology, as a strand of social psychology with sociological influences, criticizes cognitivist psychology for its underestimating of the social origin of psychological states (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Within the approach, it is assumed that “identities are constructed on the basis of different, shifting discursive resource and are thus relational, incomplete and unstable, but not completely open” (p. 111). The focus are people’s everyday practices, yet it relates to larger societal structures that are drawn on or transformed in discursive practice (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 20). Discursive psychologists are less interested in “what is going on under people’s skulls” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 14), but rather how people use language in interaction with each other. This approach to discourse analysis is concerned with the content of talk, its subject matter and social organization rather than linguistic organization (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 28). It is analyzing the rhetorical, argumentative organization of talk in order to understand the nature and function of particular versions of events.

Most discourse analytical approaches are influenced by Foucault’s conceptions of discourse. However, the approach chosen for this dissertation does not assume that discourse exists as a unified whole associated with one knowledge regime of a historical period. Instead, it presupposes that different discourses exist simultaneously and struggle for acceptance and the acknowledgement to define truth (see for instance Billig, 1996, pp. 14–16; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 13). It follows that different discourses can allow an individual to speak from different, at times contradictory positions (ibid. pp. 16-17). Also in contrast to Foucault, in this dissertation, I treat individuals as agents and structures as primary categories instead of, as Foucault suggested, focus on power. In line with



the discourse psychology tradition, I focus on people's active and creative use of everyday discourse as a resource to accomplish social action in interactions, here in interview situations.

While my predominant approach to the data was a discourse analytic one, I used open coding which is also often used in other forms of qualitative analysis. Starting with key themes, topics and categories, open coding is has also been recommended by Tonkiss (2012, p. 413) for discourse analysis. It enabled me to gain oversight on themes, identify interpretive repertoires (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and analyze more systematically despite dealing with relatively large quantities of interview data covering many different subjects. At times, my accounts are possibly more summative than the founders of discursive psychology would have liked. However, this enabled me to represent a larger variety of interviewees' perspectives. The interviewees drew upon diverse, at times multi-layered, discourses which made it productive to structure the analysis rather thematically, for instance along the lines of 'music taste', 'fashion taste', 'careers', etc. At the same time, I was able to highlight overarching discourses, for example on authenticity or decency, but also ones that are particular to specific themes.

Discourse analytic research is generally inductive in spirit, moving from the concrete and particular to the abstract and general (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Yet, the central themes in this dissertation have been investigated by many scholars before me, which would therefore make a fully inductive approach less desirable. I therefore built on existing literature with a critical distance and used concepts from this literature as sensitizing concepts. This enabled me to contrast and interpret my findings in light of the existing work that that has been published by other scholars.

Interview notes and transcriptions are often considered as the initial step in data reduction and interpretation. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, with its characteristic repetitions, digressions, pauses, 'ehms', and the like. This allowed me to analyze the interviews in a way that includes the interpretation of these utterances. In the interview excerpts presented here, '.' indicate small pauses; '...' are longer pauses. In several instances, I removed vocal expressions such as 'ehms' from the excerpts in the final edits in order to increase readability. I transcribed the larger part of the interviews myself, some were typed by other people who were carefully instructed to transcribe in the same manner and who declared their confidentiality in writing. I re-listened to all interviews before I started to code them. After the initial reading, I coded interesting passages related to the research questions. The interview data were coded and patterns identified by



looking at themes, contextualization, references, but also silences (Gill, 2000, p. 180), emphases and variations (Tonkiss, 1998, pp. 257-259). I used concepts from the existing literature on cultural distinction as sensitizing concepts. Looking at how arguments are constructed opens a view beyond first impressions and into the ideology and meanings informing them. Exploring the discourse and how it is embedded in the social context is essential in order to understand how symbolic boundaries are drawn and cultural hierarchies are perceived and negotiated.

The analysis constitutes another moment when the use of language becomes complicated. Language is pertinent for the discourse produced and translation is an interpretive step that I had to take as a researcher. The German and Dutch interview excerpts presented in the analysis were translated by me. Yet, as I am a native speaker in neither English nor Dutch, direct translations were challenging. I therefore often consulted with native speakers in cases of doubt. Yet, translation inevitably reduces the richness of the data to some extent.

Conceptualizing a qualitative research that is covering different social groups in a transnational context is very vulnerable to having 'too many' variables or influence factors. The sample size does not allow for meaningful comparison between countries or even cities. Any difference on these levels would come down to anecdotal evidence. At the same time, many people living in urban centers are geographically highly mobile, especially the higher educated ones. They move for studies, work or for temporary projects, which makes their current geographical location less prevalent. Further, in defense of the here presented methodology: this research is not set out to explain these differences, but rather to explore commonalities. The occurrence of similar discourses in different urban contexts in Western Europe speaks to the importance of these discourses.

#### **4. It's really not hip to be a hipster. Negotiating trends and authenticity in the cultural field<sup>6</sup>**

*I don't follow specific styles, because I think everybody has their own individual style, and one finds it or doesn't. Many, especially in Berlin, are walking around very fashionable, but I think they don't have a style because they simply wear what everybody here wears. And I almost can't look at it anymore.  
(Fliege)*

While differences in taste and lifestyles are often perceived as inherent characteristics of one's personality, Bourdieu (1984) has shown how these originate from differences in social positions. Ever since then, we have seen an ongoing debate on which lifestyles<sup>7</sup> render most social prestige. Recent approaches consider the crossing of cultural boundaries between legitimate or highbrow and popular culture (omnivorousness), often linked to the increasing relevance of openness and cosmopolitanism as desirable traits among today's (cultural) elites and therefore as effective means of distinction (Bellavance, 2008; Buchmann & Eisner, 1997; Peterson, 1992; Warde et al., 2007). In addition to breadth of taste, frequency of engagement in cultural consumption (voraciousness) is another way of distinguishing oneself culturally as it demonstrates a deep cultural involvement (Sullivan & Katz-Gerro, 2007). Observing ever-changing cultural trends and a high turnover of goods and experiences that characterize much of post-industrial consumerism (Bauman, 1996; Bell, 1976), Taylor (2009) introduced the 'logic of trendiness' as a structuring principle of social prestige. He argues that symbolic capital is gained by discovering and appreciating new cultural items quickly. What matters is being up-to-date, well-informed about the latest cultural developments and eager to discover new things.

This paper analyses the relevance of these different logics for contemporary lifestyles, with an emphasis on recent models of authenticity and trendiness. It has been argued that social prestige can be gained by being 'in the know' of new developments in the cultural field, which may thus offer an alternative to status hierarchies based on social class as Bourdieu described them (Thornton, 1995). At the same time, however, following trends is often harshly criticized. Especially

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<sup>6</sup> A very similar version of this chapter has been published in the Journal of Consumer Culture in 2015 (Michael, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> While lifestyle is a contested term, this study will follow Miles (2000) by analyzing lifestyle through the meanings that are ascribed to them.

people who seem trendy themselves, being early adopters or trendsetters, tend to be discarded for being shallow and fake, or inauthentic. This tendency becomes visible in the wide and passionate rejection of probably the trendiest group in society, 'the hipsters'.<sup>8</sup> The hipster can be seen as the ideal type of a trendy person: He or she is on top of current trends, owning vintage items before their remake appears in mainstream clothing chains, inhabiting the trendiest areas of urban centers and listening to the latest bands before they become popular to quickly dismissing them when they get widely known. Hipsters are subject to never ending mockery (Haddow, 2008), in recent years, countless magazines and blogs have been busy with 'hipster bashing' (Cowen, 2006; Greif, Ross, & Tortorici, 2010; Lorentzen, 2007). There is an interesting tension between the ideals of trendiness and authenticity that seems to culminate in discussions on hipster culture, but I argue it has a broader relevance, the so-called hipster being a mere ideal-type of 'trendiness failing to convey authenticity'. Part of the meaning of hipster bashing therefore lies in claiming for oneself the much valued authenticity that hipsters are so sadly lacking.

This paper aims at understanding this seeming paradox of contemporary lifestyles where notions of trendiness and authenticity must be reconciled. In this study, I will therefore analyze consumer practices in the two domains that are most relevant to – and expressive of – young people's identities: fashion and music. Through an analysis of in depth-interviews with young people involved in the latest styles of music, art, and fashion, I will investigate trendiness and modes of appreciation in relation to individual boundary-work as perceived by young urban cultural consumers.<sup>9</sup> The sample consists of people that can be considered as part of a future cultural elite and partly avant-garde; with a great insight into the cultural field but not yet institutionally established. They have deep insight and are partially carriers of new developments in the cultural field. While a few of them could fit stereotypical descriptions of hipsters (see Greif et al., 2010), the intention of this study is not to demarcate hipsters but to develop a better understanding of self-presentation through cultural consumption<sup>10</sup> and boundary work in contemporary cultural scenes.

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<sup>8</sup> Even though hipsters are a rather vague scene and the term is contested (see for instance Greif et al. 2010), they are as very often talked about as a clearly defined group (e.g. Cowen 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Many of my interviewees were not only voracious consumers, but most of them contribute to the cultural fields they are involved in, they make music, organize cultural events or design fashion. They therefore blur the boundary between consumer and producer.

<sup>10</sup> Cultural consumption refers to receptive cultural participation and includes activities such as listening to music, watching movies, television, visiting museums or theater plays.

As pointed out above, there is an on-going discussion on which cultural consumption pattern renders most prestige. In this study, however, I will heed various calls for a greater attention to how individuals consume rather than to what they consume (Holt, 1998; Sullivan & Katz-Gerro, 2007). From the discussions about changes in what constitutes legitimate or socially accepted, 'good taste' (from highbrow to omnivorous/voracious, to possibly trendy), we know that what constitutes good taste is socially constructed. In line with this, taste is seen as a performance, something one 'does' (Kuipers, 2006; West, 2010). The focus of this analysis is thus not so much the reality of people's cultural consumption practices, but how they chose to present themselves<sup>11</sup>.

Analyzing the performance of taste requires engaging with the discourses that structure the performance of taste and its evaluation. In this paper, a range of status rendering concepts are discussed which underlie the performance of taste and were relevant throughout the interviews: trendiness, authenticity, openness and individuality.

Many studies on cultural consumption and taste have focused on separate fields such as music, abstract art and fashion, which did not allow them to assess the connection between the different fields. Other studies encompassed various fields in quantitative surveys, which left out the meaning making processes and made it difficult to get at the underlying meanings of the discourse. While the existence of connections between personal dress, music and taste are widely established (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Hebdige, 1979; Roose, Van Eijck & Lievens, 2012), studies on self-presentation that analyze the logics underling the consumption of music and fashion from the consumer's perspective are rare. Further, this study will offer empirical material that positions the often claimed importance of trendiness in the wider logic of the cultural field and helps to understand why trendiness, as personified by the hipster, has to be rejected in favor of authentic and individualized self-presentations.

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<sup>11</sup> This approach is inspired by Ollivier (2008) who applied as similar strategy to explore modes of openness.

## 4.1 Negotiating trends and individuality in the cultural field

The relationship between social positions and cultural consumption has been theorized and demonstrated extensively by Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu (1984, p. 40), although classes differ greatly in the cultural items they appreciate, what distinguishes them more than anything else is the capacity to apply aesthetic criteria to ordinary objects and everyday-life choices. This unlocks a vast array of consumer products and popular culture items for aesthetic scrutiny by people rich in cultural capital. However, given the increasing speed of fashion cycles in areas such as clothing, food, art, or popular music, deciphering culture and everyday consumer choices as symbolic status markers has become rather complicated. In this situation, being up-to-date with the latest developments is likely to function as a form of symbolic capital, perhaps more so than familiarity with a canonized stock of cultural knowledge (Frank, 1997). As Chaney argues, “[i]n a constant search for innovation, traditional hierarchies of status will be circumvented by new forms of cultural capital” (2002, p. 79).

In his large-scale study in Germany, Schulze (1992) identified the highly educated and relatively young ‘self-fulfillment-milieu’ as a social segment whose main concern is the development of the self, for which they tend to engage in a broad range of cultural or leisure activities. As cultural omnivores (Peterson, 1992), the ‘self-fulfillment-milieu’ also mixes highbrow and popular cultural consumption without much concern for traditional cultural hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984). Their lifestyles are informed by a longing for both contemplation and action, an urge to be both anti-barbaric and anti-conventional and a preference for complexity as well as spontaneity (Van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). This suggests a reflexive way of organizing everyday life and an awareness of the symbolic meanings attached to the numerous means of self-presentation available, such as dress (Ferguson, 2009) and musical taste (DeNora, 2000). This development in lifestyles parallels a shift in self-presentation during the twentieth century from a more utilitarian self-image described by adjectives such as sincere, simple, or industrious to a more expressive self-image characterized in terms such as unconventional, tolerant, sensitive, intelligent and independent (Buchmann & Eisner, 1997). These terms are also very useful for describing the type of lifestyle that is most likely to garner symbolic capital among contemporary young cultural consumers. Clearly, being original or idiosyncratic in a clever manner is more appreciated than following trends or sticking to a single cultural genre or discipline.

Nevertheless, as argued above, a major concern across all cultural fields is claimed to be 'being up-to-date', or 'trendy'. While many authors use these terms, they have rarely been defined properly. I will use hip, trendy and fashionable interchangeably in this chapter. With these terms, I refer to styles and items that are in an early stage of the fashion cycle, shortly after their introduction and adoption by fashion leaders when their public acceptance is increasing (Sproles, 1981), but before maturation and decline of the trend.

The longing for being trendy has been put forward by Timothy Taylor as an increasingly important structuring principle in lifestyle formation. Partly echoing Chaney (2002), Taylor (2009) claims that "a loose hierarchical structure still exists, but it is not a structure that places knowledge of 'legitimate culture' alone at the pinnacle: it is now the trendy that is displacing this earlier knowledge to some extent" (p. 417). For members of the middle class, a taste for the trendy matters more than a taste for highbrow culture. Searching for novelty may therefore be a source of symbolic capital in its own right, showing a person's ability to spot or create trends and thereby demonstrate independent style and 'truly good taste'. Therefore, cultural capital has to be understood not only as knowledge of highbrow culture or the crossing of cultural boundaries, but also as familiarity with trendy cultural products. Trends are in a reciprocal relation with a longing for individuality, self-expression and legitimization of one's own personal style. In that sense, being innovative is, as Crewe et al. (2003) showed, contrasted with an imagined mainstream and it requires 'inside information' which can be demonstrated by displaying knowledge about developments in underground culture, wearing fashion-items before they show up in mainstream stores and showing good filter-capabilities for relevant information. It is the ultimate proof of a thorough engagement in a situation of rapid cultural change and ever more condensed fashion cycles. At the same time, not being the master of one's own style indicates a lack of agency and authenticity (Pyšňáková & Miles, 2010). Being a 'fashion victim' is at odds with a self-assured self-expression through the display of taste, while only the latter is likely to render prestige within the relevant fields (see also Simmel, 1957). There is a subtle yet crucial distinction between setting a trend and following it. This is precisely the paradox that is felt to exist between trendiness and authenticity. A trendsetter may well be authentic, but following trends – which is the more common way of being trendy – seems to be at odds with authenticity. It is therefore worthwhile to look closer at the conceptualizations of authenticity.

## 4.2 Longing for authenticity

Authenticity as an important criterion in the evaluation of cultural products has gained increasing academic attention (e.g. Moore, 2002; Peterson, 1997a; Zukin, 2008). Authenticity has been broadly defined as something real, true, genuine or original as opposed to fake and pretentious (Peterson, 1997a). When it comes to persons, authenticity is mainly seen as 'enacting ones true self' (Franzese, 2009). It is important to note that "authenticity is a moving target, and the content of the authentic [...] is continually evolving" (Peterson, 2005). Therefore, authenticity is not an inherent characteristic of objects or individuals, but has to be ascribed to things, persons or events by 'the mundane practices of meaning-making' (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 123).

Peterson (1997a) further found that authenticity consists of a balance between originality and traditional or conventional elements. Underlying these two components is the tension between a romantic and a modernist notion of authenticity, as conceptualized by Keightley (2001). The romantic notion embraces a sincere and pre-industrial past. Today, such authentic simplicity seems widely desired (Gioia, 2009) and a romantic longing for authenticity can be found in clothing (considering the increasing market for natural materials and vintage as a trend that is nostalgic and individualistic at the same time), music (such as the late revival of folk music), and TV shows (such as 'Farmer seeks wife'). In all these examples, the 'real', traditional and emotional are sought for instead of the cool or the fashionable.

In contrast to the romantic notion of authenticity, the modernist notion breaks with the past, demands radical innovation and experiment. The chaos of the cities, alienation and machines are celebrated as authentic elements of our time (Keightley, 2001). In this logic, a 'true', re-inventing self that is placed in (and in line with) this rough, unrealistic world is embraced.

Both types of authenticity are ways of dealing with late modern capitalism. While the romantic notion can be seen as a retreat from the chaotic, harsh world; seeking for something 'true' in it, the modernist approach can be interpreted as an attempt to get ahead, a way to acquire agency by making use of the new possibilities offered. Both approaches hint to a complicated relation to trendiness, as being trendy implies a constant adaption to novelty while an authentic personality comes with its own taste, which expresses who she or he truly is. This can be meaningfully linked to Bourdieu's concept of naturalness (1984).

Being at ease with the diversity of cultural goods, appreciating avant-garde that is different from what can be learned in educational institutions and making it one's own, is described by Bourdieu as crucial for the conversion of differences in the acquisition of culture into what seem to be differences of nature. Thus, people rich in cultural capital should be more easily perceived as authentic because they are more likely to appear natural and at ease within the post-industrial consumer society. They seem to comprehend commodities, signs and the arts despite the ever-accelerating pace with which trends follow one another in basically all fields of everyday life.

### **4.3 Data and methods**

To get at the meaning and relevance of status rendering criteria in taste performance, 17 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were held. Young people are often conceptualized as 'consumers of the avant-garde' (Miles, 2000, pp. 113-114). The interviewees in this study are not the youngest consumers, but they are in their twenties and thirties, leading not yet fully settled lifestyles. The main purpose of the sampling was to gain a deeper understanding of a group that can be seen as avant-garde, loosely related to the cultural elite but neither institutionally nor financially established (yet). What makes them an especially interesting group to study is that they are ahead of hip urban developments and contribute to the creative industries and networks of their cities. Being either innovators or early adopters, they are at the verge of setting and following trends, which is where trendiness and authenticity are expected to be negotiated most vehemently. Considering their cultural capital, they also build towards more established positions in the cultural industries and therefore help us to understand the deeper logics of this field.

In order to create a diverse sample that covers a range of cultural fields I used criterion sampling. I approached voracious cultural consumers who were deeply involved in the cultural field of the city they live in. They are people who 'know what's going on' in their own cultural scene or niche while a range of 'niches' were included: electronic and 'indie' music, fashion, theater and photography next to some side interests my interviewees had in other fields. While a few of my interviewees were (only) voracious consumers, most of them were actively involved in the field. A couple made a living in the cultural sector, Arne for example is booker of a concert venue, Fred lives of DJ jobs and Mary combines her theater-



passion and marketing knowledge. Others hope that their cultural involvement will pay their bills at some point. In the meantime, many sustain themselves with part time jobs as bartenders, stock clerks or office-assistance jobs. At the time of the interviews, none of the interviewees had a highly paid full-time job. This leaves them with incomes around welfare level. A full list of the people participating in this project with a number of identifying characteristics is shown in Appendix A.

They are actively taking part in the cultural life of their cities attending events, visit exhibitions (some because of the arts, others merely because of their social networks), explore new music, fashion or theater. They originate mostly from middle-class families with well-educated parents that were able to at least partially support their study-period. Being below 40 and highly educated, the interviewees' characteristics resonate with what Schulze (1992) has described as an emerging self-fulfillment milieu.

The interviews took place in several Northern-European metropolises (see list in Appendix A). Today's metropolises are inhabited by people from diverse geographical origins. This also applies to the interviewees in this study: Kasper<sup>12</sup> for example moved from Rotterdam to Paris and now lives in Berlin; Bob left his German village in order to gain access to the music scene and ended up in Amsterdam after having lived for some time in London. Their lifestyles are not strongly driven by the specific cities where they found themselves, but by the cultural facilities these urban centers have to offer. Taking a local perspective here would thus not add to the understanding of this cosmopolitan sample.

My interviewees were asked about their cultural practices, specifically their taste for - and practices around music, fashion and interest in other art forms. In addition, they were asked how they related to fashion developments and novelty and to talk about their circle of friends and characteristics they appreciated in other people. The analysis will be concerned with the most central domains of music and fashion as these are fields all interviewees were involved with. In order to analyze the interview-data, I conducted a discourse analysis. Looking at how arguments are built offers a view beyond first impressions, into the ideology and meanings informing them (Gill, 2000). Exploring what is constructed by the discourse and how it is embedded in the social context is required in order to understand how symbolic boundaries are drawn and cultural hierarchies are perceived and negotiated.

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<sup>12</sup> In order to keep the interviewees anonymous, they were asked to pick a name for themselves, the names they chose are used in this study.

I will first show how my interviewees approach their own clothing, which involves different strategies for constructing an individual style, and then capture their relations to trendiness. Next I will discuss how they position themselves towards mainstream-music. Finally, I shall draw attention to four fundamental motives that emerged as central discourses in all topics discussed during the interviews: trendiness, individuality, openness and authenticity.

## **4.4 Analysis**

### **4.4.1 Approaches to personal style and fashion**

While talking about personal style, two opposing poles emerged: an 'understatement'-approach to fashion versus a rather expressive way of styling. The understatement-pole aims at keeping their personal style rather sober and plain, at not giving away too much of their personal opinion or attitudes by their clothing. As Ronaldo explains: "It's better to go tabula rasa with your style, you know; don't let anyone get to you, then people don't start thinking they know you just from your style." This results in a plain and casual, sober style, a way of retreating from fashion developments and categorization.

The other extreme treats fashion and personal styles as a playground of various expressions. This approach is in line with the modernist notion of authenticity as described above. Tina argues "I decide every day entirely anew what I wear. That's for me a play or coquetry with the events that a style is related to." This play with signs and symbols in clothing is a form of bricolage (Hebdige, 1979). The more expressive interviewees employ bricolage in their play with existing styles and stereotypes as part of their individual expression through style. Kasper exemplifies: "For me, fashion is an important thing. Not fashion-wise but just to have my own style and things and to play around with". These approaches are positions on a continuum. In between the very expressive and the understatement poles there is a middle ground, appreciating casual clothing but 'with a little twist' that allows expression of their unique personality while avoiding drastic statements.

Looking at both ends of the spectrum, the expressive and the understatement stance towards fashion, both positions are a way to remain open and multi-layered. The expressive, playful stance is hard to read. Categorization of the person from

the outside is difficult since he or she may appear differently every day. This can be seen as authentic in the modernist sense, as the fleeting style reflects the diversity of different moods and identities. The understatement stance strives to avoid symbolic communication and being categorized or 'put in a box' altogether by not conveying much about their personality. It demands a closer look in order to explore and understand the person 'from the inside', rather than defining the person by his or her looks. This too implies that one desires to be seen as a true self and thus authentic below one's looks.

A third approach to personal style does not opt for either mystifying ever-changing bricolage or understatement, but creates a specific individualistic style, which they personally find aesthetically pleasing and identify with. These interviewees choose for a rather consistent style. Bob, for instance, is one of the few who can answer the question on his personal style straight away. He describes a set of items that he usually has in his wardrobe which make him a 'cowboy' as he claims. Looking closer at this 'cowboy', Bob's look involves skinny jeans, checked second-hand shirts and big glasses – a look that could as well be identified as a hipster outfit, but the cowboy label prevents hipster associations. Fred describes his passion for classic, English tweed looks and other specific traditional clothing. In these cases, where an expressive yet consistent style is chosen, the intention is not to indicate membership of a subculture, but rather a unique style that had to be found individually. Uniqueness here is constructed in context; the term 'cowboy' feeds cliché-images that would not be placed in the center of Amsterdam, just like the tweed-look is not to be expected from a techno-DJ.

On several occasions, participants in this study also describe a longing for a lasting, classical style. Truus states: "I'm looking for a bit of a classic wardrobe. Like something that is timeless." This longing for something lasting and consistent can be seen as inspired by the romantic notion of authenticity. Thus, both discourses of authenticity can be drawn upon and both approaches to authenticity seem relevant.

Despite the differences in their attitudes towards expressiveness of their personal style, my interviewees distance themselves from subcultural dress codes. Goth-, MOD- or Punk style are described as one-dimensional and artificial. The strict dress-codes of sub-cultures are rejected as too much of a cliché statement and preclude open communication with a diverse range of people. Since fixed categories and constraints are dismissed, it is difficult for many of my interviewees to describe their personal style: They do not feel that they would fit in any pre-fixed box or universal style category. Their own way of dressing is perceived as very personal,

unique and for many interviewees also depending on their mood and occasions they dress for.

While we see very diverging stances to personal style, these discourses share an avoidance of superficiality or easy-to-read clichés. A specific sort of cultural capital appears to be involved. If my interviewees are interested in fashion, they emphasize playfulness and the development of their own style by which they demonstrate symbolic mastery. The other option is to refuse to play along altogether by retreating into either deliberate understatement or timelessness. All stances are critical of outward oriented trends and thereby represent different strategies for being authentic and self-determinate.

#### **4.4.2 Negotiation of trendiness**

The people participating in this project display a great variety in their reported involvement in fashion trends. While some claim to notice new trends only by chance, others are actively interested in new developments. For some, being informed about new developments is relevant, as it enables them to position themselves in the field, as Eva demonstrates when she explains her interest in fashion magazines:

*I once in a while get those magazines and just watch it cause; I like to see what is being made [...] for me it's good to know my position in that. [...] just to get a feel for my own opinion.*

In fashion (as well as music), most interviewees point out that they appreciate experimenting, which is mostly based on older practices and styles that can be combined in new ways. In this sense, novelty is appreciated. However, while setting trends is valued as something innovative and original, buying items that are already trendy is seen as unoriginal, 'too easy' and may interfere with individuality. Kasper, the only male who actively informs himself on new developments, states:

*With every trend of course you have the originals because it comes from some place in some way. It's like, Kate Moss started to wear the Ugg-boots and on her skinny legs and her crazy appearance they looked funny for a season. But then suddenly the whole world is wearing Uggs but, they are unflattering to most people and then: ok just, some trends should just have to, you know, skip that trend.*

It is striking that almost all interviewees mentioned Uggs as an example of how people can be led astray by fashion-trends. For the people participating in this project simply 'following trends' is not an option. While some find it important to always know 'what is going on', every trendy item is carefully selected. Similar to the findings of Pyšnáková and Miles (2010) on Czech youth, my interviewees actively use their consumer choices to negotiate their identity and demonstrate their individuality. Although most of my interviewees buy at least occasionally at mainstream clothing chains such as H&M, it remains important to create one's own style from the items available. Therefore, none of the people participating in this project buy only at H&M and many make sure to have some unique items from second hand stores, or find other ways to incorporate mainstream items into their own, individual style. Gabriela, for instance, describes her style as being "totally different from the mainstream. I mean, I don't want to follow the mainstream. I pick things from the mainstream and make them mine". She creates symbolic ownership of the items she purchases by picking the items that are 'a little different'. She is aware that her style fits recent trends, but 'knowing her own style' and being able to distinguish it from her friends' outfits, she claims her outfits to be an expression of her personality. The individuality of clothing-styles might be mostly a matter of perception, but at least within my interviewees' circles of friends, they are visibly different from the 'anonymous' and 'boring' mass they aim to distinguish themselves from. Not simply adopting imposed fashion trends is important since, as Michael explains: "Every piece of clothing that I pick is saying something about me." The longing for trendiness for its own sake is widely rejected and seen as sign of poor character and taste. While creating trends is related to being innovative and therefore potentially cool and authentic, following trends has to be made authentic by combining diverse items or mixing styles into something that is seen as unique.

#### **4.4.3 Inclusion and negotiation of mainstream culture in music**

When it comes to taste in music, all interviewees name a variety of musical genres they are listening to. Many of them mention classical music among other genres such as indie, electronic music, blues and jazz.

Six out of the seventeen people participating in this project emphasize their appreciation for recent developments in the commercial music market. For three, this is in line with their career-aspirations in music and recognition from rather

successful people in the business; it thus fits with their position in the field and it seems logical for them to engage with the commercial side of music-production.

A few other interviewees emphasize that they like some mainstream, yet their account has an undertone of 'even though it is mainstream' to make clear that they generally do not appreciate it. Mainstream can be understood, as Crewe et al. (2003) suggested, as an imagined mainstream, a construct against which 'the alternative' is positioned while the boundaries between alternative and mainstream are constantly renegotiated and fundamentally instable. Like Crewe et al. found among secondhand retailers, mainstream is portrayed by the people in this study as too easy, boring and 'polished'. The argument that the boundaries between alternative and mainstream are subject to continuous renegotiation also shows in the interviews. Several interviewees state they like some musicians and bands that might be considered mainstream for having had significant commercial success at some point in their career. That does not imply, however, that the artists mentioned, such as the Beatles or David Bowie, would be considered by others as part of today's mainstream culture. A few of my interviewees also explicitly appreciate current mainstream-music for 'what it is': catchy and emotionally easy to access. Christoph explains: "Britney Spears is working emotion-wise, too. That's obvious, that's old school song writing, even though it's pretty shallow, dull. And I'm getting interested when there's also a little experiment, when there's also something unfinished." Here, we see the mainstream as imagined discourse is flexible and while generally disliked, there is a possibility for mainstream music to be appreciated. A few other interviewees are less concerned with distancing themselves from an imagined mainstream, but when asked about contemporary music in the charts or radio, many do not know about recent developments. Interestingly, developments in the highly profitable major music business can be irrelevant, even if one is very interested in independent niche music or works professionally as a booker for a concert venue, as Arne does.

Unlike the interviewees for whom mainstream seems largely irrelevant, others actively reject mainstream for being mainstream. Ronaldo argues:

*Electro and Minimal are two different things [...] Minimal will never be mainstream, and that's good, actually. [...] Electro really changed, it's not the Techno from the old days, it has gotten much more hearable; it's really fun to listen to. Where the difference is between Minimal and Electro, I can't really say, it's two different music genres. Minimal is more independent, it also sounds a bit like independent music. Electro is disco music.*

Ronaldo displays a great ambivalence towards mainstream culture here. On the one hand, he emphasizes that it is good that minimal (which he generally likes) will not make it into mainstream. Later on, he explains the declining popularity of (German) hip hop by the declining quality of the music which implies that mainstream cannot be all bad, but is in some way related to quality nevertheless. These inconsistencies show how fragile the boundaries of the imagined mainstream are, as Crewe et al. (2003) suggested. While his taste is not too far away from the mainstream (as imagined), he does seem eager to point out his distance from the 'Top 40'. Mainstream is positioned as something lower, not prestigious. Here we can see the negotiation of the differentiation between the field of 'mass audience production' and the field of restricted production, a seemingly disinterested field in which 'producers produce for other producers'. As Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1983) pointed out, the field of mass production 'is symbolically excluded and discredited' (p. 320). More recently, Arsel and Thompson (2011) also found that distinguishing one's own taste from commercial culture prevents one's field-dependent capital from getting devalued while reinforcing symbolic boundaries. In their findings, framing the investments in indie culture as one facet of a larger, more complex identity, helps protect indie-music fans from devaluing associations with hipsters. Similarly, the interviewees in this study discursively disassociate themselves from mainstream culture while most of them claim to not generally reject it.

While the interviewees differ in the vehemence with which they distance themselves from mainstream culture, fashion and mainstream music are approached as fields from which one can select items which, when carefully picked and combined, serve to stress the uniqueness or even idiosyncrasy of a person.

#### **4.4.4 Openness**

Notwithstanding the boundary-work towards the imagined main-stream or mass market, my interviewees show a general concern with being 'open' and tolerant towards all kinds of styles in music, fashion, and also a diverse range of people. Looking more closely at this openness is crucial for understanding symbolic boundaries. All interviewees mention at least at one point their appreciation for experiments and most of them underline the breadth of their taste in music and openness towards other art forms, especially when brought to them by friends. A rhetoric of openness is set off against limitations and boundaries, which are



generally rejected by several interviewees. A strong example is provided by Fliege, who, when asked for his favorite music answered:

*I am very, very open because I think being limited, 'I only like this kind or this kind', I think that's too narrow. [...] I believe it is very important that one looks inside and gets out, that one can say ey, I like everything. It all touches me somehow.*

This seemingly total openness, which is not further substantiated, is later undermined by his rejection of folksy music. Asked what he thinks of folksy music or schlager, Fliege replies:

*Folksy music, I don't consider actually, that I haven't considered. [...] Well, with folksy music, that is impossible, no. That I don't understand, the ones in German. [...] No, I don't like, there I probably miss something. [...] I actually can't say that has a different level because I really don't have much knowledge on folksy music and what I have heard so far is just; really, that is impossible, not acceptable, it's only dull.*

This statement makes the emphasis on openness sound like a matter of self-presentation more than a matter of fact. By defining away the cultural elements he does not wish to explore further, Fliege seems not to realize the clear limits of the openness he is so keen to convey. This, alongside similar dialogues with a few other interviewees, makes clear that being open is an essential part of my interviewees' self-presentation, while truly liking everything remains virtually impossible. Being anti-elitist is important and some interviewees who admit to dislike something tend to apologize for that. When asked if there would be any style that she dislikes, Mary answers: "Well, I could never wear gothic. But it's not, it also fascinates me. So, still, it has something, but I would never wear it." As we can see in this quote, openness can also become evident in talk about things that are disliked. Emphasizing open-mindedness and finding something of interest in virtually everything is typical for omnivorous taste patterns and discourses (Ollivier, 2008). Different from Fliege and a couple of others, many turn out to be careful in their judgments, reflexive about the effects of dismissal and ready to take different angles.

The general value of openness turns out to be a recurring theme in the fields of music, fashion and fine arts. Also being open towards different kinds of people is valued, as Bob exemplifies: "I'm getting along very well with a lot of people. That can be entirely different people." Openness is further not only emphasized as a characteristic of the



self, but they also value other open minded people. The boundary is thus drawn towards less open or less tolerant people, as Birgit exemplifies by explaining what kind of people she dislikes: “People that are not really open to new things, or other people. I don’t like that kind of people [...] I think I dislike them for the fact that they are not open-minded.”

#### **4.4.5 On authenticity: be whatever - as long as you are yourself**

The discourses on openness and uniqueness surface throughout the interviews. It is equally evident, however, that these characteristics must come from the inside and should not appear to be pretentious. Kasper exemplifies this when he distances himself from hipsters:

*If you wanna spend much time on your appearance, go for it, but then don't try to make it like, that you just got out of bed that way. [...] go, knock yourself out, wear a crazy hat, do whatever, I'm the last one to say anything. But, for me, if it comes across fake then I'm not interested.*

He even appreciates hipster-looks, but nevertheless he rejects them for their pretentiousness. For my interviewees, experimentation and appreciating a variety of styles do not oppose authenticity. It rather shows an independence of one’s taste from hypes, groups and also friends, in short, everything outer-directed. Therefore, mixing styles and picking from a wide range enables a turn to the ‘true’, inner self. Experiments that are employed to develop the self are highly appreciated in music as well as in fashion. Fixed, prefabricated formulas and styles are seen as something from the outside, never truly original when adopted by others. Many of my interviewees tell stories about their teenage years when they tried to blend in with subcultures before they ‘got closer to themselves’. Truus elaborates:

*I wanted to be a bit alternative, because I wanted to be part of this subculture. So I tried to force myself to listen to rock and all that stuff but actually I didn't really like it. And then I was like, oh fuck that, I'm just gonna listen to these girls or men who are sitting with their guitar and singing lonesome songs which I really like. And I'm just gonna listen to George Michael because I like it and, fuck that.*

Finding oneself is a central motive when my interviewees are talking about the development of their taste. This shows how closely cultural practices and identity are related. Developing an autonomous taste is thus considered a valuable part of growing up. Similarly, authenticity is highly valued in other people, as Michael shows when he explains that he respects whatever a person stands for, as long as “they really mean what they’re doing and not just doing it for getting laid at the discotheque or something”. He strongly distances himself from attention seekers and, again, ‘being true to oneself’ is a central criterion of judgment.

Here, the connections between authenticity, openness and individuality become evident. Being authentic implies to not adhere to external restrictions and boundaries, but rather to be inner-directed. In the logic of my interviewees, this implies opening up to a wide range of people and cultural goods and by doing so creating a unique taste and style. In this way, openness allows for the creation of a unique, individual personality. As preferences are felt to come from the inside, as they should in the case of an ‘authentic’ personality, they do not fit with pre-fixed categories or styles that are created by the outside. In this logic, a truly authentic personality is individualistic. It requires openness and experimenting to ‘find’ an individual, autonomously acquired taste and ‘be’ oneself among a huge variety of cultural goods and lifestyles.

This quest for originality and individuality as expressions of an authentic persona can also be understood with Bourdieu’s concept of naturalness. Being at ease with the diversity of cultural goods, appreciating avant-garde that is different from what can be learned in educational institutions and making it one’s own, is described by Bourdieu as crucial for the conversion of differences in the acquisition of culture into what seem to be differences of nature. He speaks of the ideology of natural taste, which

*only recognizes as legitimate the relation to culture (or language) which least bears the visible marks of its genesis, which has nothing ‘academic’, ‘scholastic’, ‘bookish’, ‘affected’, or ‘studied’ about it, but manifests by its ease and naturalness that true culture is nature – a new mystery of immaculate conception.*  
(1984, p. 68)

The inauthentic following of trends is a form of ‘studied’ appreciation in the sense that it has as its external point of reference those with whom one wants to catch up. The unease of people who are ‘trying too hard’ to fit in, traditionally the petite bourgeoisie, is still discarded among the people participating in this study, even

though the substantial stakes differ from what Bourdieu referred to in a high-culture environment of France thirty years ago. But the rationality behind it is similar, as we can see in the following interview segment from Arne:

*It is difficult with fashion; there is a very fine line always. If one stresses to be fashionable, I mean, that can be very embarrassing. It is a kind of art to be somehow aware of fashion, and still cool.*

*Interviewer: What makes it embarrassing on some, and cool on others?*

*Arne: Hm, good question. I think if you are not too rigid. Thus I think if one wears it naturally, when it simply belongs to a person. When one is not too strict. Also if one doesn't think one is very cool, but just does it because one likes it.*

The 'competence of the connoisseur' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 66), an unconscious mastery of the manners of appropriation, derives from slow familiarization during socialization. Following Bourdieu, this naturalness distinguishes cultural elites from people with a lower- and middle-class background who are more likely to seek confirmation from sources outside themselves. Not being considered 'one's true self' and therefore being inauthentic can thus be seen as lacking the naturalness that is so much part of unconscious socially distinctive practices or, more generally, social and cultural boundary drawing.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Being an authentic self is not considered self-evident but instead, getting 'closer to the self' is a central motive in the interviewees' discourse. Romantic and the modern notions of authenticity are both employed. While some romantic ideas of authenticity are important in the evaluation of music and fashion, all my interviewees also appreciate experimental culture, embracing diversity in order to express their authentic selves that do not fit any existing categories. Their tolerance towards different taste-schemes in music and fashion with an emphasis on diversity resonates with earlier research on cultural omnivores. Nevertheless, the analysis has shown that here are limits to this tolerance towards the tastes of others, which is in line with finding from Ollivier (2008) and Warde et al. (2008).

Looking at the role of cultural capital, knowledge in the fields of fashion and music or 'knowing what is going on' allows people to position themselves vis-à-vis current

developments and is therefore of great importance. Mixing styles and avoiding one-dimensionality requires knowledge of styles; one has to master the cultural signs and symbols in order to skillfully play with them and to make them one's own. Personal style in that respect becomes relevant as the symbolic expression of cultural capital and an individualistic identity (Pyšňáková & Miles, 2010). However, what is central for my interviewees is not the 'ideology of the trendy', as Taylor (2009) claimed, but 'being in the know' of recent developments. Trendiness has therefore not, as Taylor argued, replaced traditional status markers. Instead, while distinctions between higher and lower class schemes blur, acceptance and appreciation of someone's taste by the culturally involved individuals interviewed for this study is based on the performance of authentic and true selves that are expressed in aesthetic preferences, manners of appreciation and naturalness in dealing with the rapid developments of our time. The analysis presented here is not measuring the amount or frequency of cultural consumption, but enables us to understand what people wish to convey. And their narratives confirm they like 'all kinds of people' and things, but critically evaluate for individuality, authenticity and openness. It is hence not so much the taste in itself (what is liked) that matters, but being part of a discourse that is perceived as authentic (how it is liked). Therefore, the choice of cultural goods itself appears to be less relevant than the narrative that is attached to it. Nevertheless, we should not forget that discursive concepts such as authenticity as naturalness, openness, as well as individuality are linked to cultural capital and positions in social space.

This study contributes to a refined understanding of authenticity as an element of boundary work. As cultural taste is only appreciated when conceived as an individual characteristic, authenticity seems the ultimate criterion of evaluation. Being authentic also involves being unique, as outer-directed, prefabricated taste and styles are condemned. It is therefore important to 'find one's own style'. While "consumers only have personal choice in the context of the parameters laid down for them by the cultural industries and thus consumer lifestyles can never be entirely unique" (Miles, 2000, pp. 143–144), it is the total image that counts. It matters less whether the individual items or accessories are bought at mainstream stores or gathered by thoroughly browsing second-hand stores. In order to succeed in constructing a seemingly unique taste-pattern, cultural knowledge is employed to give meaning to one's choices. Thus, being 'oneself' is still informed by cultural knowledge which enables a person to play with styles and provide good reasons for appreciating or disliking items. The 'hipster' fails to convincingly establish this narrative of authenticity. He might look great in the eyes of some, but for the wrong reasons since his or her style is perceived as being too much in line with the latest

trends. Being too hip here indicates a lack of personality and individual taste. This imagined hipster, just like the imagined mainstream, then is a straw man against which one can set oneself off as more authentic.

The eager cultural consumers with their concern for authenticity that have been interviewed for this study face a difficult challenge. Getting 'closer to oneself', undistracted by the outside world, is an all the more hazardous enterprise in consumer capitalism, where authenticity is mainly a marketing tool or something that can be readily bought in shops. The authenticity they seek is framed as finding one's pure taste independently of peer-groups or conventions. In this sense, self-fulfillment creates authenticity; not by being plain and simple or back to the roots, but by experimenting and idiosyncratically mixing styles and genres, as true children of their time.

## **5. Highbrow culture for high-potentials? Cultural orientations of a Business elite in the making<sup>13</sup>**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Since Bourdieu (1984), sociological interest in the relation between socio-economic status and cultural taste has increased greatly. While scholars agree cultural taste is an important status-marker, they also observe a weakening of traditional cultural boundaries and class identities. This study investigates implications for young business professionals, aspiring members of the transnational capitalist class (Sklair, 2001), who are thought to be traditionally rather conservative in their cultural taste (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 291–294). While in Bourdieu’s analysis, bourgeois taste implied preference for fully consecrated highbrow art, arguably such limited taste does not fit well with the business world of today. But what relevance does highbrow culture or cultural taste have for distinction practices of contemporary young business professionals? This paper studies the cultural tastes and boundary work of young business professionals in North-Western Europe in order to develop a more refined understanding of the practices through which distinction is exercised.

Research has long tended to capture cultural taste in surveys involving different preferences for musical genres and cultural participation. Increasingly, scholars are critical of measuring the ‘what’ of cultural taste, instead advocating a focus on the ways in which culture is being valued and consumed (e.g. Daenekindt & Roose, 2014; Holt, 1997a; Jarness, 2015; Peterson & Kern, 1996). As taste is an embodied manifestation of cultural capital, such considerations open new room for exploratory work and theorizing on cultural capital. Accordingly, this study explores how people talk about their cultural taste, which furthers our understanding of how capital is valued, how cultural capital blends with other forms of capital and how consumers use it in everyday life to distinguish themselves from others.

For this study, young managers and business professionals in the early stages of their career in multinational companies were interviewed. High potentials, as they are often called, are an especially interesting group as they entered the business world fairly recently and are not yet established. The novice position increases the chances of reflectiveness and awareness of the norms and social rules within

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<sup>13</sup> A similar version of this chapter is currently under review with *Poetics* after minor revisions

the field. As potential business elites<sup>14</sup>, they not only reveal how boundary work is practiced through cultural taste, but might also indicate which cultural styles may gain symbolic dominance over others. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this paper addresses the question: How is cultural capital reflected in the self-presentation of young business professionals and what relevance does traditional highbrow capital have to them? Further, this paper explores the relevance of cultural taste when it comes to career advancement. It will therefore address what young business professionals see as relevant factors for their own career advancement.

Cultural capital is displayed in cultural taste, but taste is not only something one 'has', but also something one 'does', i.e., a performance (Kuipers, 2006). It is therefore crucial to understand how taste is presented in social situations. Performing one's taste by embedding it in a discourse that demonstrates expertise can make the consumption style itself distinguished from 'the ordinary' or popular (Holt, 1997a). 'How' people communicate their taste links taste to the social world. While some elements of cultural taste might be over-emphasized, others remain hidden in discursive practice. The choices actors make in how to present their cultural taste are meaningful in themselves as habitus and cultural capital inform these choices. Discourse relates individual taste to norms, values and social positioning. The focus of this paper is therefore how taste is presented. Understanding the performance of taste requires engaging with the discourses that structure the performance of taste and its evaluation.

This paper is examining cultural capital as well as moral and social connections. Cultural capital is inherently connected to boundary drawing. Lamont (1992) argues researchers must consider how people demarcate themselves from others by drawing not only cultural, but also moral boundaries. Following Lamont (1992), this paper considers cultural and moral boundaries. Cultural taste becomes most relevant for distinction and social closure when it has an impact on other domains such as career advancement or social connections (social capital). This paper therefore explores connections between cultural taste and social connections.

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<sup>14</sup> In this paper and in most of the literature it cites, the term elite is used to describe relatively privileged members of the upper, and upper middle classes. I follow Scott (2003) in his definition, "[a]n elite in the fullest sense is a social grouping whose members occupy similarly advantaged command situations in the social distribution of authority and who are linked to one another through demographic processes of circulation and interaction. This can be more or less extensive" (p. 157). This paper is mostly concerned with business elites in particular, which are elites within multinational corporations.

If we conceptualize cultural capital in the Bourdieusian tradition, as capital that can be converted into other forms of capital, we need to understand how and under which conditions it is being converted into other forms of capital, i.e., which profits it generates. For this, considering people's social relations is of crucial importance. Regarding the symbolic profits of cultural capital, a varied knowledge of culture can be useful in interaction with different fields of business and relating to more diverse social networks (Erickson, 1996). Similarly, Lizardo (2006, p. 800) has shown the more avid cultural consumers are likely to sustain larger social networks and that popular culture in particular connects individuals to more distant segments of society. These studies suggest that cultural preferences are relevant in business environments too and considering that informal, social factors are important for managerial career advancement (Tharenou, 1997), this study explores the relevance of cultural taste, as an embodied form of cultural capital, for young business professionals.

The contribution of this chapter is threefold: First, it extends understandings of cultural taste as a practice, as something one 'does' by looking at how taste for music and visual arts are being presented in the interview situation. Further, it considers the relevance of cultural taste in self-presentation and bonding with other people in their professional context.

Secondly, I outline the merit of linking social and cultural capital. Though inevitably linked, most research focusses on one or the other, therefore missing how the types of capital interact with one another in various ways. For example, cultural capital can be contextualized by considering social capital as an important link between cultural taste and social life of young business-professionals. Acknowledging the importance of social relations and cultural capital's connection to social capital, this paper explores perceptions of career advancement and preferences for people. This breadth enhances our understanding of different forms of capital and thereby contributes to the discussion on 'emerging forms of cultural capital' (Prieur & Savage, 2013).

Thirdly, this paper builds on Michele Lamont's linking of cultural capital to moral judgment. It thereby explores the connections between moral and cultural boundaries and argues that we need to consider both for a deeper understanding of cultural distinction.

Below, I first discuss current conceptions of status distinction, which serve as the theoretical basis of this article. Further, I contextualize the status of business



professionals as part of the service class and high potentials. After an overview of the data collection and analysis, the results address the interviewees' tastes in music, their engagement with traditional highbrow culture, preferences for people, and their perspectives on career advancement.

## **5.2. Current conceptions of status distinction**

Scholars have investigated which cultural capital renders most prestige and how cultural objects render symbolic distinction. A common distinction is drawn between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' culture (Levine, 1988, pp. 221–222). Highbrow or legitimate culture is associated by Bourdieu (1984) with 'high', disinterested aesthetics connected to the upper classes (e.g. pp. 34-35; 53-57) and opposed to a 'popular aesthetic' which is associated with mass culture for 'ordinary people' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 32). Further, Bourdieu (1984) pointed to an aesthetic opposition between the economic and cultural fractions of the upper classes as variants of the dominant taste (1984, pp. 283–295). Here, the 'intellectuals' such as teachers being more in favor of novel, contemporary and critical culture and the 'bourgeoisie', has a taste for the luxurious and prefers fully legitimate art with 'solid values' (p. 292).

Recently, the homology between cultural hierarchies and socio-economic positions, as well as the clarity of distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture, have been questioned (e.g. Bennett et al. 2009; Peterson & Kern, 1996). Not only definitions of 'high' and 'low' culture are changing, but also a range of alternative status rendering mechanisms have been proposed (e.g. Bellavance 2008; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Prieur & Savage 2013). Omnivorous cultural taste, an inclusive or eclectic taste crossing the cultural boundaries between legitimate or highbrow and popular culture, has been proposed as more prestigious than a narrow, univorous taste (Peterson, 1992). The academic discussion long followed Bourdieu's distinction of high and low culture, to later suggest additional dimensions that seem to structure legitimacy of cultural taste: omnivore versus univore (Peterson, 1992), new versus old (Bellavance, 2008, 2016) and local versus global (Bellavance, 2016; Prieur and Savage, 2013). Building on these various dimensions of taste, research now considers the multidimensionality of cultural capital. Combining highbrow and lowbrow cultural taste is often linked to openness and cosmopolitanism, desirable traits among today's business professionals and seen as effective means of status distinction (Bellavance, 2008; Prieur et al., 2008; Warde et al., 2007)

(Bellavance, 2008; Prieur et al., 2008; Warde et al., 2007). Cultural omnivores are often described as highly educated and middle class (Warde et al., 2008), and seen as particularly open and inclusive in their mind-sets (e.g. Emmison, 2003; López-Sintas & Katz-Gerro, 2005).

In a society requiring social and geographical mobility from its skilled workers, openness and flexibility are likely to serve as important resources (Van Eijck, 2000, p. 221). Openness, among other cultural resources such as flexibility, tolerance, and the search for self-improvement, is widely appreciated among upper and middle classes and can serve as a status marker in its own right (Ollivier, 2008, p. 124). Related to openness, cosmopolitanism has recently received attention as a source of distinction. Prieur and Savage (2013, 2015) suggest it as a form of emerging cultural capital and Bühlmann et al. (2013) propose considering cosmopolitan capital as a supplementary form of capital, linking to social as well as cultural capital (p. 215). Serre and Wagner (2015) further brought forward, that cosmopolitan resources or international skills such as mastering different languages, spending time abroad and in international educational institutions interlinks economic and cultural capital (p. 441). This, they argue is an indication for change of what constitutes legitimate cultural capital, making it more dependent on economic capital. Thereby cultural capital remains a central mechanism of hierarchization, despite an increase of educational qualifications for the population at large. These developments call participation and knowledge of highbrow culture as a predominant marker of status distinction into question. Prieur and Savage (2013) suggest highbrow culture does not have a very important role in marking class distinctions today. In addition, Turner and Edmunds (2002) find that Australian elites, despite high education, lack the cultural capital to appreciate high cultural activities. They further found no indication Australian elite understands cultural capital or symbolic goods as strategically important. Instead, they display an eclectic taste without much sense of distinction (p. 234).

In contrast to these arguments for the decreasing relevance of highbrow culture for distinction, Lizardo (2006) suggests that highbrow aesthetics are still prevalent among older, upper-middle class members of Western societies. These, he argues, “engage in more difficult and demanding forms of aesthetic consumption with an eye toward using these objects to express more abstract values” (p. 783). Warde and Bennett (2008) conclude about older managerial elites in the UK: ‘If no one else does, the powerful believe that command of legitimate culture is a worthwhile form of investment’ (p. 257). Similarly, Ostrower (1998) points towards philanthropy and volunteer involvement in arts institutions as a sign of elite status in the

USA. Nevertheless, Ostrower notes these activities are not necessarily related to expertise in the arts, though prestige is associated with valuing and being involved with the arts. The diverging findings on the importance of highbrow culture among today's elites and upper middle classes may be a matter of generation, as the studies pointing towards the relevance of highbrow culture mostly focus on older elites.

Cultural capital signals proximity to some, and allows distancing from others. Signaling high status through cultural capital is relevant for the social world. Here, cultural capital connects with social capital<sup>15</sup>. The focus of most studies on status distinction has been on cultural capital, while relatively few studies have investigated the intersection of cultural and social capital (Erickson, 1996; Li et al., 2015; Lizardo, 2006; Mark, 1998). Denord et al. (2011) have recently put forward social capital as the basis for other forms of capital among established Norwegian elites. As informal, social factors are of central importance for managerial career advancement (Tharenou, 1997), we should consider the connections between cultural and social capital in order to increase understanding of social distinction practices.

Current theorists agree cultivating social relations often requires resources (Li, 2015, p. 11). Cultural taste is important for building and maintaining these social relations. Exploring how cultural taste affects social relationships, Edelmann and Vaisey (Edelmann & Vaisey, 2014) find that shared music taste as well as non-consumption (not listening certain genres) can facilitate the development to strong relationships. Erickson (1996) argues it is highly relevant in the private sector to coordinate a wide range of people from different classes and such coordination might encourage an interest in 'common' culture. Van Eijck and Mommaas (2004) found private sector employees are more avid consumers of popular culture in contrast to civil servants who consume more highbrow culture, even after controlling for cultural and economic capital. Different sectors thus appear to emphasize different forms of culture. Different roles within an organization seem to correlate with different forms of culture, as Erickson (1996) showed. Similarly, Lizardo (2006) provides evidence that popular culture taste has positive effects on an individual's weak ties, while highbrow culture may increase strong ties. Comprehensive taste may therefore be useful, especially in the upper-middle class, where people deal with a broad professional network or international colleagues.

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<sup>15</sup> Social capital, following Bourdieu (1986, p. 21), is the aggregate of the resources linked to a person's social network. Volume depends on the size of the network one can mobilize and overall capitals (e.g. prestige, power, wealth) of one's network.

### 5.2.1 Contextualizing the 'high potentials'

Young business professionals are part of the professional-managerial class that 'contains managers and professionals and supervisory employees of virtually every kind and most owner-managers and business partners. It lies below owners and higher executives of large organizations and above ordinary employees' (Glover & Hughes, 1996) While their roles vary between sectors, companies and nations, the definition encompasses all business professionals in this transnational study. Some are aware they are seen as high potentials by the company they work for, junior employees expected to move up within the company quickly (Burke, 1997). The term implies a sense of elitism, people with a supposedly greater potential to achieve in their career; they are defined by possibility that is yet to be confirmed by actual achievement. High potentials are characterized by a fast, upward movement through various roles in the firm, special opportunities and a career closely monitored by human resources (Dries & Pepermans, 2007). Probably in line with these descriptions, Khan (2012) observes a cultural shift in elite identity that frames today's elites, rather than as a class, as the 'best and brightest' individuals who work hard and get ahead. This description is in line with how Bourdieu (1996) describes the new 'business nobility', often conceptualized as managers instead of owners (p. 320), even if they originate from the same class (p. 335).

High potentials mostly work for large organizations and thereby fall broadly under what Whyte (1957/2013) described as 'organization man', a worker deeply committed to obeying the rules and principles of seemingly rational organizations because s/he finds a deep sense of belonging in them. He (or she) develops a collective identity as part of a large organization and, according to Whyte, holds the Protestant ethic high by pursuing 'individual salvation through hard work, thrift, and competitive struggle' (p. 4). The organizational environment, among many other things, has changed since Whyte's time; companies globalized, more women entered the field, organizational structures and production changed and commitment to specific organizations declined. Nowadays, professionals switch organizations frequently, (Savage, Dickens, & Fielding, 1988), supposedly take more responsibility for cultivating their networks, and careers are considered rather 'boundaryless' (e.g. Arthur & Rousseau, 2001, p. 11), even though this notion remains contested in the literature (Dries & Pepermans, 2007). However, while career trajectories seem individualized and less bound to one specific organization, the ethic of commitment to professional identity and control of corporate culture through management remains relevant (e.g. Kunda, 2009).

The business professionals interviewed here might be the contemporary form of 'organization-men'. The competitiveness in their field and their own ambition and commitment encourage them to use available resources to advance their career. This study sets out to explore what these resources are and what role cultural and social capital might play.

### **5.3. Methods and data**

To understand the meaning and relevance of arts appreciation and the different status rendering criteria in taste performance, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The main purpose of interviewing young business professionals in the early stages of a management career in multinational companies was to gain a deeper understanding of a group being socialized into corporate culture, i.e., those with the potential and ambition to become part of the business elite. Criterion sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 112-113) was applied; interviewees worked in a multinational company, graduated from a European university, held their occupational position less than five years and were currently based in North-Western Europe. To create a sample covering a range of business fields, graduates of a prestigious international management program were approached first. Their program is consistently ranked among worldwide top 10 masters in management of the financial Times in the last five years ("Business school rankings from the Financial Times - FT.com," 2016). Contacting participants through their alumni network was not permitted; therefore, I used several social media platforms and my personal network to establish initial contact. Especially as they live across several countries, widely used social media platforms turned out to be an efficient and sensible way to identify and contact potential participants without formal address databases. Snowball sampling, which Lindlof and Taylor (2011, p. 114) describe as "sometimes the best way to reach an elusive, hard-to-recruit population", was additionally used, enabling further recruitment. Semi-structured interviews allow for covering specific topics, while remaining flexible (e.g. Wengraf, 2001). The interviews evolved around leisure time activities and cultural taste, with a focus on music and the arts as well as apparel. Further, the interviewees' current position, education and preferences for people were discussed. To analyze the interview data, I used discourse analysis as elaborated in chapter 3.3 on the analysis.

About half of the interviews were face-to-face, the other half via telephone and Skype for practical reasons. Excluding the introduction and warming-up phase, the interviews lasted 45 to 88 minutes. There was no systematic difference in length between face-to-face, telephone and Skype interviews.

In the sample, I aimed for a variety of business sectors and about equal representation of men (11) and women (10). All interviewees hold a Bachelor's degree (most obtained a Masters) in business, economics, tax and financial law, business administration, a management program or a combination of these (for a full list of participants see Appendix B). Thirteen interviewees completed an international management program, which involved student exchange and an international internship. Within the program, they specialized in different areas such as finance or marketing. Several completed a double master degree; others first completed a different master degree and added international management afterwards. The others hold similar degrees in economics, financial or tax law. Most entered their multinational companies through a trainee position.

While it is not certain who of this group will ultimately establish him- or herself successfully in this environment, most interviewees attended traineeship programs in multinational companies or entered as associates who are expected to 'move up' into higher levels within a certain time. Some have already been promoted and all of them see themselves moving up into (at least somewhat) higher positions in the future. Most interviewees originate from middle and upper middle class families. Among their largely well-educated parents are many teachers (especially among the mothers), public servants, entrepreneurs, but also bankers, a few engineers, diplomats, managers and CEOs of mid-sized companies. At the time of the interview, interviewees were aged 25 to 31 years. Most were not fully "settled", being ready to change location, city and routines. None of them had children and only two were married.

While some interviewees come from bi-national families, most have spent the larger share of their childhood in Northern Europe. Only Lydia came from Peru to Europe as a young adult for her education and Monique came to Europe as a teenager. All interviewees received their professional education and socialization into the business world in Northern Europe. Although most originated from North-Western Europe, the sample is overall very international in their backgrounds as well as their professional orientation. Most were on international student exchange; did internships abroad or have worked as expats. Some already started moving countries during their childhood years, following the careers of their parents. All travel for

their jobs at least occasionally and they find their way around wherever their job requires them to be. As globalized professionals they are part of the transnational capitalist class (Sklair, 2001) and live in a transnational corporate sphere, in varying degrees attached to Northern European localities. While interactions between this transnational sphere and local culture would be an interesting study subject in itself, the interviewees in this study have too diverse relations with locality to study this relation in a meaningful way.

## 5.4 Analysis

With 40 to 90 hours of work per week, the interviewees' leisure time is limited, as many indicated. Interviewee Leo exemplifies this in the following excerpt: "Unfortunately, I don't have much spare time. I try to use my leisure time to meet friends, use the time to do things together". Interviewees value spending time with friends, visiting abroad, going out for dinners or drinks. While some are still in close contact with friends from high school, all interviewees also made friends at university, while traveling and through work events. Some take pride in their diverse networks such as Paul who works as a tax and legal consultant:

*I think I really have a sensible circle of friends. Through all social layers and all jobs, from welfare to bicycle repair to construction worker to boat builder to management consultant.*

Others have less diverse networks. Talking about his friends, John explains:

*They are also mainly people that work for; yeah, they are working in business or ... something with a university background often. Well, its friends from football so you have an interest together, friends from the company here, so you have colleagues and you build a relationship here.*

Most interviewees are very active in sports. Some frequent the gym several times a week and others train for marathons. Next to sports, traveling, eating out and having drinks with friends are frequently named leisure activities. Next, 'interviewees' discourse on music taste, cultural socialization is discussed. Further, their engagement with visual arts is presented. In order to understand the relevance of their cultural taste in the field of business, the analysis concludes by discussing their perception of important factors in career development.



### 5.4.1 Music taste in everyday life

For most of the interviewees, music does not take a central place in their lives. They listen to music while traveling, doing household tasks and at work. While some show more commitment to music, for about half of them music is a pleasant way to fill silence, a tool for relaxation and mood management (DeNora, 2000), but the specific genres or artists are not very important to them. Tom, for example, does not care much about information about music and openly discloses this:

*I know very little about names of bands or names of songs. I listen mostly to the radio. I would almost say my preference would be easily accessible, music that is fairly easily accessible and easy to digest. So it can be very poppy music.*

This excerpt indicates that displaying a specific or refined taste is unimportant for Tom. He openly displays his taste for the 'easily accessible', even though with the subtle limitation of 'almost'. This, similarly to it 'can be poppy', distances him from general pop while he brings up no other music either. Further, he openly admits his lack of expertise and the ordinariness of his taste. He elaborates:

*I like music with a singer, male or female doesn't matter, and lyrics. Sort of the typical idea of a song. And they can be both pop with more electronic music ahm, and with synthesizers or just classic rock music with just the guitar and drums etcetera.*

This excerpt describes popular music without much edge, experimentalism or any other highbrow characteristics that resembles highbrow discourse. Most of the interviewees appreciate this classical form and structure of a pop song with 'some passion' (John). They do not hesitate to call their taste 'poppy' (Horst) and seek harmony in the songs. In contrast to the interviewees, avoiding to categorize one's own music taste as 'mainstream' is often a central concern of young people highly involved with culture (Michael, 2015). Distinguishing oneself from commercial or popular taste is often seen in the Bourdieusian tradition as a disposition of the upper classes (Bourdieu, 1984; and recently Atkinson, 2011). When asked what music they like, many interviewees emphasize eclecticism in their taste:

*I listen to everything, well, not everything. I like to think it's good music, but it can be anything from the 60s to, I like the 80s a lot, 80s music, I listen to rap music sometimes, eh, but I could also listen to classical music.*  
(Rafiqué)



Next to a discourse of openness towards different genres, 'good music' remains relatively unspecific here. Some interviewees enjoy concerts and festivals with friends as a social activity, but apart from this, their current music taste is framed as something private, not necessarily shared. When asked if she shares her musical taste with her friends, Louise explains:

*Honestly, we don't talk about it that much [...] I have some friends from whom I know that they share this love for [dance] festival music. Those are also the people that I go to these festivals with. But otherwise, we might talk about a song that is really nice at the moment, but we don't really discuss our musical preferences.*

Here, Louise defines music by its context rather than inherent characteristics. Similarly, talking about songs that are 'really nice at the moment', emphasizes the temporality of the hit over lasting engagement with a song or specific artist. For most other interviewees too, music is not a common theme in everyday conversations. Several interviewees are not sure what music their friends are listening to at home. Accordingly, music taste does not play a central role in bonding with peers. Nevertheless, peers played (at least in the younger age of most interviewees) a role in the development of musical taste. Lydia, who comes from a lower middle class background in Peru and financed her studies with scholarships, reflects upon the changes of her own music taste during her studies:

*From very Latin, lots of Latino music, I listened to much Reggaeton, this kind of stuff. Over time, maybe this is also something psychological, over time and with the friends at the university, we went, instead of to the club where you would mainly listen to Charts, they rather went to the club with more House, Electro, a little like that. House, bit more posh party.*

She continues to describe and reflect on a variety of different parties in her study program:

*They really tend to throw this kind of party, you have to overdress a little, such a party, 'please don't come in jeans', because everyone would ask, 'what did you wear today?'; or 'what are you wearing today', but dresses, yes.*

*Interviewer: How come, what do you think?*

*Lydia: [...] I don't know, maybe it is about the elite atmosphere.*

She socialized into a more elite or upper class culture and is aware how her music listening practices changed through secondary musical socialization (Rimmer, 2012). Further, this excerpt makes clear she is very aware of expected behavior (e.g. wearing a dress and not listening to Reggaeton). Interestingly, she marked the chart music as different from what her classmates would listen to at parties, so despite many interviewees' nondiscriminatory stance towards pop, Lydia noticed a subtle preference for house over Charts.

A few interviewees appear more deeply involved with music than the others, display a lot of knowledge and are passionate about specific genres or artists. Several interviewees, however, recognize they became less invested in music at the end of their study period and start of their professional career. Anne reflects:

*As a youngster I was more busy with music; I searched for music, uploaded on my iPod or, because you search for your own music. [...] I hardly use my iTunes, but I have super old music on it, cause I don't actively use it at all at the moment*

Anne is not alone feeling too busy to keep up with new music. Eugene and Horst used to play music in bands themselves but stopped due to their demanding jobs, which prevented them from regularly attending rehearsals and gigs.

Despite the rather casual engagement with music many interviewees openly declare, music taste is associated with boundary drawing towards people. Eugene, for example, names a case where he did not like people associated with certain music:

*I am pretty open with my music taste, heavy rock is the only thing that annoys me. And maybe hipster music, lots of synth and things like that, I think it's a bit stupid. But that's partly probably because of the people who often associate themselves with it. [...] People who often listen to that kind of techno-synth music, typically tend to take themselves quite seriously. I guess I don't like being associate with that particular music-sense. That's probably part of the reason why I don't like the music.*

Despite the general discourse of being 'pretty open', Eugene draws boundaries not only on the basis of the music but the attitude of 'taking themselves quite seriously'. While a range of interviewees listen to music that diverges from Tom's description of a classical pop song, there is a common distance from musical genre related to strong subcultural identities. All but one interviewee frequently distance

themselves from the ‘heavy’ or ‘hardcore’, indicating a distance from subcultures, ‘extreme’ scenes or aggressiveness in music. The latter plays out in their rejection of heavy metal, rough techno, or punk. Eugene elaborates on his disliking of heavy rock: “It’s just not very melodic; and the lyrics are often quite aggressive and I think it’s all very self-involved.” Self-involvement is a criticism that points to a moral rather than aesthetic boundary (cf. Bryson, 1996). While most interviewees repeatedly emphasize their general openness when it comes to music, not being aggressive, extreme or subcultural appears relevant to most. The rejection of aggressiveness links to rejection of anything ‘strange’ and ‘weird’, non-conformist and possibly deviant. Otherwise, we mostly see rather ‘mild’ boundary drawing. Rafiqué, for instance carefully rejects Dutch, folksy music:

*Don’t know, maybe some form of respect; I don’t actively dislike anything really because well, if people like it, they like it. [...] I don’t listen to it, if someone would pop it on in my car I would switch it off immediately and put something else on. So, I don’t like Levenslied<sup>16</sup>, let’s call it like that.’*

He remains respectful to the music’s admirers and does not condemn styles in general, but distances himself on an individual, ‘not for me’ basis. While expertise in music is not central for how most interviewees present their taste, moral boundaries appear to be quite relevant. A desire to fit in and appear ‘normal’ is expressed in the rejection of subcultural music.

## 5.4.2 Cultural socialization

Some interviewees mention they enjoy listening to classical music, while they approach genres traditionally conceptualized as highbrow in a similar manner to popular music. Many only express their taste for classical music very generally and cannot describe particular styles, time periods or composers they prefer. Classical music is often utilized for relaxation or to support focus on work. Though Paul and Rafiqué show a deeper involvement with classical music, several interviewees grew up listening to it. Similar to findings in earlier research, (e.g. Li, Savage, & Warde, 2015), some interviewees see the connection to their parents’ cultural participation and reflect on how their parents cultivated their cultural taste. Barbara explains:

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<sup>16</sup> Dutch folksy music

*My mother had a great, great love for ballet, theater, opera. I think my mother respectively cultivated a certain interest in me. My father would surely join, but he maybe wasn't as excited as she was.*

Barbara emphasizes her parents used to take her to the theater. Similarly, Rafiqué feels greatly influenced by his mother's love for painting and his brothers' involvement in music. Next to the examples of parents being involved with highbrow culture, other interviewees feel they developed their cultural taste rather independently from their parents and in later age as we see for instance in the example of Lydia above. Andreas reflects that he started to listen to music intensively when he was in high school:

*Music wasn't that much for me then, it was more for my sister, she always prepared all the mix tapes for when we were going on a holidays [...] During high-school I really started, and I started to listen to music all the time. Always when I was on my bike and stuff like that.*

*Interviewer: Hmhm, and your parents, did they listen to music?*

*Andreas: Not that much, no. [...] In the car we almost never had music, at home we almost never played music. So, no, I think it really came from myself and my friends and not from my parents.*

Andreas thus fits the notion of secondary musical socialization, developing his passion for music in his teenage years.

Other interviewees still actively draw on the cultural knowledge acquired in their childhood:

*Leo: Every now and then, I very much enjoy listening to classical music.*

*Interviewer: Do you have specific artists [...] or how do you select?*

*Leo: I think I listen rather to the pieces that I quite like, for example, the four seasons, a classic that I simply like to listen to. Or the Moldau, I like to listen to, it's rather always the pieces which I know that I then simply listen to.*

*Interviewer: I understand. What do you know them from?*

*Leo: In general, I know them from home, from my parents.*

While not all interviewees mention that they would listen to classical music, generally liking or appreciating classical music is produced as a subtle norm as Julia's example reflects:

*I recently watched the philharmonic on television but I have to admit actually, [...] I go to concerts, but at a real, really classical concert I have never been. Which is a bit embarrassing I have to admit, if one is living in Vienna.*

Julia's embarrassment indicates that she should have attended classical music concerts. The 'really classical' implies that she almost has. There is thus an underlying idea that attending classical music is desirable. Another area of culture that is traditionally considered morally and aesthetically superior are visual art culture. In the following section, we will look at the discourse on highbrow culture more closely.

### **5.4.3 Engagement with visual arts**

This chapter will pay special attention to the fine arts as they are often regarded as a central marker of high social status in western societies (Roose, 2015, p. 558) Most interviewees, asked if they were interested in art, focused their answer at first on the fine arts and art museums. In regards to the fine arts, traditional social norms regarding highbrow culture do surface occasionally. Asked if he was interested in the arts, Maximilian answered:

*Hmm, medium. Well actually yes, but maybe, I think to be honest, more to calm my consciousness, ehm, that I am in fact a cultured person (laughs). Well, I do like to; I go to the museum. I am not really a person for modern art but rather older arts where I believe it really was truly an art to paint these things. [...] But, it is difficult to make anyone among my friends enthusiastic and therefore, well, yeah.*

Not only does this excerpt reveal hesitation in terms of his own intrinsic interest, it suggests the lack of enthusiasm among his friends keeps him from participating in the arts (more). Nevertheless, the 'well, yeah' indicates this is not considered a very strong argument. The preference for 'older arts' fits with Bourdieu's (1984) conception of traditional bourgeois' taste for established, fully consecrated art representing 'solid values'. Explicitly aspiring to be 'cultured' is unique to Maximilian in this sample, but appears in some other interviews in a more subtle form. A rather basic connection to traditional culture is often established during childhood. Lena-Maria, who states to have very little interest in the arts, says:

*Of course I was in the Louvre sometime, these are such standard things that one has done. Sure. [...] I believe particular cultural assets, they belong to good education. But no, I've never been in the museum in Düsseldorf.*

The 'standard things' indicates social convention. Despite a vague notion of highbrow cultural background, it does not play an active part in her everyday life today. Many interviewees express their openness to visiting concerts, museums or exhibitions if someone else would organize or initiate. However, this does not say much about their own cultural taste or drive but rather their participation in a discourse that presents oneself as open, active and sociable. Visiting the most famous museums is still a common cultural activity, especially during city trips. Andreas, who emphasizes not to know much about arts elaborates:

*I can't remember when I went to a museum with only paintings.. oh yeah I did. Ehm, last summer I went to.. what's it called, Le Louvre, in Paris, in Paris with friends. But just because we were traveling through Paris and we were like well, 'we should do this'. And I was very thankful that they had these blue and red paths on the floor which showed you the Mona Lisa and the Venus of Milo [...]. But we saw those two things and then went out because it was too crowded.*

*Interviewer: (Chuckles), so you followed the path and then went out..*

*A: Yes, exactly, and then we looked at it for one minute and went. ja, no I'm not that [into] art.*

Andreas here acknowledges the social desirability of visual art attendance, yet in how he practices his apparently rare encounters, he highlights the convenience of footpaths making the art works easy to find and his visit rather efficient. He chooses to prioritize the most famous objects in the museum but decides to leave 'because it was too crowded'. His rhetoric suggests not a visit out of interest in the arts, but rather social convention. Interestingly, following this convention does not appear to require engagement with actual art works or knowledge of the arts.

With a few exceptions, most interviewees report to visit art museums or exhibitions occasionally, while a few go on a regular basis. Most of those attending art exhibitions and enjoying it do not claim any expertise:

*I like looking at paintings but I am not actually somebody who... likes total art analysis or something like that. I am for example simply a big fan of Monet, but it is not the case that I am an expert there with all the different time periods in which they have lived. (Est)*

Monet may be considered mainstream highbrow, being one of the most popular painters and reproduced on countless post-cards, calendars and posters. This preference could be considered a sign of middle-brow culture or cultural goodwill, the disposition Bourdieu (1984, p. 319) ascribed to the *petite bourgeoisie*. Cultural goodwill is based on a gap between knowledge and recognition, legitimate culture is acknowledged but the 'right' knowledge about it is absent (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 319-323). It evolves around the minor, 'light' forms of legitimate culture (p. 326) and combines an avid and anxious attachment to legitimate culture, which is not made for the middle class (pp. 326-327). The interviewees' discourse here might fit the idea of middlebrow taste, similar to Turner and Edmunds' (2002) findings on Australian elites: a popular version of highbrow culture. While knowledge about context and symbolic meanings is considered indispensable for apprehending highbrow culture, Est openly acknowledges she cannot be bothered with a more intellectual approach involving the context or analysis of the paintings. She does not like 'total art analysis' and openly declares that she is not an expert, which partly opposes the idea of cultural goodwill. Being straightforward avoids being pretentious or anxious (Bourdieu 1984, p. 327). Simultaneously, her engagement with the visual arts offers little potential for distinction or in-depth conversation.

The styles of art the interviewees prefer vary, but many prefer classical paintings over contemporary paintings:

*I like paintings by Van Gogh, Dali, in which you can really see skill and expertise and detail and that really shows, this took me more than one afternoon; I worked a month or even years on this painting. [...] I like it when people work really hard [...]. Sometimes the modern art feels for me; it feels like actually just throwing some paint on a canvas and it's done. Probably also because I don't understand it, I'm not, yeah, not really good with that.*  
(Andreas)

Here, the effort put into a painting is the feature most appreciated. Andreas relates to the work ethic (working really hard), appreciating craftsmanship over aesthetic or expressive qualities. While the expression 'throwing some paint on a canvas' is quite derogatory, he is nevertheless careful with his judgement about modern art by referring to his own non-expertise. He openly acknowledges art is an intellectual endeavor is either irrelevant or inaccessible to him. His frankness indicates it is socially acceptable for him to know very little about the arts. Apart from craftsmanship, beauty is another criterion to which interviewees resort while it is considered irrelevant in contemporary aesthetic debates. As Barbara elaborates:



*I can simply not relate much to this modern stuff sometimes to be honest. It's often too abstract for me. [...] in Munich, there is this [...], I forgot the name again, a permanent contemporary art exhibition with a bathtub full of fat. In general, I have more difficulty with that than when I see a beautiful painting. Well, beautiful I also define through it being simply artistically much work to produce such a portrait and apply diverse layers of oil. Well, that I find personally more fascinating than to construct a spider web were I would think well, I could have made that as well.*

Beauty is a relevant evaluation criterion for her, more so than concept. Barbara further evaluated the art on basis of the work that was for the painter. Here, it appears that the work ethic of the artist is assessed and connected to the aesthetic value of the artwork. Work ethics are an interesting moral boundary applied to the artistic product. The immediate, maybe non-highbrow approach to art is also visible in interviewees who appreciate other cultural genres. Louise, for example, connects different genres to different places:

*Normally I really like photography, and I like this renaissance art a lot, [...] or the fashion history of Jean Paul Gaultier or Chanel. I'm not sure whether it's 100% art but I like it, I think it's one of the best forms of relaxation. Also when I'm away for a weekend [...], I really like going to museums to get some new inspiration.*

These statements indicate taste of the visual arts is approached in a similar manner as other cultural genres; not a traditional highbrow discourse but rather a display of general open-mindedness with immediate enjoyment. The interviewees openly do not put much effort into interpreting art, but utilize artworks for relaxation, inspiration and entertainment. Tom exemplifies how some interviewees appreciate contemporary art but this too does not imply contextual knowledge about the arts:

*It's... too hard to say that I have no interest in art, ehm... But I'm not actively looking to discover or learn about art in my free time. But for me art is probably mostly something that I experience when I'm traveling, when you go and visit museums of famous artworks. [...] I realize very well some pieces of art move me more than others, [...]when I went to the modern section with more abstract art [...] and as soon as somebody starts explaining it, then I actually find it a lot more interesting and also prettier actually too, like: that I would put in my house.*



Tom's engagement with art is very immediate. The experience is enriched when somebody introduces him to the artworks. He is attracted by the fame of certain museums and artworks. Visiting a famous museum is part of sightseeing in a new city. Many interviewees enjoy having artworks explained in a tour of the museum or audio-guides, but most do not indicate great interest. Concurrently, they show few signs of discomfort with their lack of knowledge as Bourdieu's concept of cultural goodwill would suggest. Also, in contrast to the 'culturally homeless' upwardly mobile comedy consumers in a study by Friedman (2012), the young business professionals in this study do not lack the sense of ease of the middle-class or upwardly mobile. It appears legitimate to not be very involved in highbrow culture. While being cultured seems desirable and morally good, they do not refer to strong norms emphasizing the importance of visual arts or other traditional highbrow culture. Occasional art museum visits are often instigated by the social networks of the interviewees. Friends suggest going or the company arranges outings into art exhibitions. Most interviewees thus do not actively seek contact with the art world but see themselves as open to most cultural experiences. Their general openness is frequently mentioned, but does not imply a deep engagement with the artworks. Jack elaborates:

*My girlfriend bought this museum-card where you have access to all museums. [...] But we only went to two or three museums. Uh, but, not really interested in art, [...] it's not that I dislike it. But, it's not that I have a special interest for it. Not that I go for three hours to watch it, to see what it looks like [...]. If I would say sports or art, I would definitely go for sport. Sports and music instead of art.*

Without being confronted with a choice in the interview, Jack clearly prioritizes sports and music over museum visits. Eugene stands out with openly not displaying any interest. Asked if he was interested in arts he answered: "I'd go if someone wants to go, like you know, if a girl I'm seeing is really interested I'll pretend to be interested, but I'm not. I'm not personally interested at all." Apart from adjusting his taste to fit with a female, Eugene is not hesitant to show his disinterestedness in the arts.

Most interviewees pay occasional visits to art museums, especially if it is a social activity or part of a city trip. Photography is something that most interviewees enjoy, but overall the visual arts are not very prevalent in their leisure time or networks. Again, most do not claim any expertise but rather engage with the arts in an open, little informed and experience-focused manner. A few interviewees show deeper

engagement with some fields of art. Only three interviewees do not comment on their lack of expertise in visual arts. Rafiqué, for instance, read many art books and appreciates both abstract and classical art besides photography. Among the few who declare a deeper interest in the arts are Nina and Monique who used to be (semi) professional dancers and maintain this interest.

Overall, knowledge in the domain of highbrow art seems hardly relevant for the business professionals interviewed. Their cultural tastes are rarely the topic of conversation. We can infer that highbrow cultural consumption is not central in most of the interviewees' lives and offers hence little potential of binding this group together. Considering their career ambitions and drive, it is important to investigate how, if not through shared cultural taste, they bond with others.

Possibly, among this group with high levels of institutionalized cultural capital, social capital takes a more central role and similarities in dispositions are less defined through cultural taste than other characteristics. In the following, the focus will therefore be on what the interviewees considered important factors in career-development.

#### **5.4.4 Central factors in career development**

Considering the interviewees' ambitions, most do not draw the picture of themselves as CEOs of big companies. For now, most focus on the next, concrete step: the next level up, a move abroad, taking responsibility for a team or aiming for more strategic roles. They are willing to continue showing great commitment, work long hours, and change departments or country of residence. In order to explore the relevance of cultural taste for their careers, I asked the interviewees what factors they consider important for a successful career in their field. The interviewees agree that smartness, drive and continuous job performance are key. "I think working hard and having common sense. And not being a dick" as Eugene states. Several interviewees emphasize the importance of both analytic and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, being eloquent and charming, able to build trust and networks matter. Moving up within the company is easier through networks and personal contacts that think of the junior staff when a position opens. Good communication and impression management are therefore crucial, as Louise explains:

*It's very important that you have your network and your connection and that you talk to the right people in order to make things happen for you. [...] They have to take you under their wing and you have to make sure that you are in conversation with them, to let them know what you want and where you see yourself.*

In a competitive environment with upwardly striving co-workers, communicating 'where you see yourself' implies confidence in one's own entitlement to a 'higher' position. Further, friendliness (Sarah) and social proximity are relevant for bonding and play out in shared interests as Rafiqué explains:

*There's the general director and he used to be a professional soccer player. So people who tend to like soccer and hang out with him and talk about football and go play soccer with them; they tend to move up more quickly in the company. [...]. I'm not saying that because I didn't get a promotion because I did actually. But yeah, you have to have the same interest. But also bring great results. There are some people who get a promotion and there I think the friendship was more important than the results.*

This sentiment is shared by many interviewees and points to the importance of informal social capital. In line with the interviewees' perceptions, Wayne et al. (1999) showed the impact of supervisor sponsorship and mentoring on promotability and salary of employees. High quality exchange with supervisors tends to increase career success. Informal relations are central for promotions and career negotiations (Liff & Ward, 2001). Social skills and communicating your own successes are also relevant, as many interviewees have learned:

*At first I thought if I do a good job, the others will notice. But this is not always the case. [...] If you don't communicate with others and tell them what you can do, this self-marketing, then, you don't get any further. (Lydia)*

Further, Maximilian describes the importance of getting along well with colleagues and senior management:

*If you are getting along well with these persons and with the colleagues, things will be much easier. There was a person working here earlier, a colleague who only lived up to the task; she was pretty strict, always just assigned tasks, finished them, ticked the boxes and so forth. She didn't really make many friends and also didn't move up but mostly received push-backs*

*from the colleagues because nobody felt up for it really [...]. They didn't feel comfortable with how they were treated and practically negated her.*

*Interviewer: Does that mean they wouldn't want to promote someone who they didn't want to have around?*

*Maximilian: Exactly.*

Later, he reflects on conversations with management:

*Workwise it is very important, we do talk relatively much about work but then, once you know each other a bit better you also talk about private things. But mostly actually you talk about work casually.*

*Interviewer: I sometimes heard that soccer is important, is that a bonding topic as well?*

*Maximilian: No, not with me, I am not interested in soccer at all. [...] But yes, many .. Many talk about soccer and I don't know much about it and therefore I cannot participate in the conversation. [...] but technology, we have an affinity for technology.*

Talking soccer is thus not a 'must', yet many interviewees reflect on sports being a common topic of conversation. Shared work experiences, common interest in travels, and shared humor are other aspects pointed out by interviewees as important topics of conversation that contribute to bonding. When talking about making connections to managers, it becomes clear bonding does not usually happen through shared interest in culture such as music or arts. Overall, finding a common conversation topic appears to be key, as Paul reflects on common themes:

*Soccer, vacation and ... these were the main things I believe. With these you always pass. [...] Depending on who you talk to; if you talk with the secretaries, then you score with RTL2<sup>17</sup>, if you, I don't know; if you talk to the art-loving partner then you could maybe tell whichever and; but with soccer you always get on well actually. Or political, but then cheap politics somehow, not too deep. But no, better not.*

Paul demonstrates omnivorous flexibility in small talk, adjusting his conversation to the person he is talking to. Similarly, Erickson (1996, p. 249) has noted that in management, 'the most useful overall cultural resource is variety plus a well-honed

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<sup>17</sup> RTL2 is a privately owned commercial television channel in Germany, which is known for broadcasting reality television shows.

understanding of which genre to use in which setting'. Similarly, Kilduff and Day (1994) show that self-monitoring personalities who adopt their behavior to their surroundings are more likely to achieve promotions.

Spending time with colleagues outside work hours is common; Friday after-work drinks, dinners with colleagues or visiting managers from other departments or offices abroad. Monique explains the importance of spending evenings with the visiting marketing director:

*Showing him that you can work hard and play hard, that's something that's really valued. So, it's also being fun until the (laughingly) early hours of the morning and then still being very result-oriented and professional the next day, is something you need to be really good at. [...]. Of course, you should stay true to yourself, and I'm definitely staying true to myself.*

Being 'fun' can be important, yet overdoing the networking and trying too hard would be inauthentic and not appreciated. Besides social activities with co-workers, some interviewees point to a separation between business and private life. Lena-Maria for example, adopted for herself the motto 'stay friendly but don't be friends,' as she has learned that colleagues are also competitors. Sharing private matters can therefore not only disturb valuable focus on work tasks, but also create vulnerability.

A common theme to career development is being liked by 'the right people' and communicating own ambition to them. All granted that a person performs well in his or her job. Interestingly, these ideas were shared by people through different sectors. While interviewees in marketing suspected the mechanisms that would fuel careers might be different in finance, interviewees in finance would bring up the same issues. Social capital might not only be the network of people a person knows, but the ability to benefit from this network depends on personal sympathy. Here, cultural resources in a broad sense and social capital interlink.

Considering the importance of networks, social capital, it is worthwhile to consider what character traits the interviewees value, which people they bond with and whom they set themselves apart from. Asked what kind of people the interviewees value, honesty, reliability, intelligence, friendliness, passion and fun are very frequently mentioned. Having goals and striving for self-improvement are important to the interviewees and some expect no less of other people. Richard explicitly reflects about his friends in relation to these goals:

*I want my friends also to inspire me and give me energy. [...] I like to really talk about the future, being ambitious and knowing where to go to instead of just talking about the gym all day or about issues in life that are really not important for your career or personal development. But, I don't really have a lot of friends like that [laughs].*

Here, we see a boundary towards the less ambitious. Similar to Lamont's (1992) findings, moral and social-economic boundaries are interlinked. Many interviewees dislike insincerity, entitlement, self-centeredness and arrogance. Further, people who have 'drive' and 'try to make the most out of it' (Andreas) are appreciated. Horst elaborates:

*They shouldn't pretend to be someone else, so they should be authentic I think; honest, real. [...]*

*I don't like people who complain a lot and don't do things with it, you know, 'this is bad and that is bad', but in the end you just let it happen and don't do anything about it. [...] I think people in general should be dedicated to something, have a focus on that and go for it.*

Distancing themselves from less focused people who are not trying to achieve much, implies moral boundaries with the potential of large implications for interaction with wider strata of society. At the same time, the interviewees would not explicitly discriminate against lower achievers, but rather people that are not trying to 'make the best out of it'. They show little understanding for people without much ambition or who are 'lazy' and 'complaining'. This finding resonates with Lamont's (1992) analysis of members of upper-middle class who deeply value a strong work ethic and commitment to the job.

## **5.5. Discussion and conclusion**

The interviewees in this study often describe their cultural involvement as a social activity rather than an active choice for culture. They indeed do not have much need for snobbism (Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005) and fit with what Ollivier (2008) indicates as the new elites. Being open towards new cultural experiences is important and they value this characteristic in others. The discourse of the interviews displays a general openness for participating in various cultural

activities, enjoying museums on a city trip and listening to several musical genres. This openness functions as a resource enabling them to bond with others, but it does not reflect connoisseurship or knowledge about the arts. By appreciating hard working artists and people in general while drawing boundaries towards the 'weird', 'aggressive' and lazy, the young business professionals engage in a rather moral assessment of culture. While some interviewees assessed visual arts on their beauty, the effort the artist put into them was a relevant evaluation criterion to many. Here, aesthetic and moral boundaries overlap.

Culture here is not evaluated as 'pure' with Kantian disinterestedness, but described and utilized as a resource for relaxation, entertainment and appreciation of artists' efforts. The nonchalance most interviewees displayed in admitting little knowledge of visual arts or classical music indicates it is socially acceptable for them to not possess much highbrow cultural capital. There is, at least within the interviews, little indication this will change when they mature and join the ranks of the older managerial elites. They do not seem to miss cultural knowledge in interactions and rather take less time for music than in an earlier age. We might categorize their taste as middlebrow or omnivorous but their cultural taste seems to be a rather irrelevant status marker when they are talking about themselves or reflect about conversations in their work-environment or among their peers. These findings might indicate that cultural capital loses currency among young aspiring business elites.

A distinguished cultural taste does take a central place in their everyday lives. Similar to Turner and Edmunds' (2002) more established postwar elite in Australia, they were neither very concerned with distinguished cultural practices, nor did they consider these socially very relevant. Rather, activities such as traveling and sports are prevailing conversation topics at work. In contrast to Warde and Bennett's (2008) finding on older British managerial elites, most interviewees approach culture from an entertainment angle. Also in contrast to Heikkilä and Rahkonen's (2011) study of cultural elites eager to distinguish themselves from the 'ordinary', there is little attempt to perform a unique, distinct taste palette or show off refined connoisseurship. This finding fits well with the opposition between cultural and economic capital orientation as lined out by Bourdieu. The music interviewees usually prefer what the mainstream has to offer. They draw boundaries towards musical genres they consider 'weird' and subcultural, largely on moral rather than aesthetic grounds. This indicates that we need to consider both, cultural taste as well as moral evaluations for a deeper understanding of cultural distinction.



We cannot be sure whom of the interviewees will end up in the highest segment of the business world, the economic elite. However, even at this point, their identities are strongly bound by their work ethic. Very importantly, they work hard and value others who do the same. Despite massive social changes in the past decades, they seem to resemble Whyte's description of the organization man. High performance and long working hours are taken for granted, conforming to mainstream cultural norms appears generally desirable.

The interviews indicate it takes social skills, together with a confident self-presentation, to move up quickly. Here, cultural and social capitals intersect and translate to a long-term accumulation of economic capital in form of income. The interviewees need to have a strong direction in their own career and got to their current positions by impressing higher ranked managers, not because they could build on pre-established elite networks. Nevertheless, most parents supported their studies and it takes good education, support, and early ambition to have a good chance of obtaining a high position in the business world. This reflection is in line with Khan's (2012) observation on a cultural shift in elite identity that sees elites, rather than as a class, as the 'best and brightest' individuals who worked hard and got ahead. He problematizes 'rather than identifying as a group which is constituted through a set of institutions (families, schools, clubs, a shared cultural-historical legacy, etc.), today's elites consider themselves as constituted by their individual talents' (Khan, 2012). Relating this statement to the boundaries drawn towards the less ambitious or less self-improvement driven, we can see a mechanism of elite, or upper-middle class, distinction which is very much in line with Lamont's (1992) findings on moral boundaries. This distinction is further deeply grounded in the goals and values people have in their lives and strongly linked to the protestant ethic and the neoliberal version of the American dream.

The young business professionals interviewed build networks through shared work experiences and professional interaction. In terms of 'emerging forms of cultural capital' (Prieur & Savage, 2013), we can draw a number of insights. The interviewees go to famous art museums around the world and listen to international hits on local radio stations. A general mode of openness in connection with a self-evident cosmopolitanism points to cosmopolitan capital, not only as Bühlmann et al. (2013) measure it in the form of foreign education and careers, but also as Prieur and Savage (2013) suggest, as an orientation that plays out in the way cultural objects are appreciated. The analysis indicates that even more subtle forms of status distinction might translate to a more general 'way' of approaching life (incl. careers, sports and culture) that can be relevant



for building social capital. These may include working hard and being fun, self-evidently having been to certain museums, confidently acknowledging not to know much about the arts or soccer while in general being open towards these experiences. Recognizing people as funny, intelligent and reliable happens in everyday interactions on the work floor, while the desire to be 'cultured' appears to float among hedonistic leisure time concerns. Social capital seems to have a high currency for the interviewees' progress in their career, is created in a business environment that seems to remain relatively independent of cultural taste, the most often investigated form of elite distinction. Following from the interviewees' concern for social networks and alliances, future research should pay increased attention to the connections between cultural and work practices and the generation of social capital.

## **6. 'Me, I'm busy with very different things'<sup>18</sup>. An expedition into pastimes, music and apparel taste of lower status people**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Cultural consumption tells us a lot about identity, which implies a sense of belonging to one or more social groups as well as boundary drawing vis-à-vis others. Considering the scholarly discussions on the changing constitution of cultural capital and distinction through cultural consumption (Bellavance, 2008, 2016; Holt, 1998; Prieur & Savage, 2013, 2015; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005), this chapter zooms in on cultural taste and consumption of working class and lower middle class people in Germany and the Netherlands, two Northern European Welfare states.

Cultural participation is unequally distributed in society. Despite variations over time and across national contexts, various scholars have established that members of the lower classes tend to participate less in what is considered legitimate culture (Kahma & Toikka, 2012; Katz-Gerro, 2011; Prieur et al., 2008; Van Eijck & Bargeman, 2004). Many survey studies on cultural participation report a tendency among lower classes to be culturally 'inactive', 'passive', or 'couch potatoes' (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007b; Katz-Gerro & Jæger, 2013; López-Sintas & Katz-Gerro, 2005; Peterson, 1992). Limited cultural participation, however, is a rather common finding in surveys, not only among members of the lower status groups. Katz-Gerro and Jæger (2013) find 57% of their Danish sample to display limited cultural participation. Chan and Goldthorpe find that the larger share of the British do not participate in visual arts (2007b) and that the majority of the population display a univorous musical taste (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007a). Some studies acknowledge that this tendency may be at least partially explained by the fact that less legitimate activities and tastes are less considered in surveys (Katz-Gerro & Jæger, 2013; Peterson, 1992), yet labels such as 'inactive' or 'passive' are being used nevertheless. As surveys are often biased towards highbrow and mainstream culture, tend to use rather crude categories, which results in the inability to reveal subtle variations in cultural engagement, and typically underrepresent those least likely to score on the traditional categories.

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<sup>18</sup> Maar ik ben voor mezelf met hele andere dingen bezig"

Not participating in culture is often framed as problematic by European policy makers, even if a lack of interest is the main reason for non-participation (Stevenson, Balling, & Kann-Rasmussen, 2015). Even relatively egalitarian sentiments and ambitions for which the Netherlands and Scandinavian societies are well-known, can obfuscate inequalities and promote subtle forms of distinction and exclusion (Kuipers, 2013), possibly even help to maintain and shape hierarchical structures of society (Jarness, 2015a).

This chapter focuses on the cultural lifestyles of young working class employees. By doing so, it attempts to map different forms of cultural participation and explore different forms of cultural involvement and alternative meanings of cultural engagement. It will add to our understanding of motives for and against participation in legitimate, formal culture and enable us to contrast interview discourse with existing theories on working - and lower middle class taste. Further, it will give room to a wider array of leisure activities that can be considered central to people's everyday lives. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted in Rotterdam and Hamburg with people who have worked in retail, manual labor and care, jobs which can be attained after having pursued some of the most common vocational trainings in the Netherlands and Germany. The sample size in this study is not large enough to meaningfully interpret differences between the two cities. Instead, looking at what interviewees across cities have in common allows for mapping rather widely shared discourses. Understanding what connects them will better insights into contemporary cultural discourse.

Social class, as I have argued earlier in this dissertation (Chapter 3), has become an increasingly complex and sensitive issue in the last decades (Lawler, 2005, 2008; Van Eijk, 2012). The clear-cut categorization of classes as working-, middle-, or upper class, has become rather contested among scholars in the Global North (Beck, 2007; Geißler, 1998). The economic grounds for class identification became increasingly blurry as overall wealth increased, education and middle classes expanded, 'owners' often became 'managers' and elites became, at least partly, transnational (Sklair, 2001). In addition, self-identification with different classes is rather complicated by the fact that identities can be quite far removed from sociological classification based on socio-economic variables (e.g. Bottero, 2004). From the 1950s onwards, voices emerged in, e.g. Germany, to focus on one national context as an example, that declared the end of a classed society in favor of a '*leveled middle-class society*' (Schelsky, 1965) or an individualized society (Beck, 1986). In line with the importance Weber attached to the concept of *Lebensführung* (Veal, 1989), German sociologists changed paradigms and focused on social

milieus and lifestyles as part of a larger social structure. Thereby, they shifted from objective classifications based on income and occupation to classifications emphasizing lifestyles. Yet, new social structures are likely to co-exist and intertwine with older ones into a multidimensional composition (Geißler, 1998). While in their essence similar debates were held in several national contexts, the concept of class might have been unjustly 'buried alive' as Van der Waal et al. (van der Waal, Achterberg, & Houtman, 2007) argue. In fact, during the last decade, the conceptualization and measurement of class has received renewed attention and stirred discussion especially in the British context (Bennett et al., 2009; Le Roux, Rouanet, Savage, & Warde, 2008; Mills, 2014; Savage et al., 2013, 2014). Class further remains prevalent in predicting moral and aesthetic judgements (e.g. Skeggs, 1997). Lawler (2008) finds that class in the UK (newspapers) is used in two ways, as an artificial system of social inequality and as a natural attribute of a person, signaling the positive value of 'classiness'. The second, naturalized attribute makes it socially acceptable to address class. Yet, it is confined to middle-class values, opposed to working-class identities and thereby reinforces symbolic class boundaries. Middle class values and morals in the UK are often 'normalized'. While upper classes may be perceived as undeservingly rich, the middle class is seen as having worked for their successes (Lawler, 2008). A hegemonic relation that puts moral authority of middle classes over working class aesthetics was also argued for very recently by Le Grand (2015).

Without reviving or solving the questions of how to best conceptualize class and to what extent there is still a shared class identity, this study aims at exploring the cultural worlds of young people that are neither very rich in economic nor cultural capital. Pursuing relatively low status occupations, they can be categorized as working class or lower middle class.

I will start by outlining some traditional approaches to explaining classed taste with a focus on working class and their relation to middle classes. Further, I will present the methodology and data gathering considerations, followed by an analysis of leisure time interests, music taste and the interviewees' relation to visual arts. Further, I want to discuss rather particular forms of niche expertise and their relation to cultural capital.

## 6.2 Middle class taste as the 'gold standard' opposing a taste of necessity?

Cultural sociology, especially in the Bourdieusian tradition, has long testified to the inaccessibility of highbrow culture and legitimate cultural capital for the working class. While I have discussed the taste of the dominant classes in earlier chapters, taste cultures of working classes have often been described as lacking in a sense. As mentioned above, working class cultural participation has often been described in terms of its alleged absence, a general inactivity or even a couch potato existence (Katz-Gerro & Jæger, 2013).

Bourdieu ascribed a taste for necessity to the working class. Noticing scarcity of goods among the working class, Bourdieu argued that necessity imposes this taste, implying a form of adaptation to their economic limitations, an acceptance of necessity as the main driver of lifestyle choices. Necessity then turns into an inevitable, deeply ingrained disposition (p. 373). Consequently, Bourdieu's working classes would display a taste for the practical, but also the conventional. Within art, they would seek function over form and evaluate artworks by their use value, which comes down to their educational function (1984, pp. 42-44).

*It must never be forgotten that the working-class 'aesthetic' is a dominated 'aesthetic' which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics. The members of the working class, who can neither ignore the high-art aesthetic, which denounces their own 'aesthetic', nor abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, but still less proclaim them and legitimate them, often experience their relationship to the aesthetic norms in a twofold and contradictory way.*

*(Bourdieu 1984, p. 41)*

Yet, Bourdieu's description of the working-class aesthetic as a taste for necessity has received much criticism. One reason is that, today, material goods seem rather widely accessible, even though in varying quality, to all social groups in Northern European welfare states. Once such goods are available, it makes little sense to reduce ways of wearing outfits, different materials, colors etc. to a taste for necessity, as Rocamora (2002) argues. Further, the distinction between a heteronomous and autonomous pole in the field of fashion becomes rather difficult in a time when luxury designers make most of their profits from selling accessories and designing for H&M in between. Even if the contents of upper-class distinction are constantly evolving, Bourdieu appears to offer little grounds for capturing the changes in

working class taste and consumption while there is much reason to believe that the taste of lower status groups has been subject to consumerism and individualization just as much as that of other social groups.

Although Bourdieu did not leave much room for choice, there has recently been some support for his interpretations of lower status groups' tastes, coming from recent research in the United Kingdom by Atkinson (2011). In his interviews on music taste, he finds working classes to strive for physical release of pressure caused by the necessities of everyday life such as financial constraints and dull labor (p. 180). These findings seem to support the idea that function is more relevant than form for the working classes. Further, he finds an aversion to unknown, alien music and finally cultural goodwill. Similarly, Jarness (2015b) finds that people with high volumes of capital are inclined to enjoy goods as ends in themselves while "a propensity to use goods as a means to an end is associated with lower capital volumes" (p. 75). Further, he argues for a strong "intra-individual coherence, the interviewees are strikingly coherent in their classifications of a wide variety of goods, even types of goods with which they are less familiar" (Jarness, 2015b, p. 75).

Miles (2013) studied 'nonparticipants' of formal art or highbrow institutions as in a Manchester based study. He finds the 'non-users' not passive and isolated but engaged in informal cultural networks characterized by a range of activities such as shopping, window-shopping, pub visits, fishing, cooking, listening to music, watching TV, clubbing and reading. Often, he found these activities to be centered on relationships with family and friends. Among some of the occasional participants, Miles found participation described in instrumental terms, mostly involving taking children to museums or heritage sites. Further, among the seeming non-participants, Miles (2013) finds a group of 'hidden' participants whose engagement is rather personal and private and therefore outside of the larger institutional contexts. An example for this would be a person who is a prolific painter herself but does not feel integrated into the artistic community although she spends a lot of time painting. Additionally, he finds a group of interviewees who actively dis-identify with formal and legitimate culture. In a similar vein, De Meyer (2004) illustrates the creative engagement of lower classes with low-status objects. Drawing on the example of the garden gnome, De Meyer argues that these objects, disdained as mass-produced and pre-fabricated kitsch by the upper classes, are in fact underestimated in the creativity they are embedded in by their owners.

Alternative cultural practices seem to be increasingly considered by quantitative survey designs as well. Bennet et al. (Bennett et al., 2009), for example, include a wider range of items and find lower classes to be more involved in activities around the home; Roose et al. (Roose, Van Eijck, & Lievens, 2012) include items on sports, movie consumption at home, comics and shopping. Savage et al. (2013) recently found, in opposition to a taste for highbrow culture, a range of common leisure activities such as gaming, attending rock concerts and watching sports, preferred among “youthful middle classes” (p. 226). These activities, so they suggest, measure emerging forms of cultural capital. However, as Savage et al. acknowledge, “[t]he extent to which such ‘emerging’ forms of activity represent a robust form of ‘capital’, which might compete with more established and legitimate forms, is an interesting finding which warrants further investigation.” (Savage et al., 2013, p. 243).

### **6.3 Methodology**

Traditionally, the lower status groups, or working classes, would perform manual labor or production work. In the last decades, however, the traditional share of blue-collar working-class occupations has decreased in favor of the service sector (Bell, 1976; Hradil, 2004). In Germany and the Netherlands, the term working class seems even less socially accepted and is avoided in public discourse apart from a few sociologists and politicians of the left (Nolte, 2001; Van Eijk, 2012). This research thus draws on established notions of class (in the sociological context) and educational attainment as its widely accepted correlate. I focus on one often classed dimension of lifestyle, cultural capital (Bennett et al., 2009; Savage et al., 2013) and its affordances which, as numerous studies have shown, are primarily predicted by education.

The educational systems in the Netherlands and Germany differ in many ways. I considered Eurostat (2016) that has published recent data on the educational attainment level of Europeans on the basis of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-11), which classifies education levels and educational attainment. The data indicate that in Germany, 60.7% of the 30-34 year olds have not completed tertiary education, in the Netherlands this number is 53.7% (see table 1).

<b>Educational attainment level of the 30-34 year old population in 2015</b>			
GEO/ISCED 11	Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2) in %	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4) in %	Tertiary education (levels 5-8) in %
European Union (15 countries)	19,0	41,7	39,3
Germany	12,5	55,2	32,3
Hamburg	11,8	43,8	44,5
Netherlands	15,1	38,6	46,3
Zuid-Holland	16,4	36,2	47,3

Table 1 (Source: Eurostat 2016)

A larger part of the Dutch and German population in their early 30s have thus obtained an upper secondary education and a relatively small share (15.1 % and 12.5%) remain below this level. Table 1 shows only small differences for the regions where I conducted my research (Hamburg and Zuid-Holland in which Rotterdam is located) and the country scores. However, the percentage of people with tertiary education in Hamburg is higher than in Germany at large.

In order to get a more nuanced picture of secondary education which is considered the ‘middle’ in the Dutch school system, we zoom in on secondary education in the Netherlands. 32.5% of the 25-35 year olds are estimated to have attained lower education, mbo (‘mid-level vocational education’<sup>19</sup>) 1, 2 or 3. Mbo 3 corresponds to upper secondary education, yet is not the highest secondary education in the system (data source: CBS, 2016a). In my attempted to find interviewees, I thus actively searched for interviewees with mbo 2 at most. In order to identify common lower status occupations that are relatively frequent, I consulted the most common profiles in preparatory lower secondary education (vmbo) in the Netherlands, which allow students to choose an occupational profile. Among the people who completed this trajectory in 2012, the overall profile ‘economics’<sup>20</sup> was the most popular with 28.5% of the students (data source: CBS, 2016b). These profiles are highly gendered, however; for males, ‘technology’ is the most popular profile with

<sup>19</sup> Translated by the author. Dutch original name is ‘middelbaar beroepsonderwijs’

<sup>20</sup> Translated by the author. The original Dutch name is ‘economie’. ‘Techniek’ has been translated to technology. The original term ‘zorg & welzijn’ to care and health.



39.5% and for females 'care & health' with 45.3% of the female graduates in 2012. These profile orientations roughly correspond to the most common vocational curricula in Germany. However, the vocational trainings in Germany most often consist of a focused three-year trajectory that entails a dual training on the job combined with education in school. In 2012, the most common vocational trainings in Germany were 'management assistant in retail business' and 'salesperson'<sup>21</sup> (Destatis, 2013), the latter being a shorter version of the first. This occupation ranked highest amongst the women starting a vocational training, while motor vehicle mechatronics technician was the most common for the males.

Following these considerations, the call for interviewees aimed at people trained in each of the three sectors: care, technique, and service. As the sectors are permeable in reality, and especially lower wage jobs are often short-term and not necessarily specialized, training in these sectors was not a strict criterion but used for the project description to recruit people working in these fields. Most importantly, interviewees had to be currently based in Hamburg or Rotterdam, be between 21 and 37 years old and their educational attainment level should be no higher than upper secondary education (only because lower and upper secondary education are considered mid-level education in Germany).

I applied a range of recruitment strategies to find interviewees for this sub-study. The sampling strategies for this group and its implications in detail in chapter 3.2.2, 'Sampling and recruiting 'working class' people'.

### **6.3.2 Interviews in practice**

After an introduction and informed consent, the interviews lasted on average 60 minutes and were often followed by a more open conversation. Most interviews took place at the homes of the interviewees, some also in cafés that were conveniently located and relatively quiet.

Ten people in Rotterdam and eleven in Hamburg were interviewed. At the time of the interview, they were between 21 and 36 years old. A full list of interviewees and their occupations can be found in Appendix C. Although I specifically aimed for

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<sup>21</sup> Translated by the author from 'Kaufmann/-frau im Einzelhandel' and 'Verkäufer/-in'

people in technical professions, care and service separately, several interviewees actually have experience in two of these fields and not all are currently employed. Sylvia (Rotterdam), for example, who is trained as a security guard has worked in a vegetable-packaging factory in between jobs. Maurice (Hamburg) completed a vocational training as a care-worker for elderly people, yet he has worked since several years as a promoter for a software company where he earns more money. Overall, fourteen interviewees had at least some experience in the service sector, most often as shop assistants. Eight had at least some experience in the care sector and six had at least some experience with manual or technical labor. While many interviewees have had many different jobs and moved between sectors, others, such as William and Nick (both with a completed vocational training) in Rotterdam were still employed by the company where they first started their occupational trajectory.

## 6.4 Analysis

### 6.4.1 Leisure time activities

The question about hobbies or leisure activities is a bit of a cliché one, as David (Hamburg) humorously answers the question how he spends his leisure time:

*Eh, laying on the bed and thinking: Autsch. Playing computer. Meeting friends. Spending the weekends horseback riding (chuckles, both laugh), as you can see, eh, I spend; I escape in a virtual online world. To escape the gruesomeness of daily live.*

*Interviewer: What kind of virtual world?*

*David: It's an online game, it's called Eve Online, it's about space ships.*

*Interviewer: And there...*

*David: There I spend every free minute... It will be 3 years in two weeks. So not too long.*

Encouraged to elaborate a little more, David explains a complex game-world entailing intricate strategies, industrial production considerations, trade-relations and glides. Without further questioning, the complexity of this game would not have become evident. With his ironic initial answer, David shows a deep awareness that his hobby is not considered socially desirable.

Asked how they spend their free time, many interviewees in both cities mention 'chilling' with their friends, which seems for them a self-explanatory word. Nick (Rotterdam) for example, answers:

*In my leisure time? If I am not working, I am doing sports*

*Interviewer: What kind of sport?*

*Nick: Fitness. Yes, further not too much, joh. A little, or chilling at my girlfriend a little.*

*Interviewer: What are you guys doing then? When you are chilling?*

*Nick: Watching a movie, heading to the city or something. I am actually always out (chuckles).*

Similarly, Tommy (Hamburg) elaborates:

*Well, my hobby is fishing. I like fishing. And eh, now of course that the, the weather is a little more chilly, I am not outside as much, but otherwise I am actually a lot at the water, at the Elbe, Alster (local waters), doesn't matter, and I fish almost every day. Well now in the summer, with my buddy, my neighbour. We really go, even if it's for an hour or something, we surely go to the water. Yes, apart from that I am a sociable guy. I usually sit at friends' places, at my neighbour's, we sit there, chilling, as they say (chuckles) and, but apart from that that I am out and about a lot.*

Some interviewees describe themselves as very active, trying to spend as much time outside as possible (Deborah) or, as Nick and Maurice, being very dedicated to sports. Sylvie is very dedicated to her animals:

*Well, I have, as you can see on the photos, my Anton. That's the brown horse. So I go horseback riding very often in my leisure time. But as you saw in the kitchen, there's also a boxing sack hanging. I do Thai boxing together with my boyfriend. Yes, super nice. And going out, well, every now and then I'm going to a festival, that I really love, or to an Irish band, watching a hot band but... Apart from that, eh, well, listening to music, we are crazy for music here. We watch almost no TV, but play only music. Only in the morning the TV is sometimes on, to pass the time a little. Yeah, really that's my hobbies.*

Here, Sylvie lists a range of sporty activities, emphasizes her music and disregards an activity typically seen as rather passive, watching television. Interestingly, later she refers to a range of television programs she enjoys watching on a regular basis,

including some music programs (Singer songwriter talent show) and series. The disregard for television could be seen as an indication of cultural goodwill.

Ali (in Rotterdam who has two Moroccan parents), in contrast to the examples above, is very straightforward about categorizing himself as passive. Apart from his love for watching soccer, which he states makes him very happy, he explains:

*What I do in my leisure time? Not much, I am a rather passive person. Yes, if I don't have to work I prefer being at home or with my family. Look, our culture is mostly rather close. I go at least once a week to my parents' if I don't have to work, Saturdays or Sundays. And friends, I don't have a lot of friends, I don't meet with people after my work, going out I don't do either. Well, I like sitting at home most, doing things at home I like.*

*Interviewer: And what are you doing at home?*

*Ali: television, computer. In particular, I sit behind the computer a lot and search for all kinds of things, for example: how I can earn some extra money. Or I am downloading things, or I am reading things, what else, yes, everything.*

*Interviewer: And what kind of things would you download?*

*Ali: Films. Downloading a lot of films. Series, programs, among other things.*

Several interviewees are rather involved in music. Joey and Lisa for example play in bands, James is an avid music lover who used to be involved in organizing a small online radio show. Lynn and Lisa also draw and paint at home which I discuss in a bit more detail below.

As a result of their Great British Class survey, Savage et al. (2013) base their measure of 'emerging' forms of cultural capital on "the extent of a respondent's engagement with video games, social network sites, the internet, playing sport, watching sport, spending time with friends, going to the gym, going to gigs and preferences for rap and rock" (p. 227). This list captures many of the leisure activities named by the interviewees of this study. There is, however, a large diversity of activities and quite a variety of discourses in regards to leisure time and cultural preferences.

## 6.4.2 Music taste

In this section and the ones to follow, I will consider the discourses around music and relevant sub-themes more closely. Music tastes of the interviewees are, not surprisingly, rather diverse and answers cover a large palette of genres, time periods and performers. Without mentioning every genre they listed, I will introduce a few common themes in the answers.

Several interviewees, when asked about what kind of music they like, answer top 40 music. For example, Deborah states: “A little bit of all. A bit the top 40, all that you hear on the radio”. Several interviewees also emphasize they like former hits. Lisa, Tobi, Benjamin and Sylvie all love music from the 90s. Some of them are nostalgically remembering their youth with these songs, while Lisa feels she was born in the wrong time musically.

Many interviewees mentioned that they like rock music, varying from rather soft to classic rock and metal. Pop is also mentioned by several interviewees, sometimes specified as indie pop or, specific German pop bands. Among the men especially, hip hop and rap were often mentioned. Tommy, Andy, Ralf, James and Maurice, who all live in Hamburg, particularly listen to German Rap. Some artists are especially connected to a sense of the city. This way, Greta also lists ‘old’ hip hop for its great nostalgic value. Yet, also in Rotterdam hip hop finds listeners among the interviewees (Sherryl and William). Further, some of the Rotterdam citizens cherish hardcore which for them is connected to local identity.

Further, interviewees from both cities listen to electronic dance music, especially when going out to clubs. House, soul, musicals, RnB, jazz, dancehall, 50s music, psytrance, reggaeton and schlager are also mentioned. The way interviewees describe their involvement with specific genres and artists varies a lot. While some are dedicated fans of certain artists or genres, following closely what their favorites produce, others remain rather unspecific when asked about particular acts.

*Interviewer: Do you have specific favourite bands or performers?*

*Lynn: No, not at all, actually it's all mixed from what is there at the moment, where I say this song I like, then that's my favorite song, but not of specific artists.*

When considering the aesthetic criteria that interviewees apply to evaluate music, they differ in their appreciation of mood, energy, speed and level of aggressiveness.

What is striking throughout different levels of involvement is that several interviewees do not explicitly apply these categories to describe their taste – but refer to what their ear likes.

Sherryl for example, reflecting on her dislike for Rock music:

*I don't know what it is, it makes me very zappy. Coincidentally you had a bit of that kind of genre at the Eendrachtsfestival (local festival in Rotterdam). I could listen to it at that moment, because I thought 'it is okay, some of the songs'. But it pushes a certain button, then I think 'ah, it's not good, it doesn't feel good through my ears' no. You feel uncomfortable.*

In a similar vein, when asked to describe what it is that causes his disliking for rock and jazz, Benjamin answered: “Yes, the rhythm, the music, eh, it doesn't fit with me or doesn't sound good, doesn't sound nice in my head, in my ears”.

In similar words yet on a positive note, James describes his music taste as “Very varied. Well, I can honestly say, well if my ear likes it, I listen to it”.

This is only one of many ways music is evaluated, yet this wording is particularly striking as it is used by a few Dutch and German interviewees. It refers to an immediate sensation, apparently pre-reflexive. Furthermore, it is notable that this is a very individual judgment; the reference to one's own ears does not imply any wider social judgement or point of reference.

In the following, I will present a range of relevant themes within music taste more closely.

#### **6.4.2.1 Eclecticism in music taste**

Several interviewees emphasize their own openness towards a variety of different musical styles. Tommy (Hamburg) for example, asked what kind of music he likes, answers:

*Yes, well, I enjoy listening, relatively almost all music actually, but mostly I like; personally like rap or techno every now and then. I say, what the mood demands*

*at the moment, what is fun, where I am, where I sit and what the situation is. I listen to anything. I also listen to schmaltzy songs occasionally.*

Tommy emphasizes the mood and context dependency of his music choices. Next to that, he performs a sense of openness, similar to what has been ascribed to the omnivorous music taste or a populist mode of openness to diversity' as Ollivier (2008) would call it. He is not very discriminative in his taste and adjusts his music choices to his mood. At the same time, he displays some deeper knowledge about German rap music, while other genres seem to be consumed without much background information on the artists. Ralf and Andy in a double interview emphasize their openness towards different genres:

*Ralf: Actually, I don't really have prejudices against anything really... Nothing, well it depends on the mood, I also sometimes listen to Ballermann-Music<sup>22</sup> if it fits (mood)//<sup>23</sup>*

*//Andy: I'd say; yeah.. // it depends, right? But I'd say against... eh, good schlager, look, Helene Fischer is good, dude, (chuckles), I have to say.*

*Ralf: Nicky Krause..*

*Andy: Yes, that.. but these old Grandpa-Grandma schlager on television, that I don't like to listen to, I'd say, right?*

*Ralf: yeah..*

*Andy: But apart.. At the wedding of my mum they played Andrea Berg [a popular German schlager singer], well, that worked as well (both laugh) that worked later in the end as well... so yes..*

In this excerpt, we see a performance of openness that is similar to what was found among interviewees in other samples. We might call this a populist mode of openness to diversity. While they are more passionate about some other genres than schlager, they have a practical sense of tolerance for music in different situations. Ralf and Andy's involvement with schlager appears not very deep and only partially voluntary, yet they are exposed to different forms of music in their social life and deal with it in an open-minded way, displaying cultural tolerance. In this context, their music taste appears rather instrumental; function here determines what is listened to rather than an aesthetic interest. In these accounts on diversity of

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<sup>22</sup> Ballermann music refers to German party schlager, typically played at vacation destinations frequented by many Germans such as the Spanish island Mallorca with the Bar Ballermann that hires German singers to perform over the summer

<sup>23</sup> The signs// refer to overlapping talk between the speakers here and at later points in interview-excerpts

taste we see, despite the obvious display of omnivorousness, that music listening practices should be understood in context. While Andy would not choose schlager on his own, it is put on him by his environment. Ralf, however, would actively choose the party music for certain moods.

#### 6.4.2.2 Identity and place in music

Especially when interviewees were fans of particular acts, they often connected the story of the musicians to their own identity and life history. Maurice makes for a strong example:

*I love German hip hop, since forever. Absolute Beginner was my very first concert, sometime when I was 18 [...] there were 40 people or so, that was pretty cool. And then you follow them.. Then there are many newcomers that I added, [...] And many of them are also in a similar age as I, Clueso for example and such. And then it's always similar stories that you hear there and get to know about, that is of course also very interesting, to know about the developments of them or parallels, I mean that's what makes an artist, that they wake something in you, emotion. And that happens quite a lot for me there.*

For Maurice, music is thus connected to his own nostalgic memories but also biographies and experiences of artists which he parallels with his own life. Also talking about his personal favorites in German hip hop, Andy reflects:

*Where are they from? From... Eh... Bonn, from Bonn originally but Kalim also from Hamburg, Schwesta Ewa, ehh, Frankfurt [...], yeah, actually from all over Germany we have to say actually.. Yes, but they are all, no, well, hm.. well, there is there a German among them? [...] But they are also; Kalim grew up in Germany, like me, in the end I am also not 100% German, but I grew up here and therefore probably more German than quite a few Germans (chuckles), right?*

Hip hop with its American origins and trans-German connections offers an identification basis. Being German with a migration background, also traveling quite a bit within Germany, Andy further also compares his own diverse clothing style to the style of rappers.



Anna who grew up in a small village in eastern Germany, moved to Hamburg as an adolescent. She has been a dedicated fan of several German bands. Asked how important music is for her, she answered:

*Very important. I started 1997, my first concerts, Dritte Wahl and Die Ärzte. I got it as a gift for my 12th birthday, since then it was the main component of my life (chuckles) yes.*

While she used to spend all her vacation time touring along with her favorite bands, she reflects that now that she grows older, she is more selective and follows fewer bands. She now prefers the smaller shows outside of Germany which she perceives as more intimate, yet she remained committed to her favorite bands and their members' solo projects. Her body is covered with band tattoos.

Ali, Benjamin and James, whose parents came from Morocco, Afghanistan and Ghana, are deeply invested into the music from these countries. While Benjamin listens to the contemporary music from Afghanistan and Iran, Ali is dedicated to Rai music which originates from Algeria and is described by him as modern Arabic music. James, a dedicated music lover whose taste ranges from German schlager, over pop, hip hop and chanson, got socialized with West-African music through his family, involved himself deeper with African music in recent years. By now he is deeply invested in Afro-beat, a contemporary West-African genre that is also increasingly popular in Europe. He attends parties and even used to run an online radio-show to promote the music.

*James: 'Yes, well, my cousin is a musician, right? And he had, for an underground-label [...] I was his DJ so to say, I was DJ-ing for him when he had gigs and next to that we tried to start an online radio show. But, because I was then too busy we stopped at some point, right? But.. It went on for a time and it was nice.'*

As this excerpt indicates, James is involved in a range of activities around music. Music represents a connection with family, Ghana and is a great source of joy for him, while he promotes it within Europe and also has 'white' friends who enjoy it.

### 6.4.2.3 Dutch and German language music

As we saw in the excerpts around schlager and hip hop, many interviewees from Hamburg listened to music in German without the language being an explicit point of reflection. Interestingly, most Dutch interviewees did not mention Dutch language music at first when listing the music they like. When probed about it, most named at least one or two Dutch artists whom they appreciated. Nick was the only one who stated to generally love Dutch-language music which he grew up listening. In many other interviews, we can still see a careful boundary drawing evolving around the lyrics:

*Marco Borsato. Him I actually listen to. But yes, his songs really have content, so to speak. You can feel his music (chuckles). So I can listen to him for a long time. That's what I think. And the other Dutch artists? No, not really.  
(Deborah)*

Similarly, Fenna explains: "Some songs of Andre Hazes I really like, for example, the ones that really tell a story."

In a similar vein Lisa elaborates:

*I like it too, some of it. Not all. I don't think... Well my friend goes to an après skihut of sorts very often; in Rotterdam that is kind of... They have lots of Dutch music and such. But... [...] But I think the more emotional ones, when they go deeper than, than just partying and such. That, eh yes, what has real content in the lyrics, good lyrics I find pretty. So not just for the heck of it, no.*

In these excerpts, we see an appreciation of Dutch language lyrics under the condition that the text has depth or meaning to the interviewees. They seem to look down at the pure party-music in Dutch, which they do not appear to despise in English as much.

#### 6.4.2.4 Classical music

The interviewees display a range of different discourses in regards to classical music. For some, it is a source of relaxation (Arien, Tobi), others openly reject it as the following excerpt illustrates. Asked what kind of music she does not like or likes less, Fenna answered:

*The real classical. I do listen to Evanescence [American Rock band], that's a classic song, that I find pretty but in general, the Bach and Beethoven stuff, plllffff, bleah. No, or the really loud rock music, where they scream so terribly, that I find atrocious too. I cannot listen to that.*

Here, Fenna mentions classical music first in connotation to a classical song, then close together with very different genres and is very quick to dismiss some of the most canonized composers with a 'bleah', a dismissive sound while providing a little more elaborate legitimation for disliking rock music.

Another, more open and less dismissive approach is represented by Sherryl:

*Yes, I love classic. Because, you got this movie 'the Intouchables' and there you had a piece in the beginning. Actually, I think they are all songs by the same composer. Well, I thought 'that's such beautiful music', I thought the movie was so beautiful. So I used Shazam [an app to recognize title and composer of songs] on the movie and then I could search for the song and it appeared to be Ludovico Einaudi. Then I started to download a bit. So yes, that sort of classic.*

Sherryl seems to have an unusual way of getting in contact with classical music or at least instrumental music. The film and the music seem to pollinate each other with meaning, where she does not appear to have other cultural resources to draw upon in this cultural genre. A similarly informal point of access to classical music comes forward in the interview with, Andy and Ralf:

*Interviewer: And how do you feel about classical music?*

*Andy: Oh well, there I don't have any prejudice against, no.*

*Ralf: Me neither, no. It's not that I listen to it wilfully, but when it plays somewhere it doesn't bother me.*

*Andy: These, these sounds, sometimes it isn't so, right, is quite pleasant, (chuckles)*

*Ralf: Many things are incorporated in rap music, right?*

*Andy: Yes indeed, right, ja-ha, piano sounds and such shit, all and stuff!*

From this fragment, Andy and Ralf's distance to classical music becomes clear, not something they appear to choose for their own music enjoyment. Yet, acknowledging its influence on Rap music, a genre they love, makes them value the genre, even if their approach appears far removed from a traditional highbrow discourse.

Interviewees' relations to classical music appear closely connected to their parents' relation to this musical form. David, for example, the son of a school teacher and the only interviewee who mentions that he has been at classical music concerts, explains:

*My mum was in favor of my sister and me being brought up with a lot of piano music and little Radio Hamburg [local popular radio station], and this remains a little; yes, well, I don't run into a concert and cannot cite a whole lot about Bach and Beethoven, but I can at least distinguish the two.*

*Interviewer: Do you listen to them sometimes?*

*David: Before I started to work there, my sister and I went to see 'neues Werk' [new contemporary classical music] in front of the NDR studio [regional TV and radio station]. And there I am pretty excited.*

*Interviewer: What is that?*

*David: New music stuff, what classical music used to be, but weird and..*

*Interviewer: As in a concert series or.. ?*

*David: [...] If you pay attention, it's also on the subway-walls, they have advertisement posters there, 'das Neue Werk', it's about; one calls it new music, but in principle made fancy and well, string quartets, they don't play pretty, harmonic melodies but rather sounds and weird melodies. What started with 12 tone music and was continued from there.*

David first downplays his engagement with classical music by emphasizing that it would not be his choice, yet also emphasizes his at least basic knowledge and upon probing knows about developments in the field at large and is even rather enthusiastic about a specific contemporary classical concert.

Overall, there is thus great diversity in discourses regarding classical music. While some interviewees rather openly reject the genre as such, others find rather informal ways of access such as Sherry's film soundtrack. David seems to be the only interviewee to possess a slightly more developed knowledge on the genre.

### 6.4.3 Musical dislikes and boundary drawing

Similarly to the business professionals and culturally involved group in this study, many interviewees in the lower status professions dislike hard rock and hardcore. There are some particularities in the way boundaries are drawn towards the less appreciated music. Tommy, answering the question if there is any music he doesn't like:

*Yes, that exists, what I really don't like is punk rock or something, or fast rock or something, or goa, that direction. That is, goa is still a bit okay, but what I don't like is really rock, so relatively strong rock. But sure I listen to it, go along, drink a beer or something but (chuckles); personally I rather, as I said, I don't like it as much.*

*Interviewer: What is it in it that you don't like?*

*Tommy: Well what I don't like about it, well yes, I don't know, the people are in fact all super friendly and maybe all cool, but they all look bizarre, I'd say (laughs). For example, here, Gerda [other interviewee who recommended him], listens to rockabilly or something, I don't know, I can't. I think it's okay, sure, but personally I cannot really relate to it somehow. I don't know, it's not my direction simply I would say.*

In this excerpt, we can recognize a very careful distancing without much aesthetic or moral reasoning. Tommy even highlights the pleasant character of the listeners of rock music, which, on the one hand, indicates that he draws a close connection between the genre and its listeners but, on the other hand, also emphasizes his openness towards different kind of people, even if they do not dress as he does. His aesthetic judgement thus rather relates to dress rather than the music itself, the judging of which he avoids. In terms of the music, he does not recognize a personal fit, yet seems to struggle to find the right words as he uses many 'don't knows'.

Other, more quick and straightforward ways of distancing oneself from music were seen above, where some interviewees emphasized that certain music 'does not feel good in their ears'. This too relates to a rather personal mismatch with the music, but does not draw on pre-existing repertoires or cultural or moral boundaries.

In sharp contrast to these rather individualist, emotional discourses stands Gerda's explanation why she does not like RnB and hip hop (also used in the general introduction):

*Gerda: It's all too plebby (trashy) somehow, it's too... ehh, I don't know. I also don't; I mean you can mostly see from the style, how they dress, what kind of music they are listening to. And ehh, this kind of people, that.. how they dress, I simply don't like it, they are unsympathetic to me. How they wear the baggy pants or something, I find that horrible, [...] well from my experience; maybe a bit overgeneralizing but.. I can simply not identify with them, it is somehow, they are different. Different, I don't know also a bit primitive to me, if I can say it that harshly.*

Here, Gerda also connects the music immediately to people she associates with it and slightly reluctantly draws strong moral boundaries towards them. Not only does she mark them as different, but trashy or chavvy and proletarian as the German original is 'prollig', which has a connotation to trashy working class, and additionally calls them primitive. Interestingly, she again rather judges the aesthetics of dress rather than the music itself.

Anna also has a rather moral approach to judging music, yet the discourse she draws on does not emphasize class. She contrasts one of her longtime favorite bands Die Ärzte, a famous German punk rock band with other bands in the genre:

*The best comparisons are always the 'Bösen Onkelz' und 'Die Toten Hosen'. That to me is music for stupid people. Striking, bawling and loud. And ideally drunk. These are my images with the band. Grasping people with platitude, and I never know if I should admire that they became millionaires with that or if it is horrible towards the people. [...] Even the lyrics, that is so mindless.*

Later she elaborates how even most of the fans of her favorite band are idiots who do not understand the humor of the band. With these elaborations, Anna draws a sharp distinction between intelligence and stupidity associated with bad behavior and a lack of humor. Her distinctions are fusing moral and cultural boundaries, yet they are less class-based than Gerda's.

A few interviewees also draw their musical taste boundaries on the basis of the mood and emotions they associate with the music. Sylvie, for example dislikes:

*Depressing music, but it can be pretty, you know. I also think a calm song I also find relaxed, but I rather listen to reggae or something. These love songs of Mariah Carey I would say, Whitney Houston, no, that I don't love.*

The interviewees thus draw on a range of different discourses to draw boundaries towards different music genres and artists. Interestingly, however, it appears that stronger judgements are associated with subcultural dress associated with these genres than with the aesthetics of the music itself.

This is different for people disliking mainstream music. Ali is frustrated about the contemporary popular music:

*I think it is not as original as in the past. Heavy metal I don't like anyways, 'cause that is really only noise, it is screaming, and, and it mostly is about very scary stuff, that one becomes insane or what do you have. And pop music of today, well, it is all about the same. I think, pop music is most of the time, actually, what I like is mostly the melody and a bit the lyrics that are about nothing, But with me, this Rai music mostly has beautiful melodies and lyrics that make sense. I don't think they are original anymore. Before I think, the level was higher than it is ow. [...] For example, earlier I listened to hip hop, yes, you associate yourself a little bit with that, of course. Well, pop music, only the legends such as Michael Jackson and what else from that time.. Whitney Houston, I don't say I listened to her but I thought it was indeed pretty to listen to (laughs)*

This sentiment of a lost time in popular music is shared by several other interviewees. Not only Ali who, with this 35 years, is among the oldest people in the sample, but also younger interviewees such as the 22 year old Lisa or 29 year old Benjamin are nostalgic about popular music from the 90s and early 2000s. Maurice, who first states to be quite tolerant towards different kinds of music, then questions his statement and elaborates:

*Where I notice that I am indeed not tolerant at all is with all of this plastic music that is out there, right? Well yes, in the 90s there was also a lot of trash, but that was still very different trash, that is now somehow celebrated differently. All of this plastic music, this artificially made synthesiser sound, entirely distorted voices and so forth, there I get a little; that I don't like. Therefore, I am also a bit of a slow type in regards to music.*

Asked what makes the synthesiser sound now different from the 80s or 90s, he answers:

*It was a very different sound, sure, it was also conceptualized, but now there are too crass concept things, too pre-fabricated. Rihanna for example, good singer and so forth, but all the stuff around it, what she does, the albums she*

*records, it has too little soul, I feel. You know, too much plastic, too cold, too little, well... really soul. I don't buy it because it is so produced. And somewhere with something like Beyoncé it stops for me. That is exactly the intersection between the two worlds somehow, this direction. And there is a lot in the charts, I just have to switch on a normal channel and everything sounds distorted, plastic-ish and the same, well, then I'm out.*

Maurice here draws on notions of authenticity and commercialism. He has little appreciation for the aesthetics of contemporary popular music and judges them accordingly. It is interesting that the popular music of the last decades is more appreciated by him, a sound that he identifies as less plastic and more authentic. Here, the discourse of a few interviewees such as Maurice overlap with the discourses of the culturally involved group who are also concerned with authenticity and distancing themselves from 'the mainstream'.

#### **6.4.3.1 Boundaries towards people**

We already saw a few examples of class-based boundaries being drawn towards people in association with music. There are, however, a few notable additional discourses in regards to people.

David, with his upper middle class origins, has chosen for himself (at least for a moment which already lasts for many years) to do manual labor. He reflects:

*My mom has been a pre-school teacher, and I thought, it would be nice, lots of vacation; And the plan to become a teacher was gone after the first day of university. [...] I remember my first day, I got there, looked inside, saw the people, went out, smoked a cigarette, went inside again and thought: this isn't going to work out. [...]*

*I thought I would enter venerable halls of knowledge and education, where reasonable, intelligent people aim for higher things. And then it was only a bunch of self-loving idiots that compete in who talks the most nonsense.*

At 27, his 'studies' were not financed anymore: "I needed to find a job somehow, where did I end up? With a temporary employment agency." While he is aware that



his current job offers rather precarious working conditions, he reflects about his co-workers in a rather positive way:

*The reason why I like to be in this company, despite the work really being shit, it really is shit: even though the guys there, you can't say it differently, are uneducated classes [he uses a rather sophisticated, politically correct German term], but basically very sweet people. Of course I don't have to leave my wallet and my phone there for 8 hours without watching, but I don't have to be afraid someone would steal my lunch or something like that. Of course you joke around, also harshly. And of course people shout at each other every now and then. But I would never be afraid to have trouble on my way home with the guys. [...] Many people are ignorant, not in a way that I only rely on myself. You already noticed, I don't like thinking in categories.. I get along with my co-workers better, the ones who find reading the Bild [popular news magazine with lots of pictures] too tiring, than with some scientist who doesn't notice he is on the wrong track. No, not you.*

David actively distances himself from intellectualism and pretentiousness. Further, similar to many other interviewees, he prefers 'simple' people who are honest and down to earth. Being honest is a very common theme among the character traits interviewees highlight.

Furthermore, moral boundaries are drawn towards people with inconsiderate behavior. Andy and Ralf first name running through red traffic lights in front of children. Then, Ralf elaborates:

*Standing outside at the bus-stop, drinking beer.*

*Andy: Yes, I find that super antisocial, I also like to drink a beer sometimes, you know, but then I don't drink it outside somewhere.*

*Ralf: Maybe at the beach or something, a bar or beach.. or*

*Andy: yes.. or with friends or at home.. Ey, in front of the TV or so, you know*

Here, moral boundaries are drawn towards indecent behavior which associates close with Skegg's (1997) conceptualization of respectability.

#### 6.4.4 Interest and disinterest in the visual arts

The interests and levels of engagement with the arts vary among the interviewees. Asked openly about interest in 'the arts', most interviewees, as in the other samples, interpreted the question pre-dominantly in relation to visual arts. I will therefore focus my analysis on this domain. Throughout, interviewees mention that they do not know much about the arts. Further, none of the interviewees in this sample report to visit museums on a regular basis, while a few mention occasional visits. Three central motives emerge that evolve around reasons not to attend museums. One regards disinterest in visual arts, a second concerns financial constraints, and a third revolves around social networks. Additionally, there is a more subtle discourse that seems to be outside the discourses evolving around formal arts participation. I will address this discourse on informal arts last.

Many of the interviewees provided a very clear, distancing answer when asked whether they were interested in the arts. Nick for example quickly states 'No, absolutely not'. While about half of the interviewees quickly decline their general interest in visual arts, many qualify this disinterest by stating to not have much knowledge or deeper interest. Ali explains:

*Yes.. Paintings.. Well, not really my thing. I never go to museums. But sometimes, when I see a painting or something like that on TV for example, I actually find it pretty. But it's not my hobby. Neither is poetry. Art is not really my thing.*

In this excerpt, 'not really my thing' is a rather personal, yet careful dismissal. Nevertheless, Ali emphasizes his enjoyments of paintings or related things on television to then again conclude that it is not his hobby. This excerpt marks a clear personal boundary towards artistic discourse while nevertheless not denying the aesthetic value of art. William, who interprets the question more openly, explains:

*Yes, I do find it fascinating. Some stadiums and constructions. That is all art I think. To build that. Yes, and paintings I also find pretty to look at in general but I mean, it is not that I can really focus on a painting. A painting is a painting, even if it's worth billions, it remains a painting. It is indeed art to make something like that, I mean like *The Night Watch* [Rembrandt] or you name it. Yes.. It remains cloth to me, a picture, so. There might be a lot of time put into it, but blood and tears, I don't know if that went in it. I actually love size, large size, something big. Big art I love, so yes, the skyscrapers for example.*

Here, William is pretty open about not being very engaged with paintings or pictures. He clearly prefers large physical objects that he admires for their artistic constructions buildings. He therefore confidently defines as art what he considers worthy of admiration. This can be framed as a rather practical mode of consumption, yet it can also be seen as emancipation from formal highbrow arts discourse. Many interviewees enjoy some form of visual arts, yet most of them never go to the museum.

*If I am interested in arts, maybe in photography, but not apart from that. We were in London in the national museum, which actually has an advantage I can clearly name: In London, in Britain everything is for free, all museums are for free. I think that's incredible, I didn't know and was pretty flashed when I read it in the travel guide. In Berlin it isn't expensive either, 5 euros or something is okay. In Hamburg that can be very different: that one pays a lot of money for surely also good things, but.. Yes. I think, people who don't have a high income don't teach this to their children. I think one thinks twice if one goes to the museum for 10 euros or does something else cool. Maybe go to the movies, because that is more interesting for the kid. I can only speak about London, which is remarkable: that you can go in every day if you like, with your kids or also as an adult, to teach yourself something as well. Further, I don't know much about the arts.*

Anna draws on different relevant repertoires here: first, she does not show great enthusiasm about the arts in general. Then she names financial constraints as a reason to critically consider museum visits and the UK as a positive contrast example to her home city, Hamburg. Here, cultural goodwill comes forth: she frames it as desirable to go to the museum, and further sees it as a place for learning. This comes close to what Jarness (2015b) has described as an educational mode of consumption, typical for his interviewees who are not very familiar with canonized cultural forms, yet enthusiastic to learn more (pp. 72-74). At the same time, Anna also draws on a more practical discourse, bringing price and entertainment as arguments which would, at least broadly, resemble Jarness' (2015b) description of a practical mode of consumption (pp. 74-75). The same interviewee can thus apply elements of several modes of consumption – or draw on different discourses of openness towards cultural diversity as Ollivier formulates it (2008).

Most interviewees emphasize their openness towards going to museums or galleries in general – while for some interviewees, going to the museum seems outside of what they would consider as an appropriate leisure activity-, some emphasize that they should go more often. This can be interpreted as the display of cultural goodwill. Gerda, when talking about art that she likes, exemplifies:

*It's art for me, to create these crazy things.*

*Interviewer: Yeah.. and are you going to the museum sometimes, or rather not?*

*Gerda: Noo, hmhm.. I used to, back in Kindergarten, I know almost all museums here in Hamburg. But, that's ages ago. Maybe one should refresh that a little but.. I like it, well, if my boyfriend would say come, let's go to the museum, I would be pleased, but one gets around doing that so rarely, I don't know.*

In Gerda's excerpt, we thus not only see that she thinks she should go more often, she also puts the responsibility on her network, her partner in this case who could initiate such an activity. Further, Gerda draws upon the motive of financial constraint to explain her lack of museum attendance:

*It does cost, it's always stupid that it costs money (laughs) I am a miser in that, I usually don't like spending money for something like that.. and yeah, then I try to arrange my leisure time in a way that costs little money.*

'Something like that' referring to attending art exhibitions does imply that it is not as high in her priorities as other purchases. Nevertheless, she performs self-criticism, which implies that she responds to a discursive norm that art attendance is desirable. In this sense Gerda's, as well as Anna's, statements can not only be interpreted as displays of cultural goodwill, as in trying to be part of dominant classes' taste and lifestyle; they also react to a wide norm of cultural participation as desirable.

Even when several interviewees such as Gerda express to be generally interested in the visual arts, their social context does not always seem to encourage it. When asked if she has any affiliations or contact with arts, Sherryl declines:

*No, not really, I can find pictures very pretty, but I wouldn't look for the name or what art it is.. No. For example going to the museum, yes, I don't think I'm for the museum. Because everyone says 'that is boring', I started to think it is boring as well'*

Here, her interest does not reach very far and she seems to have consciously adopted the attitude of her surroundings towards museums. Some interviewees, however, mention their connections as a potential incentive, a 'way in' to formal cultural institutions. Asked if he was interested in visual arts, James answered:

*Yes, but I am not as knowledgeable as in for example fashion or music, right? But.. yes, fashion is also a specific form of art I think. And music as well. And, but of course, when I, for example I was just in London because a friend of mine studies art there; I was with her in such an art museum and I was there for 6 hours as well and was super enthusiastic; and I looked at some sculptures and paintings for half an hour to... Cause I think it's fascinating, eh? Here in Hamburg nobody is that much into the arts except.. right: I was with her at an arts exhibition in Hamburg, near central station, and also at an exhibition in Altona, that was a private one, there I was with her as well, she was my art buddy so to say, but now she's in London, therefore... well.*

*Interviewer: Does that mean you now don't know many who are interested?*

*James: Yes, but.. The ones here are, are not really aficionados.*

James is one of the few interviewees who has visited exhibitions recently, yet he seems to very much miss his one 'art buddy', as this interest is not widely shared in his other surroundings. A less enthusiastic but emphasized openness for art exhibitions comes from Tommy:

*There were very few occasions, I would say, when I went to an art exhibition. Well, sure, every now and then, earlier in school or something, we went to art fairs and such. But hm, that's a while ago for sure [...]. But I would say I would look at it, I would say now. I would look at it, I would join (chuckles). But in general, I can't relate much to it I'd say. But I would look at it. I am open towards the arts let's say.*

Tommy emphasizes his own openness to arts and highlights that he would 'come along' without being able to relate much to potential art exhibitions, does not display much own motivation. Also his repeated statement that he is willing to look at it emphasizes his disconnection. He is, however, along with other interviewees, rather interested in crafts himself. Tommy has taken wood-work workshops and pottery classes in the past and Lynn and Lisa paint without drawing much connection to the kind of art in museums. These activities appear to be placed outside of the formal realm of 'arts' and I argue we should thereby subscribe them to an informal arts discourse. In a similar vein, several interviewees decorate their apartments with photographs or prints of art works which they don't mention when talking about 'the arts' in general. When interviewing Sylvie at her house, I noticed a variety of family photos, large prints and wall-carpets. Yet when asked if she was interested in art, Sylvie answered:

*Art? Uhhh. [pause]*

*Interviewer: You do have a lot on the walls*

*Sylvie: Yes, I love African, he? Yes, I don't go to a museum or something. That I did earlier with my mother, to Boijmans (art museum in Rotterdam) that sort of stuff. Yes, no, no usually not.*

*Interviewer: For your own house you do have art..*

*Sylvie: Yes, yes, indeed. It is a little African, but because of a leakage we didn't finish anything. We were painting the walls, you can see where we have the leakage. I love coziness, you know, a warm house. It has to be warm, not so much modern. The furniture I got because I'm here temporarily. I thought then I don't buy new furniture. I do love African a bit, a bit safari like.*

Later, she elaborates on the origins of her wall-carpets she points to several items:

*Uh, this one is from, I don't know anymore. Indonesia, no, I don't know anymore. She brought it with her, this one for sure. [points to another] This one comes from Spain the African over there. And for the rest, this one comes from Aruba, the iguana. The rest is all from Action [discount variety store], most of it (laughs).*

Sylvie appears almost shy talking about her wall decorations, returning the art question to the realm of formal arts. The criteria she applies to describe her personal choices are revealing; coziness is quite typical for working class taste according to Bourdieu (1984). When explaining that most of the items come from Action, a cheap discount store, her laughing might mark and underline that it does not belong to the realm of real art.

The interview fragments in this section indicated that the highbrow discourse around art is still positioned as dominant among the interviewees. The discourse about informal, crafty arts often conducted in private at home, is thus clearly presented as a dominated discourse by the interviewees themselves. While some seem to shy away from dismissing formal visual arts, they do not appear to have access to its discourses and are aware that their own ways of creatively engaging with visual culture are excluded from this realm. Another way of thinking about these informal ways of participation and engagement is calling them niche expertise. This term however translates to a wider range of leisure activities than visual arts.

### 6.4.5 Niche expertise

As we have seen above, some interviewees were deeply interested in music whilst others enjoy visual arts. However, for none of them this takes up a larger part of their free time. Interestingly, when asked about their pastimes, many interviewees brought activities forward that were outside of what would be conceptualized as formal cultural participation and asked about as leisure activities in most surveys. Towards the end of the interview, after having already talked a lot about her own drawings, her cats, and her singing in a band and how this is embedded in a family tradition, asked about her television habits, Lisa explains:

*No, it's never on. Maybe it sounds strange, but if there is news, then I search for it, on the laptop. But me, I am busy with very different things. Yes, maybe it's a bit outside of this research or so, but a very different topic. I am, well, I am a bit more busy with humanity, with yes, the situation when something has happened. What is happening there and I also believe in conspiracy theories let's say. Well, that is what I am busy with sometimes. And that can take quite a long time for me. Then I completely delve deeply into history, so I am really a person who sits behind the computer and looks. And I really believe in conspiracy theory.*

*Interviewer: Is it one theory or several that are connected?*

*Lisa: One.*

*Interviewer: Can you tell me about it?*

*Lisa: Do you really want to know? Soon you will really think that I am crazy (laughs).*

*Interviewer: Everyone is crazy, me too.*

*Lisa: In the end, maybe we will never get behind this, but since I am religious anyways, thus it all has to do with the same thing. You have god and you have the devil, that's normal. But.. I think mostly, do you really want to know (chuckles)?*

*It is really.. Do you know what Free masons are?*

*Interviewer: Yes, yes.*

*Lisa: Okay, what I personally think, but that's my thought, I mean everyone is free to express their opinion right? That the Freemasons have something to do with, ehm, a group that has higher power than the rest of us. But this is my opinion, but I can share my opinion with, there are other people who think this. And the Free masons, yeah, that has to do also with what happens in America and more; it goes a bit further. Yes, and these kinds of things I am actually busy with, yes.*



Lisa's example is probably a relatively unusual hobby, yet another person, Tommy in Hamburg whose job was connected to a Free mason organization investigated free masonry symbolism and rituals for himself and recommended me several information sources.

There are more interviewees who are deeply invested in specific topics. Toby for example seems to know everything there is to know about cars, David improved the sound-quality in his room through DIY constructions that muffle sounds, and Sylvie is a passionate animal lover. Keeping snakes and a horse do not only take much of her time, but also requires her to know about these animals. Similarly, Gerda seems to know everything about 50s fashion and design and her closets are full of rockabilly items. Several interviewees thus build what we can call a niche expertise.

Next to these examples, which also involve drawing, singing (in karaoke bars and bands) and cars, in both cities, one respondent enjoys spending his leisure time fishing. Fishing is a hobby that requires knowledge, about fish species, which time of the year which fish are to be caught, and of course practical knowledge about the procedure and gear. Other interviewees are deeply invested in sports. Andy is adjusting his entire lifestyle, including eating, drinking and sleeping routines to his training at times. Ralf is a passionate soccer viewer. He is betting on many European, African and Brazilian soccer leagues. Not only in the primary league, but ranging from one to fifth league in different countries.

*Interviewer: How should I imagine it? Are you heading to a betting office or are you doing it online?*

*Ralf: Both, both, well.. Depending on the situation I go here, to the betting office, eh, otherwise I also have an app on my phone, yes.*

Andy, in contrast, states not to have much involvement with soccer and elaborates:

*Therefore yes, he knows better and, I think you need some expertise to bet along somehow, and that is not really the case with me, right?*

*Interviewer [to Ralf]: That means you follow basically everything?*

*Ralf: Yeah, from the first to the fifth league, around the entire world actually, hm.*

*Interviewer: Wow.*

*Ralf: Brazil or African soccer, really anything actually.*



Ralf's hobby thus involves a lot of knowledge on different soccer leagues. Yet, it remains an individualized niche expertise, as it does not connect much to mainstream media discourse or large communities of people.

Probably more widely shared, yet not a common topic of conversation, is fishing. Tommy explains:

*I have really good fishing equipment. [...]*

*Interviewer: Yes cool, and what do you do with all the fish you catch?*

*Tommy: I take photographs and eh, we document them, too. We document our catches and then, eh we set them free again. So release and catch, I'd say, that's how it's called, to catch them and then set them free again. And with the fishing license you have to pay 5 euros a year and then you can fish for the entire year. Well, there are protection times for the fish; every fish-breed has a specific close season. Then you can; eel for example you can catch the entire year. Pikeperch you aren't allowed to catch right now, these you are only allowed to catch in September again. There are these regulations you have to adhere to, otherwise it's torture, fishing, poaching. One can pay high fines. If you get caught taking a fish that you're not supposed to catch, if you are unlucky, you pay a high fine [...] But you'd learn all of that. You get books, your study material, also your fishing books and such. I did it a long time ago [...] Yes, it's a cool hobby, as you see I also have a lot of fish stuff as well.*

These different passions have very little to do with each other, and some interviewees are more deeply invested in their hobbies than others. What makes them worth mentioning, however, is that most surveys would not capture these forms of participation or overlook the extensive knowledge bases participants have in order to participate in these hobbies. Many interviewees thus have built large knowledge resources in areas that could be considered niche, yet they are experts in this area.

Interestingly, as many of these examples have shown, these leisure activities and informal cultures are often rather individualistic activities that are not very present in public discourse. While some interviewees talk about these hobbies with their close friends, people online or family members, they do not seem to connect them to a larger collective very much. Even Gerda for example, when she dresses up in rockabilly together with her boyfriend and heads to a rockabilly bar in town, she doesn't make much connection to other members of the scene. An exception

here seems to be James, who has a large network of friends, sharing his interest in afrobeat and other music.

## 6.5 Conclusion

As I noted earlier, a systematic comparison between the interviewees from different cities is hardly possible as they differ in too many ways. It appears that the people interviewed in Hamburg (Germany) were slightly more explicit, dedicated fans of particular bands, cherishing subcultural identities more explicitly. Yet, this part of the conclusion is very tentative and possibly a coincidence.

Being middle class, as Lawler (Lawler, 2005, 2014) argues, is associated with being normal, as opposed to a morally and aesthetically questionable working class. It is not surprising, then, that interviewees who formally take social positions of the working class or lower middle class position themselves among the middle class by displaying cultural goodwill and moral disgust towards the 'trashy' or 'anti-social'.

From the analysis, it becomes clear that ascribing to interviewees one homogenous mode of consumption, such as pursuing culture as a means to an end (Jarness, 2015b), seems to do little justice to people's occasionally deep involvement in certain leisure activities. Interviewees in this study would for example use formal cultural institutions like museums as a means to an end, to learn something, while they pursue other hobbies as an end in itself, even if they shy away from connecting it to what they frame as the official 'arts'.

This becomes evident in the three motives that relate to non-participation in formal arts, disinterest, financial constraints and social networks. A discourse on informal, more private forms of participation then shimmers through after more detailed follow-up questioning. This is similar to what Miles (2013) has called 'hidden participation' or 'ghostly engagement'. These forms of participation however seem mostly hidden from researchers. Amongst the personal networks of the interviewees, they can be widely known and appreciated, possibly adding to the status of individuals within the group.

Considering the emerging forms of cultural capital as described by Savage et al. (2013), a lot of the interviewees appear to be rather active in these leisure

activities. Without having counted or systematically probed about these activities, playing computer games, reading things online and doing sports appear to be rather common hobbies, often among the first things the interviewees mention. Yet, what potential these activities have as actual capital should be determined by its potential to generate profits. While they appear entertaining and possibly intellectually challenging in some cases (such as difficult strategic computer games), the interviewees partly reflect that these are not widely accepted, 'respectable' hobbies. Similarly, several interviewees developed niche expertise that do not seem to translate to widely shared mainstream discourses on leisure activities. If this really 'benefits' them in a way that cultural capital does is questionable.

Their hobbies might involve lots of reading, experience, and expertise but rather outside of dominant discourses on culture. An awareness of this is reflected in the hesitant, almost careful way these hobbies are brought up by the interviewees. For someone like a hobby fisher, there might be little prestige or wider acknowledgement of his hobby in broader social circles, independently of his mode of consumption. Here, the 'what' of cultural activities may adopt certain relevance, if only in the decision to bring it up as a topic of conversation or not. As Kahma and Toikka (2012) convincingly argue, the lack of cultural participation among people with lower education and lower status occupations may be explained by how we define and measure cultural consumption. If we think of cultural participation in a broader, more inclusive manner and count a larger variety of activities, we might find terms such as 'inactives' redundant. At the same time, we should remain attentive to the clustering of activities in relation to specific social groups as these may still remain relevant for cultural boundaries. It is this association between social class and culture that makes it distinctive and therefore crucial to consider how activities and preferences are clustered in relation to socio-demographic factors.

## 7. Negotiating difference and taste in style: Comparing northern European class fractions<sup>24</sup>

*You sometimes can't get around trends, because the entire industry builds on them. But if the trend wouldn't fit, for example flares, [...] I wouldn't be up for that. I just want to say, I don't know how much I am already brainwashed, to notice that or not. [...] I think, one looks a little what feels hip right now. But, nevertheless I have, I think pretty much my own style since years.  
(Maurice, 36, Hamburg)*

### 7.1 Introduction

As this excerpt reflects, trends are setting the framework of availability from the clothing industry and the interviewee is well aware of fashion trends' influence on his style. Maurice is concerned with not being the one odd person looking different, yet, it is important to have a sense of one's own style. Fashion consumers navigate between two conflicting motives – a need to have one's own, individual style and the need to fit into a group.

Dress is an essentially social phenomenon. As Entwistle highlights, the individual act of getting dressed is making the body acceptable, appropriate and respectable in the social world (Entwistle, 2000, p. 7). With the emergence of counter cultures in the 1960s, fashion diversified in the Global North, fashion cycles have gotten increasingly fast and subcultural styles evolved into mass youth movements (Frank, 1997). Trends are not only relevant in clothing styles but many areas of culture and social life. As Taylor (2009) argued for the arts, "it is now the trendy that is displacing this earlier knowledge to some extent. Highbrow culture is seeking the companionship of popular culture" (p. 417). Being trendy or hip, crucial in any field of culture that is in a state of constant flux and revaluation, can be a source of social prestige to a status hierarchy based on social class (Thornton 1995). It is essential for fashion to be ever changing and different stages of the fashion cycle

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<sup>24</sup> A similar version of this chapter is being presented at 'Consumption, inequalities, futures: Conceptual and practical sociological challenges', midterm conference of the Research Network of Sociology of Consumption (September 8th 2016)

afford different levels of prestige. At the same time, a general sense of style has long been seen as deeply ingrained into a person's dispositions.

Clothing makes for a particularly interesting case to study symbolic boundaries as it is located in people's everyday lives, no matter how invested or disinterested individuals are in their looks; more or less restricted by external circumstances -they are required to make choices regarding their own looks. As clothing is itself symbolically loaded, it is a space that can represent, challenge or question other areas of social life.

Fashion innovations and trend adaptations are often associated with young people. Building on 59 interviews with Northern-Western Europeans in their 20s and 30s about their lifestyles, this chapter takes a closer look at trends and individuality today. I will explore how they position their own clothing style towards trend developments, but also draw boundaries towards 'bad' style. Exploring bad styles is crucial as it can bring more collective or social norms forward rather than purely aesthetic evaluations (Woodward & Emmison, 2001). These discourses bring forward how people with different levels of cultural capital navigate trends and a sense of authenticity, but also which affordances trends offer. By drawing on the different dimensions of cultural legitimacy, I will explore how interviewees of different socioeconomic status negotiate their own style and how they draw symbolic and moral boundaries towards others. Apart from the aforementioned dimensions, moral categories such as appropriateness of dress and authenticity come forward in the discourses and are central when judging style. Drawing on interviews with young business professionals and people involved in the cultural field as well as a group of lower socio-economic status allows contrasting aspiring cultural and economic elites with a less privileged group.

The idea of a collective taste in fashion might be increasingly problematic when considering society to be ever more fragmented and individualistic. While we see the importance of global fashion trends, styles get only adopted by people with certain lifestyles (e.g. Crane, 1999). Diana Crane (1999) showed that today, fashion innovations indeed stem from various layers of society. Fashion diffusion then works neither purely top-down nor bottom-up. Further, she suggested, rather than the upper classes differentiating themselves from lower classes, it might be rather the young striving to differentiate themselves from older people (p. 22).

While the sociology of fashion has criticized Simmel's approach to class differentiation and domination by means of cultural symbols, cultural sociologists

following Bourdieu (1984) continued to find the upper strata of society being the dominant tastemakers in most areas of lifestyle. A relevant question thus remains which role elites have when it comes to taste differentiation and domination. The answer might depend on social context, elites are, at least in today's societies, not the only ones to innovate fashion (Behling, 1992), but may often still have the means to be early adopters. Further relatively privileged social positions may still be relevant in the legitimation of certain styles and establishment of wider norms regarding the appropriateness of new styles. This chapter will thus explore how different social groups negotiate their own style and how do they draw symbolic and moral boundaries towards others. These considerations imply, that I will not only consider fashion as a system of inherently changing styles, but a wider notion of dress which, as Entwistle (2000, p. 43) suggests, refers to an act or a series of acts and can imply choices of aesthetic as well as functional nature.

The following section will provide a brief overview of central discussions in the sociology of fashion. Then I will present the methodology adopted for this chapter, followed by the analysis, which I will relate back to the theoretical considerations.

## **7.2 The social and individual nature fashion consumption**

Fashion has often been described as a particularly modern phenomenon. While scholars are discussing how specific fashion is for modern or postmodern societies, it appears agreeable that it is a particular system found under particular social circumstances and characterized by an internal logic of change (Entwistle, 2000, pp. 44–45). In the sociology of fashion, the dissemination models of new trends have long been at the center of discussion. As Gronow (1993) pointed out, Simmel's way of thinking about fashion appears inspired by the works of Emanuel Kant who was interested in the relation between individual, subjective feeling of pleasure which at the same time has been conceptualized as universally valid (Gronow, 1993, pp. 91–93). Simmel then lines out to a driving force behind fashion: the need of union with other people on the one hand, and the need to isolate oneself on the other (Simmel, 1957, p. 546). Gronow neatly summarizes: fashion does function as a substitute standard of taste, without actually being one' (Gronow, 1993, p. 94). While there are no explicit standards for fashion, it does offer a norm to which individuals can orient themselves without suppressing their individuality or uniqueness (ibid.).

In his classic work from 1904, Simmel (1957) further suggested that fashion change is driven by class differentiation. Upper classes use fashion to differentiate themselves from lower classes who then follow the trends set by the upper strata in order to signal higher status. This motivates the upper class to seek ever-new styles. Fashion, according to Simmel, is thus a trickle-down process. Despite it being problematized today, Simmel's idea of class differentiation as a driving force behind cultural change has inspired many scholars. Famously Bourdieu (1984), but also many others ascribe fashion innovation and trend setting to higher status groups (e.g. Rogers, 1995). Indeed, as Diana Crane has shown, fashionable clothing was mostly available to the middle and upper classes in the nineteenth century (Crane, 2000).

Blumer (1969) famously criticized this notion of fashion which he deemed a reductionist theory of fashion. He did acknowledge the importance of Simmel's contribution to understand that essence of fashion lies in a process of change as well as the central importance of prestige for the operation of fashion (p. 278). Yet, Blumer criticized Simmel for misrepresenting the social aspect of fashion. According to Blumer, fashion change does not happen as a response to a need of class differentiation and class imitation, but in response to a wish to be in fashion (p. 282). He emphasizes fashion as a process of collective selection, the fashion consuming public that is not controlled by the elite but ever new clothing models have to fit the ever-changing taste of a wide, fashion interested public. It creates unanimity and unity, helps to detach society from the past and offers a means to adjust visions for the future. Fashion then is a mechanism to create and stabilize social order in modern, ever changing societies. Yet, as Gronow (1993) notes, Blumer's own approach fails to explain the continuous change in fashion. As Entwistle (2000) summarizes earlier critique on Simmel, his approach to fashion appears rather outdated. Nevertheless, clothing choices can still symbolize class difference and are used for symbolic violence (Karademir Hazir, 2016; Skeggs, 1997).

Related to Simmel's ideas on innovation and still a widely used concept are Fashion cycles. Briefly, a fashion cycle involves different stages. There is first an innovation and introduction, where innovators chose to exhibit a new look. Fashion leaders or early adopters spread a new trend. The early adopters are followed by a majority that adopts the trend until it is mass conform (Sproles, 1981) and eventually declining and becoming obsolete. Often, scholars have ascribed high socio-economic status to innovation and early adaptation (Rogers, 1995). Yet, this has been questioned by rather mixed and inconsistent evidence from a range of studies regarding social-

economic status and fashion innovation (Behling, 1992). Fashion dissemination today is understood as a rather diverse system with fashion innovation happening in diverse social layers (Crane, 1999) and the boundaries between high fashion and mass-market have become more blurred (Rocamora, 2002). Bourdieu has been substantially criticized for his analysis of the fashion field (Crane & Bovone, 2006; Rocamora, 2002).

In contrast to Veblen's conspicuous consumption, which has been a rather dominant concept to explain luxury consumption, Van der Laan and Velthuis (2013) have argued that Dutch men actually dress rather inconspicuously, concerned as they are with 'being normal' rather than showing off their wealth. The northern-European context with its welfare-states and egalitarian values may be important when we think about class differentiation and symbolic boundaries (Kuipers, 2013).

His field approach shows limited applicability to the contemporary fields of fashion which has a much more blurry distinction between the 'heteronomous' and 'autonomous' poles, the homology between producers and consumers on their specific poles is not as clear and he underestimates other motives for fashion apart from class distinction.

### **7.3 Methodology**

This chapter is part of a larger study on lifestyles and symbolic boundaries. To gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and relevance of different cultural forms and the different status rendering criteria in taste performance, semi-structured interviews were conducted. A central advantage of using qualitative methods is their openness for new interpretations. By paying attention to how interviewees describe their life-world and be open to their perceptions of value and cultural worth, this research is be open towards alternative interpretations and meaning making. Semi-structured interviews allow for covering specific topics, while remaining flexible (e.g. Wengraf, 2001). The interviews evolved around leisure time activities and cultural taste with a focus on personal clothing style, trends, music and visual arts. Further, the interviewees' current position, their education and appreciation of people were discussed. Approaching interviews from a discourse analytical perspective means to encourage participants to speak fully, yet it is not assumed that there is a single, correct answer to a question. Rather, one possible



version is produced in the interview (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 72). Understandings of the world are created and maintained through social interaction in everyday life (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 102). Semi-structured interviews resemble conversations more than surveys, even though they are different from everyday life conversations. They are however fundamentally social settings in which versions of reality are constructed in interaction (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 14) and narratives are constructed and performed. This discursive performance of the self, taste and boundaries is likely to be more general to social situations.

59 interviews were conducted with people in their 20s and 30s who are based in urban centers of North-Western Europe. The interviews were semi-structured which implied that I was drawing on an interview guide which I adapted to the specific interview situation. The core of the interview guide was very similar throughout the interviews. Yet, they were kept flexible to the interests of the interviewees. Depending on the interviewee, these other interests were explored in more or less depth. After following the interview and finishing the recording, I encouraged interviewees to ask questions about the research or me. Often, these conversations stimulated a more free process of shared discovery in which I could also discuss my interpretations and findings from other interviews. Without steering original answers into specific directions, I was able to share impressions and interpretation attempts with interviewees that resulted in a more collaborative construction of meaning.

The discourses surfacing in the interview situations and presented here in the analysis are not exhaustive. As discourse is ever changing, adapting, and emerging, this study cannot present an exhaustive inventory but present a range of prominent ones that became evident in the interview context. As discourse analysis is not aiming to identify one single, 'true' story but explore patterns in and across texts, I work with what is being said and explore the social consequences of different representations of reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 21).

The semi-structured interviews in this study cover in their essence the same themes. Yet, what one individual appears to prioritize will be foregrounded in one interview and possibly shape the interviewer's focus for the next interview. Noticing for example, that business professionals seemed to enjoy elaborating on their career-plans with great passion and detail, I started to ask a few more questions about this domain to this group.

Conceptualizing a qualitative research that is covering different social groups in a transnational contexts is very vulnerable to having 'too many' variables or

influence factors. The sample size does not allow for meaningful comparison between countries or even cities. Any difference on these levels would come down to anecdotal evidence. At the same time, many people living in urban centers are geographically highly mobile. They move for studies, work or temporary projects, which makes their current geographical location less prevalent. Further, in defense of the methodology presented here: this research does not set out explain these differences but rather explore commonalities. The occurrence of similar discourses in different urban contexts in western Europe speaks to the importance of these discourses. Not so much in explaining regional differences but understanding larger cultural context.

In order to be able to show the reader differences between the three different social groups interviewed for this study and increase transparency, I will mark the group recruited on basis of their cultural involvement as 'culture' (of which a full list can be found in Appendix A), people in the business professional sample group 'business' (see also Appendix B) and people from the group with formally lower education and comparatively lower socio-economic status group 'lower status' (of which an overview can be found in Appendix C). As I discussed in chapter 3, there are a few overlaps between group 1 and the others, yet I will label them here as initially sampled.

## **7.4 Positioning in personal style and fashion**

Most interviewees perceived the request to describe their own clothing style as rather difficult at first. While some also actively emphasized that their looks are not a central concern to them, everyone was able to describe some items, styles they wear or that inspire them. Clothing can have multiple symbolic meanings. Further, practical considerations, mood, and context influence clothing choices. The underlying motives and interpretations are consequently rather diverse. While there are many interesting dimensions that structure clothing choices and style descriptions, I will focus here on how interviewees position themselves towards fashion trends and the boundaries that emerge in their descriptions of 'bad style'.

Many interviewees describe their own clothing style as casual, some as normal, simple, sporty and comfortable. A few describe their approach to clothing as a playing field in which they experiment with various styles their symbolic meaning.

Here, we can see two opposing poles, a 'blending in' stance versus a rather expressive way of styling. The 'blending in'-pole aims at keeping one's personal style rather sober and plain, 'normal' as some interviewees describe it. The other extreme is experimenting with fashion and personal styles as a playground of various expressions. Tina (culture), the most extreme example in this category argues "I decide every day entirely anew what I wear. That's for me a play or coquetry with the events that a style is related to."<sup>25</sup> This play with signs and symbols in clothing is a form of bricolage (Hebdige, 1979). The rather expressive interviewees employ bricolage in their play with existing styles and stereotypes as part of their individual expression through style. As Gronow (1993) noted, the individuality of individual taste is expressed in the combination of different styles and idea of style as bricolage is not restricted to youth subcultures. Kasper (culture group) exemplifies, "For me, fashion is an important thing. Not fashion-wise but just to have my own style and things and to play around with". Many of the rather expressive stances are interviewees that are deeply immersed in urban cultural life. Among the people deeply involved in the cultural field, the notion of normalness or casual was less common.

The different approaches can be seen as positions on a continuum. In between the very expressive and blending in poles there is a large and diverse middle ground, appreciating 'ordinary' cloth but 'with a little twist' that allows expression of their unique personality, while avoiding drastic statements.

I will explain both stances as well as the middle ground a little more closely by providing a closer look at interview-excerpts of young business professionals. They are an especially interesting case as the norms of what is acceptable clothing style in the business world are narrower than in the other groups. Many of the business professionals were quick to distinguish between their business-wardrobe and the clothes of their leisure-time self. At the same time, some also reflect how their personal clothing style became more formal as they became professionals. The interviews reveal how clothing choices in the business world are context dependent. A central concern for the interviewees is dressing 'for the occasion', which is very similar to Woodard and Emmison's (2001) findings on Australian middle classes. The interviewees reflect that their personal style developed with their job-surroundings and became more professional over time. Dressing in line with one's social circles leaves room for a range of different styles

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<sup>25</sup> The quotations within this chapter are kept as close to the original wording as possible, while increasing readability by reducing intonations, or vocal fillers.

and expressions. The variety can still be captured by positioning them between the two opposing poles described above, a 'blending in'-approach to fashion versus a fashion as self-expression approach. Yet, the space in which these expressions are possible appears more restricted by what is considered appropriate in the business world than for interviewees in other fields. The blending-in pole aims at keeping their personal style rather plain, making sure their outfit 'works' and interviewees were concerned to 'not look weird'. Eugene (business group) is a good example:

*I would describe my style as it looks as though I don't know what I'm doing, but I found something that works and stick to it. So I don't; I wouldn't say I am a very fashionable person, I just find things that like look alright and I'll do the same thing again and again and again.*

Eugene thus orients his clothing towards keeping it safe, reliable and convenient, a way to blend in and meet social requirements. Eugene adopts to mainstream fashion and wears the same combinations until they are out of fashion and would stick out again too much. This approach is similar to what Van der Laan and Velthuis (2013) found in interviews with young Dutch men, "dressing as a negative act: they want to avoid standing out and attracting undesirable attention in case they dress themselves in a way that others would subsequently disqualify" (p. 5). Interviewees with this approach to fashion are not too involved with being up to date with the latest fashion trends. Tom (business), for example, calls himself a late adopter:

*I think I don't actively... or constantly observe people to try to identify trends. It's more when I see it a lot, [...] at a certain point when you see quite a few people wearing something and you say hey, that I like. And I think, I sort of start liking things by seeing them quite often. [...] I'm a late adopter. I bought my Ray Ban sun glasses only last year. [...] for example, you see lately everybody is wearing Ray Ban big sunglasses and... you're no longer cool or, you no longer stand out if you have Ray Ban sunglasses. But I still think those are nice, cool sun glasses so I have bought them. And it's not eh, a concern to me that many other people have them.*

In this excerpt, we see little attempt to be explicitly fashionable or stand out. It is rather about playing it safe and yet not getting too far behind current fashion. It is less of an emphasis on expression of the clothing or be ahead of other people in adopting new trends. It is rather finding something that 'works' (Eugene, business) and continuing to wear that.

The more expressive stance on the other end of the spectrum emphasizes fashion as self-expression and these interviewees take pride in creating their own look. Richard (business) even relates it back to his company identity as the manager of the brand he works for and represents. Rafiqué (business) makes for another strong example. When asked how he would describe his personal style, he explains:

*I have blue suede shoes for example, well nobody wears blue suede shoes at my company, they all wear black shoes. So. There's always something. Because I look like I fit in but, generally not, I always stand out from eh, from the people I work with now.*

*Interviewer: So.. you do make sure that kind of small, smaller details are more colorful?*

*Rafiqué: Ja exactly, I have to play it safe, exactly or make sure that I don't go overboard. But it has to be fun for me. [...] So eh, what I do, I do it for me and it's more like fun for me. I take fashion pretty seriously. And eh, well I enjoy it, it is for me.*

Here, fashion is a fun way of self-expression. It is a way of being original and standing out a little bit, while remaining carefully adjusted to the context of the work environment. Similarly, even though less expressive, Louise (business) describes her style as:

*In some way its classic but I always try to follow fashion. I'm really interested in like new trends, new things, and I'm always the first one to try. Ahm, but I like things that have a classic cut.. And yeah, I like things that are simple. So I don't wear a lot of prints or very embroidered stuff or; it should be kind of classic and simple but still fashionable.*

In this excerpt, we notice some pride in being an early adopter and daring to try new things. Nevertheless, the fashion concepts of classic and simple are important to her. She also distances herself from the people that blend in too much:

*Let's say I like it when people dare to express themselves a little bit or wear what they like, or do something crazy or special instead of just like very boring and easy choices. Of course, I also do that sometimes, when you're just like relaxing, and you're at home. But, in general, I like it when, when there's a nice color, or special detail, or.. that gives a bit of life to the person. [...] just people that have an own style, that are not, like in this gray zone, where there's nothing outspoken about it.*

In this example, expression is emphasized again. However, it seems to have a low threshold, since a 'nice' color or detail is deemed good enough to be expressive. Apparel here is geared towards others in a sense that more importance is ascribed to it outside of the home. The 'less easy' choices, condemned by some of the interviewees with a less expressive stance are celebrated by people like Louise, Rafiqué (both business), Christoph (culture group) or James (lower status group).

Apart from these poles, there is a lot in between an expressive stance to clothing and the 'blending in' approach which in this sample all happen within the framework of what is considered appropriate by them, fitting into business culture. These approaches to clothing can be seen as positions on a spectrum. In between the very expressive and the understatement pole there is a middle ground appreciating casual clothing, but 'with a little twist' that allows expression of their personality while avoiding drastic statements. While striving for either of the poles is one dimension that structures the discourse on taste, another structuring dimension relates to the extent and motives of trendiness. While these dimensions can overlap and are intertwined, they are not the same. If we think of Tina (culture)'s example who uses her body as a canvas and combines various items and styles. She stands out from the crowd, yet does not necessarily always fit with the newest trends even though she is very aware and at times ahead of them. While early fashion adopters will stand out and demonstrate a strong sense of 'own taste', adopting trends at a later moment can be related to different motives. As I will show below, following industry trends by wearing fashionable clothes can for instance offer a sense of fitting in, looking normal by staying up to date with mainstream fashion. Yet, being the first among one's friends that 'dares' to adopt a new trend can also be a way of standing out, and getting recognized as (relatively) fashionable within this smaller group.

#### **7.4.1 Affordances of fashion trends**

Independently of how much or little people were interested in fashion developments, all have at least a broad idea what is going on by looking at people in the streets, advertisement or stores. Current trends are therefore a point of reference for most interviewees, something to identify with or distinguish oneself from. A few interviewees ascribed great relevance to being up to date with their clothing.

Benjamin (lower status group), who works as pizza delivery boy, describes his style in the following way:

*Honestly, I try to look nice. I try to go along with fashion, but eh, I don't always succeed. If there wasn't as much fashion, cause if you want to live fashion-consciously it costs you a lot of money and that I don't have, unfortunately. I have enough money, but not to, for example, buy the newest trousers or newest shoes, cause that costs me, for me a fortune: new shoes are 200, 300 euros, the ones that just came out and if I pay that I have to spend almost a monthly salary to buy shoes. And there are always new shoes, new clothes, and such; and if I buy it all the time, then you're not doing it right. So I do the usual, I pick something I like and that looks nice, that fits a bit with the norms and values of today, that fits with the time. Cause I won't run after fashion.*

Here, Benjamin highlights the financial burden that a fashion conscious style implies. He clearly orients his style on current trends, yet shoes that he does not want to subordinate to fashion too much either. Birgit (culture), who works in marketing for a cultural organization, describes her style as fashionable yet classic within fashion:

*I think my personal style is, I'm trying, for fashion, I'm trying to be really up to date. But I do like the more classical collections. If I look for new cloth. [...] And it also has to fit my figure. I think that's really important [...]. You have a lot of trends, but you cannot wear them all because some are made for models that are really long and really thin. So that looks ridiculous if you put it on, so I won't wear it then. But I'm ja, I think I'm really trend-sensitive if you can say it like that.*

In this excerpt, fashionability is the first description of the clothing style. Yet among the most fashionable collections, Birgit also strives for something classical. Classical implies something that lasts, styles that continue to remain relevant which stands in contrast to the idea of novelty, yet is also brought forward by other interviewees who aim for a fashionable wardrobe. Birgit also emphasizes the fit with her figure – by making sure to select the trends that fit her body, her own taste judgment comes forward.

Some interviewees that work in marketing of consumer goods also reflect how being fashionable comes with their jobs.



*I wear what I want to wear and I try to follow the trends, I follow the trends, I do not set the trends, but, yeah if I see something is; eh, people are wearing certain items, I will also try to do that. And yeah, as I said I try to, you know, follow the latest collections and everything so, I try to incorporate that in my style. [...] especially because of the company I work for so I really need to show that I try to follow the trends and reflect that also in my clothing. (Richard, business group)*

Trends for some are also a point of reference of what is 'normal'. Andy takes pride in mixing different styles in his wardrobe without being too far out there and explains: "Well, a normal look, and anything that is normal, falls in trend, yes". Here, trends set the boundary of what is normal, implying that one needs to follow the trend and change in order not to be moved into the margins. This requires one to buy new clothes or stay informed on new developments. Fashion trends can offer a safe space of clothing options. Knowing that items are fashionable can make them a safe choice. Yet, throughout, interviewees emphasized the importance of suitability for themselves. Asked if she is paying attention to fashion developments, Sherryl (lower status group), for example, answers:

*No, not really.. But I usually note them actually. For example on Zuidplein (local shopping center), that is completely full with.. yes, fashion, that is actually in. I once googled, three months ago, when I thought 'what is the fashion in this year'. Cause I wanted to buy new things and then I looked for what was in, so that I wouldn't run around weird. Back then it was pastel-colors, purple and that sort of thingies, green, mint, that was in. Well. I didn't buy it.*

*Interviewer: It wasn't for you?*

*Sherryl: Noo, noo. I am always worried. Sometimes I have certain colors I really don't wear! Orange, only on queens' day, kings' day then. And yellow, also horrible to wear. [...] in terms of color, I don't know, I really hate the color yellow. I don't find it pretty at all. Pink I also find weird to wear. Maybe a little bit on the shirt, but fully pink, nooo.. yes.*

*Interviewer: And if pink would be fully in fashion would you still not wear..*

*Sherryl: That I don't know, because fashion does quite a lot. Sometimes I buy things that I actually don't want to wear (laughs)*

*Interviewer: Do you have an example?*

*Sherryl: Ahm, I had a dress with holes/ tears and pfhh.. I don't know man. But, it didn't suit me well in the end. I don't know where it is.. You have these shops there with really nice clothing for slim people, but, I didn't feel it fitted right, I didn't feel comfortable so I haven't worn it again.*



Here, Sherryl describes an interesting relation to trends. Her checking current trends before going shopping indicates that she likes to see herself being part of larger trends and making sure she is not the odd one out. Yet, she has her own principles of what colors would or would not suit her. Exceptions can be made for king's day, which is a Dutch holiday on which many Dutch people dress in orange to celebrate the monarchy. Here, the occasion beats her sense of aesthetics. Describing the dress with holes in it, she reflects how much influence fashion trends have on her, motivating her to buy this dress even though she did not feel that it was right for her.

Similarly, many other interviewees emphasize that a trend has to fit them:

*I do try to stay up to date. Again, not really very actively but I... do kind of follow trends or at least know what they are about. Not that I always follow them like, in my own clothes but, I (usually) know what the trends are and then I pick out what I really like and, leave what I don't really like. (Linda, culture)*

A large share of the interviewees thus feels inspired by trends and orient their new clothing to it. Yet, many emphasize that they are not simply buying everything in fashion but handpick and choose what fits with their identity and body. Being up-to date becomes an ideal that is adhered to if aesthetically acceptable. Several interviewees reflect that this ideal is steering them more than they would want to, as Sherryl's shopping of a dress she did not like indicates. Fashion is thus a frame and from that, interviewees pick what does not appall them.

## **7.4.2 Distancing from trends**

Some interviewees of all three groups actively distanced themselves not only from trends that would not match with them – but from the idea of following trends in general. Eugene (business) for example, is generally rather negative about trends:

*I think the way I work with trends, is when I see something new that one of my friends wears, something, new, (kind of way of wearing clothes), I'll make fun of them for a while. And then, maybe about six month later, I'll probably decide that it's quite a good idea, and copy them. [...]*

*Interviewer: How come you change your mind?*

*Eugene: Ehm, probably because I, I stop making fun of them after six months. And think, if they want it so much, it's probably quite a good idea to do it. And*

*then I try it on and someone might say something nice to me about it, like oh that's nice on you. And I'm like yeah, that is nice on me. And then I carry on wearing it for another six months. So I'll find something else to make fun of. [...] I'm being slightly (pretentious) I think. I mean, in terms of my fashion choices, I probably see someone is wearing something good one time and I'm like that will work. And so I'll do the same, but I'll do the same like every day. (both laugh) So it's kind of, imitation rather than thinking.*

While Eugene generally rejects following trends, calling it ridiculous on other occasions, he still acknowledges that seeing things a lot will inspire him to try trends as well and he is influenced by positive feedback. Still this seems to make him, in comparison to his peers, a late adopter who does not take much risk in experimentation. Yet, he is aware of his own double standards. Making fun of his more fashionable friends appears to be less based on aesthetics than on the fact that what they wear is too fashionable. Some are more actively avoiding the fashion industry altogether, such as David who goes shopping only when friends or girlfriends urge him to. When asked if he orients his clothing on trends, David (lower status) answered:

*I, I so couldn't care less... that I don't want to eternalize on tape..*

*Interviewer: Does it amuse you?*

*David: Yes for sure (laughs). Well, what does amuse mean? A part of me finds it rather sad.. Well, I don't mind if people dress tastefully and such. And I understand that that always relates a little bit to current trend developments and such, but.. right? If all wear the caps here only on top of the head, that looks like shit, don't do it.*

For some, especially among the people dedicated to the cultural field, others that follow trends too much are ascribed a lack of authenticity. As Fliege (culture), a fashion photographer in Berlin, elaborates:

*Many, especially in Berlin, are walking around very fashionable, but I think they don't have a style because they simply wear what everybody here wears. And I almost can't look at it anymore. That's why I liked living in Paris or London, cause people there still have a different sense of fashion. They still dare to dress up chic, walking outside chic. Here people are like uhww, what's he wearing, you know? I think it is a pity, cause you're limited and that is the worst that can happen, if you're limited. Well for myself I don't know if I have style, I simply wear what I like.*

Here, clothing style becomes a matter of authenticity. Wearing what he really likes puts Fliege above fashion dopes that do not dare to make their own choices. Style then becomes a matter of confidence and independence from the masses. Some interviewees try to actively avoid what they consider too trendy. Without reflecting this explicitly, they seem to rather avoid trends that have already reached their plateau. Ronaldo (culture) for example reflects about his shopping behavior:

*My first go-to point is mostly Zara and H&M. For simple stuff. Ahm, well I have to say, for Jeans I am a bit of a brand-type. So I actually buy jeans from two brands, Diesel and Replay, because I simple, ah, I like the jeans of these two brands. And then a H&M jeans can't compete. But, especially because it is H&M, well, then I rather go to a second hand store and buy anything there. Cause, it is too, too, too trend. Too trendy what they sell there. You can notice with the cut, you notice when you, for example, the shorts, I don't understand it because the designer could have made better things. Well, sometimes it is not in itself, not so bad what they do.. But it seems like an unfinished idea. So, somehow I have the impression that the designers really know exactly what they could have done better but don't do it on purpose because they, I don't know, like Dolce & Cabana or someone else [...] it really seems as if the designers wanted to copy something but then don't do it very well so that it remains H&M compatible.*

Here, Ronaldo associates poor design quality with mass-chains and trends. He considers them too trendy which implies that a little bit trendy might not be a problem for him and they still serve him well for 'simple things' which, as for some interviewees would be the rather invisible clothing such as socks, underwear or T-shirts.

### **7.4.3 What is bad style?**

When asked about what they consider bad style, many interviewees highlight their tolerance of what other people are wearing. Anne (business) for example states: Well it always depends, well if someone else wears it, then I don't care, but, ahm, I think clothing has to fit. Yet, Anne (business) also notes that in her business environment, unsuitable outfits are being pointed out:

*It always depends on context, right? When I'd see someone at work, never mind how stylish it is, for example, leopard-shoes at our work, well, then this women gets a comment, it's a bit weird, yes? The shoes can be as cool as they want, right? But it doesn't fit in the context sometimes, right?*

This quote indicates that appropriateness of style is very context dependent. A lack of sensitivity to context is framed as bad and in some contexts rebuked by comments. Many interviewees are rather quick, though, to move from expressing a general tolerance towards other people's clothing to particular things they dislike. Most still have a clear opinion about what they would never wear themselves or find appalling with others. Two rather dominant discourses evolve around the social appropriateness of clothing. The first focusses on the fit for the body and how revealing the clothing is; the second discourse focusses on the occasion and social situation.

The discourse about body-fit and revealingness of the clothing is used by some interviewees from all groups. Often, the comments are related to body size. While emphasizing the general acceptance for different sizes, often harsh boundaries are drawn towards the ones who wear clothes that do not hide overweight.

*Well, right now you see, these (laughs), that I find very trashy (Assi), all with everything one wears a tight top and a leggings, ehm, only most cannot afford that body shape-wise. That I find a bit problematic. While I am in favor of everyone loving their bodies as they want, or as they are, but it remains questionable if one has to.. wear.. a tight spandex trousers with that.  
(Lena-Maria, business)*

Similarly, Lynn (lower status) gives as an example of what she considers bad style: a person wearing clothing that is three sizes too small and "if someone looks like a stuffed sausage". In these examples, interviewees seem to avoid judging on the body size of others on the surface, yet judge people on their supposing lack of self-awareness, which implies a clearly marginalized identity. People are supposed to 'love' their own body, yet if this body does not have the socially desired shape, they have to comply to a strict regime (covering it with clothing) in order to make it acceptable. The boundary towards the inappropriate clothing-fit then is a moral boundary that marginalizes overweight people. Interestingly, it is often women who are mentioned as bad examples in too tight clothes. This might indicate that there is still a higher scrutiny towards female dress and or stricter norms that women are expected to attend to (see for a more elaborate discussion Entwistle, 2000). Yet, there are also some examples of men being criticized for their revealing

clothing. Ronaldo (culture) dislikes men showing their chest and Arien (lower status) elaborates:

*Well, the classic 'ass seeks pants'. Thus if the pants hang below the belt, were you can really only think "can you please pull up your pants? I didn't want to know what boxer-shorts you are wearing" or it's already pre-programmed, á la belly showing, that you'll get a kidney damage, I can't stand that.. [...] it could be on purpose, it could also be too wide pants. Everything in that direction, showing belly is; No, I don't like it really. At home possibly, but not to walk outside with.*

Here we also see a clear distinction between the public realm and the home, where Arien is more tolerant. Interesting is also the reference to kidney damage, here, the argument is built around health issues and then intertwined with aesthetic judgment.

The second discourse regarding social inappropriateness of clothing is, mostly of concern to the business-professionals in the sample. Anne (business) elaborates:

*Mh, especially at work it has to fit in the, in general, in the context, right? Well, I mean if it's business or if one has a gala, then, you wouldn't wear jeans*

Horst (business):

*I think bad style is, is when people dress up which is not appropriate for the situation, that is bad style in general, ehm.. but I think there are styles that are never appropriate, so that's even more bad style..*

*Interviewer: Do you have examples?*

*Horst: Ja for example I don't like tattoos or eh... ehm... I don't like.. the more extreme stuff, like I said, the rock concert t-shirts or eh, hippie stuff or eh, yeah it can be fashionable but eh, in general I don't like tattoos and piercings and that kind of stuff. [...] It's hard to distinguish between aesthetically and what you define as appropriate, I think that's really, yeah connected to each other so I can't see that separately [...]. I don't like sportswear either eh, fine if you play tennis of course but not really to wear [...] these kind of running outfits when you go to the supermarket for example, or anything else except for sports.*

Horst is quite reflexive about his aesthetic taste merging with social norms. Clothing choices can be acceptable in certain contexts, yet not in others. He further draws a clear boundary towards subcultural symbols such as tattoos and piercings. This

dislike is shared by several other business professionals, yet among the lower status, mixed professions sample several interviewees subscribe themselves to subcultures and their respective clothing styles. Anna for example, describing her experience of a Poland-visit: “When I show up there, tattooed from head to toe, pierced, colorful hair, you feel a little like a freak. But rather friendly, very polite. Totally underestimated country, that I’ve learned”. Later, when explicitly asked to describe her clothing style she elaborates:

*Casual and comfortable. Well, I don’t like tight things, I don’t like emphasizing the body, I don’t like it slinky. Ehm, I have unbelievably many band-clothes, so Band T-Shirts, soccer clothing, many, well St. Pauli (Hamburgian football club), right, for sure. I also have, well, if I dress up, which doesn’t happen often, it is rather Rockabilly Style, well, that’s what almost everyone in our friends’ circle; I am a Hanse child<sup>26</sup>, and I grew up in a Hanseatic city, live in a Hanseatic city. Everything that has an anchor and is marine blue is pretty and will be bought.*

Here, Anna does not only subscribe her style to one- but several subcultural identities: German rock, the alternative Football Club St Pauli associated with leftist politics and counter culture, rockabilly, and finally a local, Hanseatic-maritime style. Among the culturally very involved group, while there is less of a rejection of specific subcultural symbols as among the business professionals, they often draw a boundary towards people that fully commit to a subcultural identity as too one-dimensional.

Several interviewees of the business professionals and lower educated but not from the culturally very involved group bring forward an interesting point that relates to considerateness and the affordability of appropriate clothes today. Economic boundaries are delegitimized by drawing a boundary towards people that do not pay attention to their outer appearance:

*It is important to me that one runs around well groomed and such, that one looks good somehow.. [...] I also think, even if you have little money or something, one can buy good clothes for cheap.. One doesn’t need to look like a bum. (Ralf, lower status group)*

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<sup>26</sup> Hanse child and Hanseatic city refers to the Hanseatic League a trade and defense confederation of merchants and cities established in the middle ages around Baltic, maritime trade. Hamburg for example is still officially named Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and Lübeck is Hansestadt Lübeck (Hanseatic city of Lubeck)

Similarly, Jack and Monique (both business group) argue that money is no longer an 'excuse'.

*I sometimes see that meeting people at the office or, clients coming in where sometimes I think, you know, they could have maybe been a bit more formal in their wear. Not necessarily wearing a suit, but where I thought they were maybe a bit too shabby. Not really planned, like people that look put together, so like they spent a bit of time thinking about what to wear.*

*Eh, especially now because you know clothes have become quite affordable, like even H&M has really cool items and really nice fabrics so it's not like, I don't think, women particularly, have any excuse not to look decent.*

*(Monique)*

Here, Monique draws a clear boundary towards people who do not consider their outer appearance (enough). Interestingly, being dressed appropriately is not about the money spent- as she argues, everyone could afford H&M, but instead about time spent in considering one's appearance. Again, she is especially strict with women. As clothing is considered affordable, not looking 'put together' or looking like a 'bum' is thus less tolerated and becomes an issue of inappropriate behavior. While interviewees thus delegitimize economic differences, appropriate or decent clothing becomes a matter of consideration of social context. Looking 'well put together' though takes some skill or mastery of symbols, so knowledge.

Here boundaries are drawn towards people that do not adjust to the standard. Representativeness here is an interesting way of putting it as it is not clear what should be represented. It might be closely connected to appearance in the business world Jack works for. Jack would like people to adjust, look 'representative' and 'normal' -which he connects to clean, ironed and fit clothing. What is thus notable is that the emphasis of the discourse lies on the affordability of 'decent' outfits, but the cultural capital necessary to know and apply these styles or even general willingness to adjust to these norms remain unaddressed. It is thus assumed that knowledge on what is 'appropriate', 'put together' or 'normal' is available to everyone. This basic assumption is highly problematic as Beverley Skeggs (1997) has emphasized. Criticizing clothing for being too revealing as I have discussed above and not appropriate in certain contexts links closely to respectability which, as Skeggs (1997) shows is a marker of middle classness. As she argues, "respectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who are not do not" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 3). Respectability is something to aspire to, yet not accessible for working classes who lack cultural and economic resources.



In a few interviews, ethnic boundaries are being drawn when dress is discussed. Fenna (lower status group) is one of the few interviewees, where subcultural style is identified with race.

*I ABSOLUTELY don't love this; how do I say it neatly, negro clothing<sup>27</sup>. It is true, I don't have anything against dark people or I don't care, but, that type of person does for example wear baggy-pants, the low hanging where you see the boxer shorts here. And, or the T-Shirts for men that are now in fashion, they are a little longer, hang here openly, that I really don't like for example. Every subculture has actually their own clothing a little, such as the Gabbers in the past, they wore this brand of clothes, with track pants, that I like, but not the low-hanging pants, and noo, bleah, noo.*

Here, Fenna draws aesthetic boundaries that merge with moral ones. She thinks very positively about Gabbers, a rather local subculture to Rotterdam, she does connect baggy pants closely with dark skinned people of today. She constructs be to not offensive or rude, yet seems to ascribe this clothing style to an entire ethnicity. Fenna is not the only interviewee who draws moral boundaries towards specific subcultures on the basis of their clothing while equalizing subcultures with entire ethnicities or races.

In stark contrast to these discourses pushing for an adjustment to a constructed normality, several interviewees, especially among the more culturally involved people emphasize a different discourse that relates to bad style. Tina (culture), who generally opposed the idea that a certain piece of clothing could be bad style, elaborates:

*Mostly it is central for me, is somebody worn by his clothes or is someone wearing his clothes. Eh, it is incredibly dreadful to me if I get the feeling; well, that doesn't mean it is not legitimate or so, of course other people try stuff as well; but if I get the impression someone looks dressed. So if he somehow seeks to follow a certain style-concept, where one could say yes, fits all criteria of that style, ticks all the boxes, agreed; but doesn't feel it. So in principle stands in an insane contradiction with the outfit and tries to live up to that style.*

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<sup>27</sup> The word negro- ,neger' is, though also considered offensive by some, still rather commonly used in Dutch and not considered offensive by everyone.



Here, the emphasis lies on the match between personality and outfit. Inauthentic outfits appear the worst for Tina who herself is deeply immersed in playing with different styles and their symbolic meanings. Nevertheless, the sentiment is shared by others, as Fred (culture) states:

*Bad styles to me is when people wear stuff they don't feel comfortable in. In regards to clothing. Apart from that it is also impossible behavior, that's also part of bad style in the end, simply bad manners I don't appreciate.*

Kasper (culture) elaborates a rather different example of inauthenticity:

*Last year I was in Australia and you see all these surfer dudes with their hair gone wild and the Billabong-things hanging to their knees [...]. And they try to be so casual [...], but when you notice closely, they pluck very carefully all their eyebrows and these and they spend like hours in the gym and they, if the sun is not hot enough they are in their tanning-bath, you know, getting their tans and, you know? you are not casual, you're not anything it's just that you, it's a look and you take hours to get it.*

*J: So it's too much attention in a way to a look; a look that is supposedly random and it's supposed to look all mixed together but in the end it's just too much attention to look like this?*

*K: Ja, and if, you know, if you wanna spend so much time on your appearance go for it! But then don't try to make it like it's so, that you just got out of bed that way. [it's just sick] you know, go, go knock yourself out, wear a crazy head, do whatever, I'm the last one to say anything, but, for me it's ja, if it comes across fake then I'm just not interested.*

Here, appearing casual while being very concerned with one's looks is what annoys Kasper (culture). Yet also among the business professionals, authenticity and individuality are of concern to some, albeit with a different connotation. Monique (business), for example, is concerned not to mix too extreme styles. Her business-background defines her style to some extent and sets a boundary to other styles even if she appreciates them.

*Monique: Sometimes you see people that are really, like the hipsters you know, you've got a lot of those here [...], I don't think it suits my personality and my background and you know, my business-type of background. I don't see how I can go from really businessy during the day to I'm hipster during the weekend, it's not my style. For me it's a bit too far in terms of being really fashionable. I*

*think some people can pull that off, and I think that's really cool, I appreciate that, but sometimes you also see rockers or people that are really into gothic clothes, and if they can pull it off nicely, well, good for them, I wouldn't have anything against a particular style that I wouldn't like, I think as long as it's good on you, it's fine? Yeah.*

Monique displays openness and appreciation to diverse styles. Yet, the limit is 'as long as it's good on you', which makes the style depended on the wearer.

There are rather contrasting discourses about the breaking of style boundaries. While some interviewees dislike the mixing of different styles (Ralf, Andy, James, all lower status group), others embrace exactly this as the most skillful way of dressing if it is done 'right'. Christoph (culture) for example, asked if there are styles he does not like, answered:

*Yes, I find it totally boring if one has one style, for example rockabilly-girls, these days, they are simply from top to bottom skull and cherry and ehh, I think that, well, I think everything is boring that has no counterbalance, that doesn't break at any point. And if there is someone who is a MOD, simply only a MOD, or only, whatever; I think it becomes interesting if one starts to combine, then fashion starts to interest me. If someone, is simply true to a style and safe in that style, then it stops being interesting and I start finding it embarrassing. Because fashion has a lot to do with trying to bring to the surface, to the outside what is inside, a totally deranged attempt! But, cause of course that is impossible. But that I think is exciting about fashion.*

This comment again links to notions of authenticity: an interesting character is reflected in a diverse, multi-layered and reflexive style.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

The three groups of young northern Europeans that differ in their education, occupation and level of cultural involvement have a range of discourses on clothing in common. There is an almost inescapable trend awareness among these city inhabitants. They differ in their trend orientation, whereby from every group some are more actively orienting their styles on current trends than others.

The adaption of trends however, differs. While some see trends as a means to stay up-to date and display a sense of fashionability and style, others, especially among the business group and the lower status group, describe adhering to trends as a rather safe space. The most outspoken clothing styles that use fashion as a playful expression are found among the culture group. Here, playing with symbolic meanings of fashion requires a mastery of these symbols while both other groups tend to shy away from breaking style boundaries.

Fashion trends to some extent define what is normal in this group of young Northern Europeans. Yet, some interviewees of all groups reject trends as a cultural concept that does not concern them while others acknowledge that it inevitably influences them after a while. Here, following trends is seen as going against logic or practicality but adopting to group norms. Among all groups there is also a widely shared sense that wearing clothes only because they are trendy is not appreciated. Instead, they select the fashions they deem to fit with their personality and body alongside preferred colors and details which give a sense of own style. A common boundary, especially among the business professionals and lower educated group, is drawn towards inappropriate, too revealing dress, which is partly associated with ideas about ethnicity and body-norms. Here, we might see signs of cultural goodwill and cultural marginalization. Interestingly, especially the culture group draws boundaries on the basis of authenticity rather than 'decency'. Authenticity in style, displaying a unique personality however, appears closely bound to the mastery of symbols.

Those lowest in cultural capital are likely struggling to fulfil these requirements, and the higher up you go the more subtle it gets with being authentic instead of phony and being able to find the right dress for the right circumstance. Money is not accepted as an excuse, the dimensions that structure fashion do not literally range from 'high fashion' to 'low' or 'mass', but draw on autonomy, authenticity, daring to be different, flexibly adjusting to circumstances. While there is thus not a one-dimensional hierarchy, these concepts are nevertheless structured by the availability of cultural knowledge or capital. Mastering the symbols in a way that is accepted as authentic by the cultural group requires confidence and knowledge of styles. Similarly does looking decent or 'well put together' require knowledge of what this style entails at the time and in a social context.

## 8. General conclusion

I set out to study culture, to find out how people think about their cultural consumption, what they consider relevant or less relevant and how they evaluate cultural products. I was interested in how different social groups negotiate their identity through culture, how they draw boundaries and make sense of good and bad taste. When I started to interview, I was curious how people would color in the term omnivore, fill trendiness, but also traditional highbrow culture with their meanings. In the following, I first summarize findings that relate to the initial research question, how do socio-demographic background characteristics relate to the way people draw cultural boundaries and negotiate their identity with taste? Then I address the other research questions and central themes that emerged in relation to them in some more detail.

I first interviewed a group highly committed to the cultural sector, the culturally involved group. They were deeply immersed in the cultural field(s) of urban centers. Most had studied at university and most hoped to make a living with their own art or being involved in the field through facilitating and gatekeeper roles such as band managers, event organizers, bookers or theater critics. A lot of them could be described as omnivores, yet that label does not seem to mean much in itself. What was striking in their discourse, however, was the emphasis on openness and their concern with authenticity. 'Being true to oneself' was prevalent in how they reflected upon their own cultural taste and life-choices. They also judge other people by these criteria. If we think with Goffman, then the display of a personality cannot be 'authentic', only convincing or not. There is hardly one 'true self' but rather different masks we learn to wear (see also Lawler, 2014). If we connect this longing for a true self to the cultural field, we know it is a central challenge to 'stand out from the crowd' as a creative person (Hracs, Jakob, & Hauge, 2013). On a personal level, creating a unique persona is, at least to some extent, achieved by combining an original set of cultural interests and turning them into a unique taste fabric. Looking for something truly innovative, pushing the boundaries is deemed important, and could mostly be achieved by bricolage. As we know, taste very much identifies and describes a person, a unique taste with an open mind appears to help produce a unique persona.

The second group, young business professionals, appeared far less concerned with culture. Few were dedicated music listeners or art lovers. Nevertheless, I would not conclude music is entirely unimportant to this group as a whole. Listening to music provides a life soundtrack, a tool for mood management à la Tia

DeNora (2000) and is certainly appreciated. Yet, interestingly, among most of the business professionals interviewed here, music does not play an important role in their social world and is therefore not central for symbolic distinction. Several interviewees were not too sure about the music taste of their friends, since it is not a common conversation topic for them. Similarly, they would occasionally visit art museums, especially during their travels, but would be quick to emphasize not knowing much about the art presented there. Music described as aggressive, such as Heavy Metal, was widely disliked among the business professionals who often also disliked subcultural styles of dress. Here, 'weirdness' was something to symbolically disassociate oneself from (Bryson, 1996).

The level of engagement with art-works varies among this group. While some follow the marked footpath in the Louvre to quickly see the Mona Lisa and then leave the museum, others would describe their fascination with Dalí and details of his works. The fact that even someone who does not enjoy the Louvre visit would still go there on his trip to Paris shows there is still an aura of legitimacy and normativity surrounding the visual arts. Yet, contrary to past theorizations, there is little shame to acknowledge the absence of true fascination or expertise. Also, being more deeply involved and knowledgeable about visual arts, as a few of the business professionals are, seems to render little symbolic profit for them in their environment. Overall, distinction among the business professionals rarely happened on the basis of aesthetic appreciation of culture but was rather grounded in the realm of morals and work ethics.

The lower status group is by far the most diverse. They work in various fields and seem to come from rather diverse backgrounds and identities. Therefore, it appears hardest to make out central shared discourses for this group (see also Peterson & Simkus, 1992). They were for example rather divided between those rejecting any music perceived as aggressive or too loud and others who very much appreciated this type of music. Further, they displayed a range of seemingly unusual hobbies and expertise involved with this. What is very clear from these interviews is that calling them 'inactive' or passive is rather reductionist. Scholars not being able to produce surveys that capture ordinary people's leisure activities is perhaps a clearer sign of social division than the alleged difference in cultural activity levels between the higher and lower educated. Ascribing lower status groups one homogenous mode of consumption such as pursuing culture as a means to an end (Jarness, 2015b) seems to do little justice to, at times, people's deep involvement in certain leisure activities. For instance, interviewees in this study would join their friends at a party with music they do not enjoy themselves,

then listen to classical music for relaxation and read extensively on free masonry as a hobby.

### ***What are central boundaries emerging in the discourse on taste?***

A central value within all three groups was openness. This openness is, at least to some extent, a discursive product, a way of portraying the self, rather than a universal acceptance of difference. Among the interviewees in the culturally involved sample, openness and authenticity stood out as very central values and fundamental grounds by which to draw boundaries.

Among the business professionals, aesthetic and moral boundaries very much intersect with their rejection of 'weird' art, music and clothing. Next to the discomfort with weirdness, experimentalism or the subcultural, moral boundaries influenced judgments of artworks as some interviewees admired hard working artists producing large, detailed paintings.

For the lower status group, there is less of a clear, unified discourse. While some people displayed cultural goodwill or emphasized barriers to consume visual arts, others were rather open about their disliking of museums and inaccessible, abstract art. At the same time, most also declared themselves open for the possibility to go to museums and the like if, for example, someone would invite them or ask them to join. There is thus little general, outspoken rejection among my interviewees. When it comes to people, many mentioned moral characteristics such as dishonesty and unreliability as traits they disliked, often based on negative experience with former friends, partners or colleagues. Relating the findings back to Lamont's (Lamont, 1992) work, I found mostly cultural boundaries for the culturally engaged sample, while for both other groups, moral boundaries are very important, at times interlinking with cultural ones. Conversely, economic boundaries are not very explicit in the discourse, possibly because the interviewees are relatively young and their own economic position is not yet settled. At times, however, economic boundaries relating to social class seem to be lurking behind moral boundaries.

In a time when the value of openness is central to identity performance and functions as a moral boundary, disliking something on the basis of aesthetics such as 'ugliness' or 'simplicity' finds little social acceptance. In a time when 'bad taste' can be embraced as camp, it only seems justifiable to dislike something when it is morally detested. It remains acceptable to reject cultural goods or people and their

taste based on morals. Disliking is generally considered appropriate if it is done on moral grounds. Aesthetics and morals thus often fuse in the evaluation of culture and are difficult to disentangle at times.

***Which status hierarchies can be observed in discourse on taste in fashion, music and visual arts?***

Trendiness remains a tricky thing – the tension between innovation and imitation often makes it a slippery slope and a sensitive topic for many. In the realm of dress, being ahead or on the forefront of trends can be a source of pride, emphasizing the innovativeness and daringness of the self. Being the first means not being tainted by the suspicion of copying. Being too interested in trends however already raises suspicion for some. Being ‘in the know’ without being a copy-cat is considered to be desirable. Interviewees from all groups in this study stressed the importance of not following trends blindly but selecting those suitable to one’s own body and personality. In line with this, some interviewees are rather dismissive of trend-followers. While there seems no systematic difference between groups, trends are more relevant for some and more openly rejected by others in every group. Concerns about trendiness flow along other considerations in outfit selections, while most interviewees are aware of trend-developments at least to some extent and position themselves toward these developments.

Overall, there was a large variety throughout the groups in how people engaged with new music. Interestingly, only a few interviewees indicated it was important for them to stay up-to-date with new music. Especially among the culturally involved group there were some dedicated music lovers that kept on searching for new music and listening to different kinds of new releases. For some, this comes with their job (e.g. a DJ, musicians and a concert booker), for others it is a leisure time passion. Some interviewees from all groups reflected that discovering new music was more important for them when they were younger. Now, in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, they only sporadically checked new music in order to stay a somewhat current either with new developments in the field at large or specific artists they admire. Some interviewees, especially among the business professionals and lower status groups, are listening to radio stations playing top-40 music on a regular basis. This makes them aware of the newest songs, but they are rarely emotionally attached for the long term to specific artists or genres. For these interviewees, demonstrating expertise in music does not seem to render a lot of prestige in general but it depends on a person’s social surroundings, such as one’s circle of



friends or how much one can impress with specific cultural knowledge. Some other interviewees independently of which sample they belong to, has certain favorites, often acts, or in a few cases labels, they grew attached to in their adolescent years that they keep on following. They are happy with the music they once chose for themselves and do not look out for new artists too much.

An interesting case in terms of status distinction is local music. As I interviewed people living in larger cities, I found they often grew attached to local artists. Rotterdam, for example, used to be famous for its hardcore music which, as it appears, most interviewees who grew up in Rotterdam listened to at least during their teenage years at parties. Similarly, quite a few of the people from Hamburg are proud of Hamburg's hip hop or 90s indie music scene as they grew up listening to at least some of the hits. This local pride refers to relatively contemporary popular music and is not confined to the lower status group. Other interviewees reflect upon their involvement with local scenes, especially during their youth. Asked about local folksy music, most interviewees are rather quick to declare their disliking. There are a few exceptions; particularly among the lower status group and the business professionals a few interviewees see themselves exposed to this music on family celebrations and some interviewees from the lower status group have friends that like this kind of music. Parallel to these different forms of local music, all interviewees also listened to international music.

Quite a lot of interviewees describe how they discovered certain music or other art forms through friends. Also, going out for theater-plays, concerts or festivals is something many interviewees would only do together with friends. At the same time, some complain about not knowing other people that would be interested in joining them for museum or gallery visits. Social networks may thus play an important role in encouraging or discouraging cultural participation (Mark, 1998).

Being up-to-date can be a symbolic resource. However, none of the interviewees seems to be informed about the trends in every cultural form; possibly none of them has that much time on their hands. Similarly, people seem to not be an expert omnivore throughout all cultural fields (Van Eijck & Michael, 2013). Instead, it appears people 'specialize' in certain cultural forms, e.g., sports, healthy food, music, visual arts, film, clothing or a combination of these. Further, many report they draw on their friends' network or family members to stay loosely informed about other domains. Birgit, for example, checks new art exhibitions and events in her home city and invites her friends to come along. She herself does not know much about new music being released. Instead, some of her friends provide her



with new music. This information exchange within friends' networks seems worthy of more extensive investigation. It raises the question to what extent this information functions as a resource or capital among friends, to what extent status is ascribed to 'being the one who knows'. Within a network, cultural knowledge can give status, without being necessarily translatable as cultural capital to many other social contexts.

Thinking a little more about traditional high status forms that were discussed, music and visual arts are two rather different domains. Classical music is used as a means for relaxation by some of the business professionals and lower status groups. Described in this way, it is far away from being appreciated in a legitimate way. At the same time, it is also still a subject of cultural goodwill, something one 'should' listen to more often. However, for some the term classical music is so broad that it accommodates nearly any instrumental music from movie soundtracks. A few interviewees from each of the groups seem to have a bit more extensive knowledge in this domain, often socialized into it by parents.

For the visual arts, there is a more prevalent, obvious access barrier. It is a domain with striking differences between the social groups interviewed here. Yet, today it is easy to find acceptable other cultural forms to appreciate. Not going to an art museum does not make a person 'barbaric'. Rather, what comes forward as important is to display an openness towards different kinds of cultural experiences. Refusing to consider the option then could come across as narrow-minded.

The opposition between a more cultural and a more economic orientation, described by Bourdieu as the dominant and the dominated fraction of the dominant class appears still very relevant today and manifests itself not only in how boundaries are being drawn, but also to what individuals aspire. These two groups, here approximated by the young business professionals and the culturally involved, move in rather different value spheres and often geographic spaces of the same cities.

***How do 'emerging forms of cultural capital' (e.g., omnivorousness, trendiness, authenticity) relate to the traditional cultural hierarchies to which Bourdieu referred?***

The answer to this research question has to remain rather tentative. Omnivorousness remains a rather broad concept that can manifest itself in everyday life in many different ways. Especially when studying discourse, omnivorousness seems in

itself hardly mentioned but rather produced as a performance of openness. Most interviewees would not be aware of their taste being categorized as omnivorous and their daily musical diet even from a top-40 radio station can already have a rather omnivorous character. Yet, displaying a detailed and varied music taste can be used to construct a unique taste which adds to a convincing performance of individuality and authenticity.

Authenticity is of most urgent concern to the culturally involved group. Above all else, cultural products as well as people needed to be perceived as authentic. This typically stands in contrast to trendiness. Following trends would imply copying other people, which seems to be acceptable only if combined with other, non-trendy items that emphasize individuality. This need for individuality is not new to society (see also Gronow, 1993), but it may be accelerated by an increasing concern with authenticity, which requires 'to be one's true self', which cannot be a copy, as I have argued in Chapter 4. However, being authentic also requires a deeply ingrained disposition in order to be at ease when evaluating culture and interact with other people (Bourdieu, 1984). This idea of disposition remains thus useful in grasping newer forms of social distinctions.

Authenticity is an interesting status marker largely overlooked in the literature on cultural capital. Authenticity only exists when it is ascribed to a person or object, it is thus a relational and rather intuitive category that is difficult to quantify even though recently scholars have begun to capture the phenomenon in quantitative research (Goldberg et al., 2016).

Trendiness, as discussed above, seems to be a two-edged sword: It can be desirable when performed convincingly and with a 'personal touch', but it is to be avoided when it is conceived as simply following trends. It thus requires mastery of fashion symbols or contextual clues in order to be used as a source of prestige. It may thus relate closely to Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital, albeit in a less formal, appropriately dosed manner.

### ***Implications for conceptualizations of cultural capital***

As discussed on several occasions in this dissertation, cultural capital is a much contested, yet very popular concept in sociology. I agree with the current literature that ascribes decreasing relevance to traditional highbrow cultural capital as it was measured by Bourdieu (1984). Yet it still has a specific status that is widely

acknowledged, as becomes evident by people still casually engaging in highbrow activities or expressing a desire to do so. Interestingly, these activities do not seem to be necessarily coupled with extensive knowledge. As several interviewees mention, they would know the names of some of the most important classical composers or artists, but do not always know more about their style, works or context. Visual art museums are then seen as a potential sources of entertainment. Guided tours can enrich this experience by adding information, but visual art is hardly described as a transcending experience by the interviewees in this study. What people do in terms of cultural participation is less revealing than the meanings they attach to these activities. These meanings cannot be easily read off single activities, but from patterns and ways of engaging with culture.

Considering the emerging forms of cultural capital as measured by Savage et al. (2013) cover media consumption (video gaming, social network sites and the internet at large), watching sports, time with friends, gym visits and a preference for rap and rock music. Many interviewees, especially from the lower status group, appear to be rather active in these domains. Without having systematically probed for these activities, playing computer games, reading online and participating in sports appear to be rather common hobbies, often among the first things the interviewees mention. These activities are rather similar to what Savage et al. (2013) have categorized as emerging forms of cultural capital. Yet, what potential these activities have as actual capital should be determined by its potential to generate profits. While they appear entertaining and possibly educational, challenging in some cases (such as difficult strategic computer games), some interviewees reflect that a few of these activities, such as extensive video gaming, are not widely accepted and 'respectable' hobbies. Yet, the meaning attached to many of these activities can also relate to their nature: checking the news online or the newest works of a contemporary composer.

Social connections were perceived as very important for the careers of the business professionals (at least in their current career stage). As described in the interviews, social connections do not come from long established family connections, but grow on the work floor and the social life around it. They do not seem to require a lot of highbrow cultural knowledge but social intelligence and 'soft skills'. Instead, talking about a variety of topics, partly work related but also sports and traveling might relate to rather subtle yet essential forms of cultural capital.

Among the culturally involved people, social contacts were little emphasized as career enhancing. I did not, however, explicitly probe for factors that would

determine career success in this field or the importance of networks. Wide networks in the field seemed to be a given and self-evident, evolving around shared interest in the arts. Cultural capital usually becomes profitable when it can be turned into social capital. The connection between social and cultural capital certainly requires more research and could reveal a lot about actual exchange values of cultural capital. The often proposed forms of emerging cultural capital such as cosmopolitanism, openness, but also engaging in a range of additional leisure activities likely vary considerably in what extent they translate to other forms of capital. Openness certainly is a central cultural value and, as Ollivier (2008) has suggested, can take very different forms. However, as an actual resource that functions as cultural capital, thus having a form of exchange value, it remains difficult to establish. Future research should therefore explore this possible exchange value in social life more closely. Instead of focusing on one form of capital or cultural hierarchy at the time as a lot of recent research has done, different forms of capital should be studied in relation to each other.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Overview of interviewees wave 1 (Culturally involved)**

Most of the interviewees are highly educated; only two had never been enrolled in education at the university level. Two were still studying and about half of the participants had an MA degree or an equivalent diploma. Their current occupations though are often part-time jobs and not always related what they have been trained for.

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<sup>28</sup> Interviewees in all groups chose pseudonyms for this research.

<sup>29</sup> This list includes the education that the respondents are enrolled in at the time of the interview.

## Overview of interviewees and their occupational and educational status

Pseudonym <sup>28</sup>	Current occupation	Education <sup>29</sup>	Current Location	Age
Arne	Sound-technician, booker	MA in Art History	Berlin	37
Birgit	Communication assistant	MA in Corporate Communication	The Hague	25
Bob	Tour-manager and student	currently Studies Media Management	Amsterdam	26
Christoph	Musician	BA Communication Design	Berlin	30
Eva	Musician	Conservatory	Rotterdam	31
Fliege	Fashion-photographer	A-levels, quit studying	Berlin	29
Fred	DJ and searches day job	A-levels, quit studying Design	Hamburg	31
Gabriela	Student	MA in Media and Journalism	Rotterdam	24
Judith	Temporary employee (part time) in university administration	MA in Theater, Communication and Film Studies	Amsterdam	23
Kasper	Searching a new job	MA in Marketing and Entrepreneurship	Berlin	27
Linda	Part-time work for a fund raising and marketing organization for cultural events	MA in Cultural Economics	Rotterdam	25
Luzie	Student and freelancer for a publisher	MA in Literature and Sociology	Berlin	25
Mary	Student and marketer for a theater company	BA Theater science, currently Acting school	Amsterdam	26
Michael	Student and part time job in a super market	A levels, starts BA in Bio-engineering	Copenhagen	23
Ronaldo	Student and waiter	Quit studying business, cur. acting school	Hamburg	26
Tina	Works in a bar and performance artist	A levels, quit studying literature	Hamburg	27
Truus	assistant stylist and fashion designer	MA in Fashion and textile design	Rotterdam	25



## **Appendix B: Overview of interviewees wave 2 (Business professionals)**

All of the interviewees in this group have tertiary education. Only one has not obtained a master's, but only a Bachelor degree. Several further completed two master's degrees, often one in business and an additional one in management or finance. All interviewees are full time employees in multi-national companies.

<sup>30</sup> This list includes only one degree per interviewee and therefore excludes a few double degrees

## Overview of interviewees and their occupational and educational status

Pseudonym	Job title	Education <sup>30</sup>	Sector	Current Location	Age
Tom	business performance reporting adviser	MSc in International Management	Oil and Gas	The Hague	28
Julia	Consultant	MSc in International Management	Consultancy	Vienna	28
John	Business development manager	MSc in International Management	Apparel Industry	Amsterdam	26
Louise	International Marketing Manager	MSc in International Management	FMCG (Fast moving consumer goods)	Dusseldorf	27
Lena-Maria	Brand Manager	MSc in International Management	FMCG	Dusseldorf	28
Anne	Global Business Operations Manager	MSc in International Management	Telecommunications	Dusseldorf	27
Maria	Trainee (Finance and Controlling)	MSc in International Management	Chemicals	Dusseldorf	27
Richard	Senior Product Manager	MSc Economics & Business	FMCG	Rotterdam	27
Est	Project manager	Masters in Finance, Controlling and Taxation	Online Services	Munich	26
Sarah	Senior Consultant (2)	MSc in International Management	Consultancy	Zurich	29
Jack	National Account Manager	Master in international business	FMCG	Utrecht	29
Andreas	Junior Associate Tax adviser	Masters in tax law	Consultancy (Tax and Legal)	Amsterdam	25
Barbara	Pricing and Demand Analyst	MSc in International Management	Oil and Gas	Hamburg	27
Monique	Brand Manager	MSc in International Management	FMCG	Copenhagen	28
Maximilian	Global Portfolio Manager	MSc in International Management	Telecommunications	Dusseldorf	28
Rafiqué	Implementation Consultant	Ba Business Administration	Financial Services	Amsterdam	29
Lydia	Account Manager	MSc in International Management	Online Services	Hamburg	31
Eugene	Strategy Consultant	Masters in Economics	Consultancy	London	25
Paul	Senior Consultant	Masters in Economics	Consultancy (Tax and Legal)	Berlin	29
Horst	Senior Associate	Masters in Finance & Investment	Banking	Amsterdam	30
Leo	Controller	MSc in International Management	Energy	Dusseldorf	31

**Appendix C:  
Overview of interviewees wave 3 (Lower status group)**

This group consists of people in working class and lower middle class positions while the boundaries between the two are not very clear-cut. In comparison to the other groups, this group represents a relatively lower status. While some also have parents in traditional working class occupations, a few, such as David and Tobi, come from middle-class backgrounds. For some interviewees, migration backgrounds complicate their family of origin’s social position as is the case with Ali, Benjamin, James and Sylvie.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>English translation of job title</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Sector experience</b>	<b>Age</b>
Maurice	Promoter, software expert	geriatric nursing (upper secondary educ.)	Care & Service	36
Gerda	Geriatric nurse	Dental technician (upper secondary), Geriatric nursing (lower sec. educ.)	Care (dental and elderly)	27
Anna	Management assistant in retail business	Trained retail saleswoman (upper secondary)	Service	29
Tommy	Geriatric nurse assistant (untrained)	Lower secondary education (general schooling, preparatory for vocational trainings)	Care	31
Tobi	Technical assistant at the Germany army	Lower secondary education (general schooling, preparatory for vocational trainings)	Technique	26
David	Factory-worker (employed through a temporary employment agency)	Secondary school certificate (Abitur), used to be a student at university but quit without a degree	Manual labor (Production)	35
Ralf	Butcher, working in diverse side-jobs	Butcher (upper secondary vocational training)	Service	26
Andy	Shop assistant, currently unemployed	vocational training as shop assistant (lower secondary education)	Service	26
Arien	Shop assistant (untrained), employed through a temporary employment agency	Lower secondary education (general schooling, preparatory for vocational trainings)	Care & Service	31

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>English translation of job title</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Sector experience</b>	<b>Age</b>
James	Education to become a preschool teacher	Secondary school certificate (with detour), now in vocational training as preschool teacher	Care & Service	28
Lynn	Shop assistant	Lower secondary education (general schooling, preparatory for vocational trainings)	Service	30
Joey	Courier and dishwasher in a small restaurant	quit many different educations, considering to apply for upper secondary training	Service	21
Sylvie	In-between two security jobs, from security guard to transportation security	Lower/intermediate secondary vocational training (mbo 2)	Service & Manual labor	29
Lisa	Unemployed, part-time babysitter	No completed second. Education	Care	22
Willem	Whitesmith and crane operator	Lower/intermediate secondary vocational training (mbo 2)	Manual labor (Production)	26
Benjamin	Pizza courier	Not completed lower secondary vocational training (mbo 1)	Service	29
Sherryl	Unemployed	wants to start lower secondary vocational training (mbo 1 or 2)	Service	21
Deborah	Shop assistant, currently unemployed	Lower/intermediate secondary vocational training, business (mbo 2)	Service	25
Ali	Warehouse assistant	Upper secondary vocational training (mavo 4, about equivalent to mbo 3)	Service, Manual labor	35
Fenna	Part-time care worker	Lower/intermediate secondary vocational training (mbo 2)	Service, care	34
Nick	transportation security	Lower//intermediate secondary vocational training (mbo 2)	Service	23

## **Appendix D: Interview guide English (Business professionals)**

(After information about the interview procedure, informed consent and room for questions)

### **Intro**

- First, I would like to know a little bit more about your background and current position.
- What is your current occupation?
- How did you get there?
- Age? Where are you from originally? What are your parents doing/ what was there education?
- How do you spend your free time?

### **Music**

- How important is music for you?
- What kind of music are you listening to?
- Is there any music that you dislike, or certain characteristics of music?
- How do you discover new music?
- Similarities / Differences to friend's taste? To mainstream, what is mainstream?
- How has your taste developed over time?

### **Fashion**

- How did you chose this morning what to wear?
- How would you describe your personal style?
- How often do you buy new cloth? Where?
- How do you feel about cloth from mainstream chains such as H&M?
- How confident are you in your clothing choices? Are you asking other people for advice in what suits you?
- Has your style developed over time?
- Are current trend developments important for you?
- How do you know about new trends? Do you ever read fashion magazines?  
Style of close friends?
- Examples of bad style?

## **Art**

- Are you interested in art? If , what?
- What like/dislike ?
- What How did you become interested? How do you find new stuff?

## **People**

- What kind of people do you value?
- What kind of people do you connect with?
- If you think about your friends, do they share your interests?
- Are there character-traits that you dislike in other people?
- I imagine you are working in a competitive environment, could you describe how that feels?
- What kind of people make a 'big' career in your field?
- How important is sociality for that?
- Where would you like to see yourself in the future?
- Working hours?

## **Ending**

- Is there anything that you think might be relevant which I haven't addressed or what I should know?
- Do you have any open questions, maybe things you would like to ask me?
- It will take some time, but I will send you the article which I will write after the analysis so you get an idea what I am doing with this data. If any other thoughts or reflections and the like come up after this talk, I'm happy if you contact me (Business cards).

## **Appendix E: Interview guide Dutch**

(After information about the interview procedure, informed consent and room for questions)

### **Intro**

- Wat is je huidig beroep? Kun je me vertellen, hoe je in deze positie bent gekomen? Hoe heb je de keuze voor dit beroep gemaakt?
- Hoe oud ben je momenteel?
- Wat zijn je ouders van beroep? (Wat voor opleiding hebben ze genoten?) Waar ben je opgegroeid?
- Wat doe jij in je vrije tijd?

### **Muziek**

- Hoe belangrijk is muziek voor jou?
- Wat voor muziek luister jij graag?
- Bestaat er ook muziek die je minder leuk vindt?
- Hoe kom je nieuwe muziek tegen?
- Wat voor muziek luisteren jouw vrienden?
- Als je terugdenkt, hoe heeft jouw muzieksmaak zich ontwikkeld sinds je een tiener was?

### **Mode**

- Hoe heb je vanmorgen bepaald wat je zou aantrekken?
- Hoe zou je je eigen kledingstijl beschrijven?
- Wat vind je van winkelen/ shoppen? Hoe vaak doe je dat ongeveer?
- Vraag je iemand anders voor advies als je nieuwe kleding gaat kopen?
- Hoe houd je jezelf op de hoogte van nieuwe modetrends?
- Lees je modemagazines of fashion blogs?
- Wat is slechte stijl volgens jou?
- Wat voor kleding stijlen vind je lelijk? Ken je mensen die dit dragen?

### **Kunst**

- Ben je in kunst geïnteresseerd? Zo ja, wat voor kunst?
- Hoe ben je met kunst in contact gekomen?

## **Mensen**

- Zou je kunnen aangeven of er mensen zijn naar wie je opkijkt?
- Kun je beschrijven wat voor een type mens jij waardeert? Karaktereigenschappen waar jij van houdt?
- Zijn er ook karaktereigenschappen die je naar vindt?
- Wat voor karaktereigenschappen zijn nodig voor succes?

## **Einde**

- Waar zie je jezelf over vijf of tien jaren?
- Is er nog iets wat misschien belangrijk is maar wat ik niet heb gevraagd?
- Heb je vragen aan mij?
  
- Het zal een tijdje duren, maar als je geïnteresseerd bent, kan ik mijn studie naar je opsturen als het klaar is.



## **Appendix F: Interview guide German (Business professionals)**

(After information about the interview procedure, informed consent and room for questions)

### **Intro**

- Was ist Dein derzeitiger Beruf? Magst Du kurz beschreiben, wie du dort gelandet bist?
- Alter, Herkunft, Eltern – Beruf und Bildung
- Wie verbringst Du Deine Freizeit?

### **Musik**

- Wie wichtig ist Musik für dich?
- Was für Musik hörst Du gerne?
- Gibst es auch Musik, die Du weniger magst? Wie lernst du neue Musik kennen? Geschmack der Freunde? Mainstream?
- Wie hat sich der Geschmack über die Zeit entwickelt?

### **Mode**

- Wie hast du heute Morgen entschieden was zu anziehst?
- Wie würdest Du Deinen eigenen Stil beschreiben?
- Wie oft ungefähr kaufst Du neue Kleidung? Wo?
- Was für ein Verhältnis hast Du zu großen Ketten wie z.B .H&M?
- Hat sich Dein Stil in den letzten Jahren verändert?
- Wie wichtig sind gegenwärtige Trend Entwicklungen für Dich?
- Wie Bemerkest Du neue Trends? Ließt Du Modemagazine? Wie ist der Stil Deiner engen Freunde?
- Gibt es Stile, die Du hässlich findest?
- Was ist schlechter Stil?

### **Kunst**

- Interessierst Du Dich für andere Kunst? Fall ja, was für welche?
- Wie kam es dazu, dass Du Dich dafür interessierst?

## **Menschen**

- Mit was für Menschen hast Du schnell eine Verbindung?
- Generell, was für Menschen schätzt Du am meisten? Gefallen Dir besonders
- Wenn Du an Deine Freunde denkst, teilt ihr eure Interessen?
- Gibt es Charaktereigenschaften, die Du nicht leiden kannst?
- Verhältnis zu Kollegen
- Was braucht es um in Deinem Bereich eine gute Karriere zu machen?
- Wo siehst Du Dich selbst in der Zukunft, so in 10 Jahren?

## **Ende**

- Gibt es irgendetwas, das vielleicht wichtig wäre, ich aber nicht gefragt habe? offenen Fragen, evt. auch an mich?
- Es wird eine ganze Weile dauern, aber wenn Du magst, schicke ich den Artikel, den ich aus dieser Studie schreibe. Falls Du noch Reflektionen oder andere Gedanken hast die Dir irgendwann nach dem Interview kommen, freu ich mich, wenn Du mich kontaktierst.

## Nederlandse samenvatting

Verschillen tussen mensen gebaseerd op migratieachtergrond, gender, en socio-demografische kenmerken zoals leeftijd, opleidingsniveau, inkomen en beroepsstatus structureren leefstijlen en de maatschappelijke kansen die men krijgt. Dergelijke factoren worden meestal niet letterlijk benoemd in alledaagse conversaties, maar de bijbehorende verschillen zijn desondanks alomtegenwoordig in morele en culturele scheidslijnen en impliciete smaakhiërarchieën. Eén van de centrale onderwerpen in het vakgebied van de sociologie van de voorbije decennia betreft de vraag hoe leefstijlen en smaken zijn gestructureerd, en in welke mate ze zijn gestructureerd door de socio-economische posities van actoren. Het verband tussen cultuur en sociale klasse is gelinkt aan de notie van sociale uitsluiting omdat dit verband een zekere mate van reproductie van sociale ongelijkheid langs klassengrenzen in de hand werkt (Bourdieu, 1984). Dat zal meer het geval zijn naarmate de relatie tussen de sociale en de culturele hiërarchie in een samenleving eenduidiger en stabiel is. De afgelopen decennia worden echter gekenmerkt door grote sociale en culturele veranderingen. Individualisering, sociale mobiliteit, globalisering, en de continu veranderende trends in cultuur en technologie. Dat roept de vraag op wat voor de huidige jongere generaties nog de relevantie is van oudere culturele hiërarchieën die gebaseerd zijn op het onderscheid tussen zogenaamd *hoge* en *lage* cultuur. Ondanks een reeks aan waardevolle kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve studies die zijn uitgevoerd in het vakgebied, blijft de vraag naar hoe verschillende culturele, economische en sociale hulpbronnen zich tot elkaar verhouden, onbeantwoord.

Een belangrijk concept om dit soort processen te omschrijven is het concept 'cultureel kapitaal'. Het wordt algemeen aangenomen dat cultureel kapitaal drie vormen aanneemt: een belichaamde vorm, een geobjectiveerde vorm, en een geïnstitutionaliseerde vorm (Bourdieu, 1986). Geobjectiveerd cultureel kapitaal verwijst naar het bezitten van culturele producten zoals boeken, muziekinstrumenten en kunstwerken. Geïnstitutioniseerd cultureel kapitaal wordt beschreven als academische kwalificaties, en het belichaamde cultureel kapitaal wordt gevormd door culturele kennis, smaak en consumptie. Deze belichaamde vorm van cultureel kapitaal staat het meest centraal in studies naar culturele stratificatie en leefstijlen. In de voorbije jaren is een heel scala aan opkomende vormen van cultureel kapitaal onder de aandacht gebracht. Zo werden een eclectische culturele smaak (typerend voor de zogenaamde 'culturele omnivoor'), kosmopolitisme en trendgevoeligheid voorgesteld als vormen van belichaamd cultureel kapitaal die in toenemende mate aan belang zouden winnen (e.g. Bellavance, 2008; Prieur & Savage, 2013; Taylor,

2009). Deze vormen van kapitaal kunnen bijgevolg een rol spelen in het verklaren van hoe symbolische en culturele scheidslijnen tegenwoordig in stand worden gehouden.

Verschillende academici hebben erop gewezen dat we, om culturele stratificatie te begrijpen, niet enkel de culturele producten die mensen consumeren moeten bestuderen, zoals bijvoorbeeld de muziek die ze beluisteren, maar dat we hiervoor ook moeten kijken naar hoe ze deze producten consumeren, aan wat voor praktijken zij deelnemen, welke betekenis of waarde zij toekennen aan culturele zaken, en hoe zij bijvoorbeeld muziek evalueren.

Voortbouwend op de ideeën dat traditionele hiërarchieën in status en symbolische betekenissen aan het verschuiven zijn en dat statusverschillen in steeds subtielere vormen naar voor kunnen komen, levert dit onderzoek een bijdrage aan het begrijpen van hoe statusonderscheid vorm krijgt en op welke basis scheidslijnen worden getrokken tussen sociale groepen in de hedendaagse samenleving. Hiervoor onderzoek ik discoursen over culturele smaak en consumptie en analyseer ik de scheidslijnen die niet enkel worden gecreëerd, maar ook worden versterkt en in stand gehouden door dergelijke discoursen. Op basis van 59 interviews over kledingstijlen, muziek, beeldende kunst en mensen, ga ik na welke onderliggende waarden deze domeinen verbinden en hoe verschillende sociale groepen zich onderscheiden van anderen in en door hun discours. Om zowel het discours over culturele smaak te kunnen bestuderen als de wijze waarop dit discours door verschillende sociale groepen wordt gebruikt voor cultureel *'boundary work'* (Lamont 1992), vergelijk ik discoursen van mensen uit eenzelfde leeftijdscategorie die beschikken over verschillende hoeveelheden cultureel en economisch kapitaal.

Ik geef voorlopige antwoorden op de volgende onderzoeksvragen:

- (I) Wat zijn centrale scheidslijnen die naar vorenkomen in het discours over smaak?
- (II) Welke statushiërarchieën kunnen vastgesteld worden in de discoursen over smaak in mode, muziek, en beeldende kunst?
- (III) Hoe verhouden 'opkomende vormen van cultureel kapitaal' (vb. omnivoriteit, trendgevoeligheid, authenticiteit) zich tot de traditionele culturele hiërarchieën waar Bourdieu naar verwijst?
- (IV) Hoe verhouden socio-demografische achtergrondkenmerken zich tot de manier waarop mensen culturele scheidslijnen afbakenen en via hun smaak uiting geven aan hun identiteit?

Dit onderzoek focust op drie culturele domeinen. Ten eerste muziek, een cultuurvorm die diep verankerd is in ons dagelijks leven. Muziek wordt gebruikt op talrijke manieren en is op ontelbare wijzen verbonden met het sociale leven. Het kan een gevoel van verbondenheid of gemeenschap bieden, maar kan anderzijds ook ‘gebruikt’ worden voor zogenaamd *mood management* (DeNora, 2000). Samen met schilderkunst wordt muziek beschreven als de meest legitieme kunstvorm (Boudieu, 1985, p. 14). Tegelijkertijd omspannen de verschillende vormen, genres, en makers van muziek alle denkbare posities in de symbolische ruimte. Muziek is waarschijnlijk één van de meest algemeen bestudeerde, maar ook meest dynamische en alom verspreide vormen van cultuur. In veel onderzoek naar culturele leefstijlen van de voorbije decennia werden de conclusies gebaseerd op analyses van muziekmaken (Coulangeon & Lemel, 2007; Coulangeon, 2015; Peterson, 1992, 1997b; Van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). Afhankelijk van het genre, behelst muziek alles van prestigieuze *highbrow* cultuur tot massacultuur. Aangezien deze categorieën ook veranderen doorheen de tijd, kan het bestuderen van de wijze waarop muzieksmaak wordt besproken in verschillende sociale groepen veel onthullen over vormen van cultureel kapitaal en culturele waarde.

De beeldende kunsten hebben gefungeerd als een gemeenschappelijke en breed gedeelde indicator van een hoge maatschappelijke status in westerse samenlevingen (Roose, 2015, p. 558). Hoewel traditionele *highbrow* cultuur mogelijk [in belang] aan het afnemen is, zijn er nog steeds veel verschillende manieren om beeldende kunst te waarderen, en blijft het mogelijk een relevant gebied voor de bestudering van statusverschillen (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014; Hanquinet et al., 2013).

Ten derde zijn ook mode en kleding diep ingebed in het alledaagse, maar desondanks weten we relatief weinig over statusonderscheid in het hedendaagse discours over mode en kleding. Trendgevoeligheid en vernieuwingsdrang werden recent voorgesteld als kenmerken die prestige opleveren; mode is het gebied waarin deze factoren nogal vanzelfsprekend relevant zijn. Mode kan een hoge mate van cultureel kapitaal en aanzien symboliseren, terwijl confectie vaak wordt gezien als een oppervlakkige vorm van expressie, die geassocieerd wordt met massaconsumptie.

Om een beter begrip van symbolische scheidslijnen en hiërarchieën binnen deze drie domeinen te ontwikkelen, heb ik steekproeven geselecteerd uit drie verschillende groepen van Noordwest-Europeanen. Om een duidelijk beeld te schetsen van het huidige discours van relatief jonge mensen, worden in dit onderzoek twintigers en dertigers onderzocht. Deze leeftijdsgroep gaat door een voor dit onderzoek interessante levensfase; de meesten hebben een carrièrepad

gekozen, maar hebben zich nog niet volledig gesetteld. Ze vertegenwoordigen relatief jonge culturele consumenten die voornamelijk hun eigen inkomen verdienen, en mogelijk deelnemen aan de nieuwste trends op het gebied van muziek of mode (Crane, 1999). Voorts concentreert dit onderzoek zich op mensen die leven in sterk geurbaniseerde gebieden in Noordwest-Europa. Uit deze omvangrijke populatie werden subgroepen geselecteerd op basis van hun beroep alsook hun bezit van cultureel kapitaal. Om de betekenis van de posities van de geïnterviewden in het sociale veld te analyseren, werden ze gerekruteerd uit drie verschillende sociale subklassen.

De eerste groep bestaat uit mensen die een grote hoeveelheid cultureel kapitaal bezitten en nauw betrokken zijn in het stedelijke culturele even. Deze mensen worden geacht zich bezig te houden met zowel traditionele als innovatieve, avant-garde kunst en stijl, mogelijk in de hoedanigheid van moderne “hipsters”, trendsetters en potentiële leden van de (toekomstige) culturele elite. Deze deelnemers zijn van specifiek belang voor het onderzoeken van de relevantie van trendgevoeligheid als een status verlenend mechanisme. Ik noem ze hier gemakshalve de culturele groep.

De tweede groep wordt gevormd door *aankomende zakenlui* in de vroege fase van hun carrière, werkend voor multinationals. Dit zijn hoogopgeleiden met het potentieel om deel te gaan uitmaken van de economische elite. Deze groep is relevant om recente mechanismen van distinctie en in- en uitsluiting te kunnen begrijpen die meer gericht zijn op economisch kapitaal.

De derde groep bestaat uit mensen met een in vergelijking lage(re) sociale status (lager opgeleid en met een relatief lage beroepsstatus). Interviews werden afgenomen bij mensen werkzaam in de sectoren zorg en welzijn, techniek of detailhandel. Deze beroepsvelden sluiten aan bij de meest populaire lagere tot middelbare opleidingen in Nederland en Duitsland, waar deze groep werd gerekruteerd. Lagere statusgroepen zijn in eerdere survey-onderzoeken getypeerd als tamelijk inactief op het gebied van cultuur, of als univoren. Desalniettemin moet nog worden onderzocht op welke manieren deze groep zich verhoudt tot bijvoorbeeld hoge cultuur, of hoe zij hun vrije tijd invullen. Hiervoor moeten opvattingen over cultuur, dominantie en het cultureel veld als strijdtoneel meer diepgaand worden onderzocht. Aangezien deze groep over het algemeen minder mobiel blijkt binnen Europa (Verwiebe et al., 2014), en mogelijk meer gericht is op lokale cultuur, is deze groep gerekruteerd in slechts twee steden: het Nederlandse Rotterdam, en Hamburg in Duitsland.

## Onderzoeksmethode

Individuele diepte-interviews bieden de mogelijkheid om de subtiele ideeën en processen van betekenisverlening van de geïnterviewden te kunnen vatten. Op de data werd een discours analyse toegepast. Aangezien onze kennis van de wereld wordt gevormd door taal, die de realiteit weerspiegelt en organiseert (Tonkiss, 1998), vormt taal een belangrijk medium om culturele hiërarchieën en scheidslijnen te bestuderen. Ik bekijk met andere woorden welke betekenissen worden geconstrueerd door het discours en hoe dit is ingebed in de sociale context, om te kunnen begrijpen hoe culturele hiërarchieën en scheidslijnen worden waargenomen, opgetrokken en verdedigd.

Ik stel de analyse en de resultaten voor in vier grote hoofdstukken. Hoofdstuk 4, getiteld *'It's really not hip to be a hipster: Negotiating trends and authenticity in the cultural field'*, zoomt in op de culturele groep. Voor deze gretige cultuurconsumenten – die ook vaak cultuurproducenten zijn – bieden culturele grensoverschrijdingen en het experimenteren met verschillende stijlen de mogelijkheid om smaakpatronen te creëren als vormen van expressie die dicht bij het zelf staan en daarom als authentiek gelden. Het volgen van nieuwe trends en subculturen wordt opzij geschoven als zijnde saai, oppervlakkig en nep. Authenticiteit en originaliteit, zelfs idiosyncrasie, worden bijzonder gewaardeerd en worden beschouwd als nuttige bouwstenen om een identiteit te ontwikkelen en om een positie te veroveren in het culturele veld. Uniek en individueel zijn in je smaak – wat tot uitdrukking komt in een persoonlijke stijl, en muziekconsumptie en -productie – maken iemand volgens deze groep tot een authentieke persoon. Het onderzoeken van trendgevoeligheid en smaakgerelateerde affiniteiten en aversies als mogelijke statuskenmerken levert veelbelovende inzichten op in het cruciale belang van authenticiteit bij het trekken van symbolische grenzen.

Hoofdstuk 5, *'Highbrow culture for high-potentials? Cultural orientations of an economic elite in the making,'* verkent de culturele smaak van *young business professionals* en het belang van een *highbrow* culturele smaak in hun sociale – en professionele leven. Eerdere studies kennen de economische elite een eerder conservatieve *highbrow* smaak toe, terwijl recentere studies juist de voordelen van omnivoriteit voor *business professionals* hebben benadrukt. De culturele consumptiepraktijken van *young business professionals* worden besproken in verhouding tot hun sociale netwerken (sociaal kapitaal) en hun loopbaanontwikkeling. De interviews onthulden dat binnen hun eigen discours over smaak, relevante scheidslijnen vaker gebaseerd zijn op morele dan op esthetische criteria. Terwijl ze een openheid met betrekking tot veel vormen

van cultuurparticipatie vertonen, lijkt het *highbrow* discours nogal irrelevant. Cultuurconsumptie speelt een beperkte rol in de levens van de geïnterviewden, die sociabiliteit en arbeidsethos als belangrijker beschouwen in hun sociale en/of professionele relaties. Het feit dat iemand die niet geniet van een bezoek aan het Louvre toch naar het museum zal gaan wanneer hij of zij Parijs bezoekt, toont aan dat er nog steeds een aura van legitimiteit en normativiteit hangt rond de beeldende kunsten. Desalniettemin, en in tegenstelling tot wat eerdere theorieën claimden, bestaat er nauwelijks schaamte over het erkennen van een gebrek aan oprechte belangstelling of expertise. Voorts lijkt een diepere betrokkenheid en kennis over beeldende kunst – zoals het geval is bij een aantal van de *business professionals* – hen maar een beperkte symbolische winst op te leveren in hun omgeving. Over het algemeen baseerden de *business professionals* hun oordelen over anderen zelden op de esthetische appreciatie van cultuur; moraal en arbeidsethos speelden een veel belangrijker rol.

Sociale connecties werden van groot belang geacht voor de carrières van de *business professionals* (in elk geval in hun huidige loopbaanstadium). Zoals beschreven in de interviews, komen sociale connecties niet voort uit gevestigde familieverbanden, maar ontstaan deze op de werkvloer en in het daaraan verbonden sociale leven. Ze lijken geen grote hoeveelheden *highbrow* culturele kennis op te pikken, maar wel sociale intelligentie en ‘soft skills’. We kunnen overigens stellen dat het praten over een breed scala aan onderwerpen – dit kan deels werkgerelateerd zijn, maar kan eveneens gaan over bijvoorbeeld sport en reizen – op zich ook in verband kan worden gebracht met een eerder subtiele maar desondanks essentiële vorm van cultureel kapitaal.

Hoofdstuk 6, “Me, I’m busy with very different things’: An expedition into pastimes, music and apparel taste of lower status people’ behandelt de culturele smaken van de derde groep in deze studie. In het meeste survey-onderzoek wordt deze sociale groep als cultureel inactief gekenschetst, met een univore, lokale en populaire smaak. De interview data in deze studie hebben echter een meer complex beeld geschetst van hun cultuurparticipatie, die reikt van een diep subcultureel engagement, over het omarmen van de ‘mainstream’, tot erg specifieke niche expertises. Vele geïnterviewden hebben expertkennis opgebouwd in zeer specifieke niches, zoals bijvoorbeeld buitenlandse voetbalcompetities, dieren, mode uit de Jaren ’60, of vrijmetselarij. Enquêtes die peilen naar cultuurparticipatie nemen dergelijke factoren slechts zelden in beschouwing. Dergelijke vaststellingen vragen met andere woorden om een meer open en inclusieve aanpak om participatie te meten.



Deze groep lijkt het meest divers te zijn in hun culturele oriëntaties. Waar sommigen de door Bourdieu voor hen typerend geachte culturele welwillendheid (*cultural goodwill*) toonden, of de hindernissen die hen ervan weerhouden om beeldende kunst te consumeren op een rijtje zetten, waren anderen juist openhartig over hun afkeer van musea en ontoegankelijke, abstracte kunst. Tegelijkertijd verklaarden de meesten wel open te staan voor de mogelijkheid om bijvoorbeeld musea te bezoeken indien iemand hen daarvoor zou uitnodigen. Er was met andere woorden slechts een beperkte algemene, uitgesproken afwijzing onder de door mij geïnterviewde mensen.

Hoofdstuk 7, *'Negotiating difference and taste in style: Comparing Northern European class fractions'* vergelijkt de drie groepen aan de hand van de manier waarop ze spreken over kleding en kledingkeuze. Het hoofdstuk onderzoekt hun oriëntatie op trends in hun kledingkeuze en stelt ze tegenover ideeën over slechte smaak.

Mode is een omstreden domein, waarin sociale veranderingen, normen, waarden, en ideologieën tot uitdrukking worden gebracht in de stijl en kledingkeuze van individuen. Binnen de drie groepen jonge Noord-Europeanen, die verschillen in opleiding, beroepskeuze en mate van culturele betrokkenheid, zijn meerdere overeenkomstige manieren van spreken over kleding te herkennen. Er is een bijna niet te vermijden trendbewustzijn aanwezig onder deze stadsbewoners. Ze verschillen echter in de manier waarop ze zich richten op trends, waarbij er in iedere groep personen aanwezig zijn die zich actiever op trends richten dan anderen.

De manier waarop trends worden overgenomen, verschilt. Waar sommigen trends zien als een manier om up-to-date te blijven en modebewustzijn en gevoel voor stijl willen laten zien, beschrijven anderen het meedoen met trends vooral als een veilige keuze. Dit is voornamelijk het geval bij de zakenmannen en -vrouwen, en de lagere-status groep. De meest uitgesproken kledingkeuzes, waarin mode wordt gebruikt als een speelse manier om jezelf uit te drukken, zijn te vinden in de culturele groep. Hier vraagt het spelen met de symbolische betekenissen van mode om de beheersing van deze symbolen. De andere twee groepen zijn voorzichtiger met het verleggen van grenzen op het gebied van stijl.

Voor deze groep jonge Noord-Europeanen bepalen modetrends tot op zeker hoogte wat normaal is. Maar binnen alle groepen zijn er naast personen die trends zien als een cultureel concept waar ze weinig mee te maken willen hebben, ook personen te vinden die erkennen dat ze op een gegeven moment onvermijdelijk beïnvloed worden door trends. Voor dit deel van de geïnterviewden is het volgen van trends

iets wat onlogisch en onpraktisch aanvoelt, maar wat helpt in het aanpassen aan de groepsnormen. Bij alle groepen bestaat er het breed gedeelde gevoel dat een keuze voor bepaalde kleding, alleen omdat die trendy is, niet gewaardeerd wordt. In plaats daarvan wordt er gekozen voor kleding die past bij hun persoonlijkheid en lichaam, en voor kleuren en details die een eigen gevoel voor stijl uitdrukken. Een breed gedeelde grens, in het bijzonder bij de zakenmannen en -vrouwen en de lager opgeleiden, wordt getrokken bij ongepaste en weinig verhullende kleding. Dit wordt deels ook in verband gebracht met ideeën over etniciteit en lichaamsnormen. Hier zien we mogelijk tekenen van culturele welwillendheid en culturele marginalisering. Interessant genoeg is het voornamelijk de culturele groep die authenticiteit belangrijker vindt dan gepastheid. Een authentieke stijl die een unieke persoonlijkheid laat zien, lijkt echter verbonden te zijn aan het beheersen van symbolen.

## **Conclusies**

Openheid was een centrale waarde binnen alle drie de groepen. Deze openheid is, tenminste tot op zeker hoogte, een discursief product. Het is een manier om jezelf uit te drukken, in plaats van een universele acceptatie van verschil. Voor de geïnterviewden in de culturele groep waren openheid en authenticiteit zeer centrale waarden en vormden ze de basis waarop symbolische grenzen getrokken worden.

Trendgevoeligheid blijft een lastig issue; de spanning tussen innovatie en imitatie maakt het vaak tot een hellend vlak en een gevoelig onderwerp voor velen. Op het gebied van kleding geldt dat vooroplopen met de nieuwste ontwikkelingen een bron van trots kan zijn omdat men daarmee vernieuwingsdrang en lef demonstreert. Wie de eerste is, loop niet het risico van kopieergedrag te worden beticht. Anderzijds kan het ook verdacht zijn om al te zeer in trends geïnteresseerd te zijn. Het gaat om het evenwicht, waarbij de ideale positie er eentje is waarmee iemand laat zien bij de tijd te zijn (*in the know*) zonder anderen na te apen. Personen uit alle drie de groepen benadrukten dat het van belang is om niet blindelings de laatste trends te volgen maar alleen datgene te kiezen wat past bij het eigen lichaam en de eigen persoonlijkheid. Bijgevolg stond een aantal geïnterviewden afwijzend ten opzichte van trendvolgers. Er zijn geen systematische verschillen tussen de groepen gevonden in dit opzicht; in elke groep zijn trends belangrijk voor sommigen en worden ze afgewezen door anderen. Of iets trendy is, is slechts één van de overwegingen die een rol spelen bij iemands kledingkeuze, maar de meesten hebben een redelijk goed zicht op de laatste trends en voelen zich geroepen om zich daartoe te verhouden.

Muziek en beeldende kunst zijn twee verschillende domeinen binnen de traditionele hoge kunst. Klassieke muziek wordt door sommige zakenmannen en -vrouwen en lager opgeleiden gebruikt als een manier om te ontspannen. Deze beschrijving van het gebruik van klassieke muziek staat ver af van een legitieme waardering van klassieke muziek. Tegelijkertijd is klassieke muziek ook onderdeel van culturele welwillendheid, iets waar je vaker naar zou moeten luisteren. Dat betekent niet dat men ook altijd weet wat eronder moet worden verstaan. Sommige geïnterviewden pasten de term klassieke muziek toe op een breed scala aan muzieksoorten, van bijna alle soorten instrumentale muziek tot aan de soundtracks van films. Een beperkt aantal geïnterviewden binnen de drie groepen bezat uitgebreidere kennis over klassieke muziek. Zij waren hierin vaak beïnvloed door hun ouders.

Voor beeldende kunst ligt de drempel kennelijk hoger. Het is een kunstvorm waar opvallende verschillen tussen de groepen naar voren traden. Het is vandaag de dag echter vrij eenvoudig om acceptabele alternatieve cultuurvormen te vinden om te waarderen. Niet naar een kunstmuseum gaan maakt een persoon in de ogen van de geïnterviewden bepaald nog geen (cultuur)barbaar. Het gaat er meer om dat men een zekere openheid laat zien ten aanzien van verschillende culturele producten en ervaringen. Weigeren om verschillende opties in overweging te nemen, wordt vaak als bekrompen gezien.

De tegenstelling tussen een meer culturele en meer economische oriëntatie, door Bourdieu toegeschreven aan de gedomineerde respectievelijk de dominante fractie van de dominante klasse, lijkt nog altijd zeer relevant en manifesteert zich niet alleen in hoe symbolische grenzen getrokken worden, maar ook in de ambities van mensen. Deze twee groepen, hier bij benadering gerepresenteerd door de jongere zakenmensen en de culturele groep, begeven zich in behoorlijk uiteenlopende waardendomeinen en ook vaak in verschillende delen van dezelfde stad.

## English summary

Differences between people based on immigration backgrounds, gender, socio-demographic variables such as age, education income and occupational status structure lifestyles, and life chances. While these factors are often not named explicitly in everyday talk, differences are instead carved out through moral and cultural boundaries and implicit hierarchies of tastes. One of the central concerns of sociology in the last decades has been the question of how lifestyles and tastes are structured and in what ways they are structured by socio-economic positions of actors. The association of culture and social class links to social exclusion and can thereby foster the reproduction of social inequality across class lines (Bourdieu, 1984). The last decades have been marked by major social and cultural changes. Individualization, social mobility, globalization and ever-changing trends in culture and technology raise the question of what relevance older cultural hierarchies based on the distinction of highbrow and lowbrow culture still have among younger generations today. Despite a range of valuable quantitative and qualitative studies conducted in the field, the question how different cultural resources relate to each other remains to be answered.

A prominent concept to capture these processes is cultural capital. Cultural capital is commonly understood to take three forms: embodied, objectified and an institutionalized form (Bourdieu, 1986). Objectified cultural capital refers to the possession of cultural products such as books, musical instruments and works of art. Institutionalized cultural capital is described as academic qualifications. Cultural knowledge, intertwined with cultural taste and consumption, form embodied cultural capital which is the most central for the study of cultural stratification and lifestyles. In recent years, a range of emerging forms of cultural capital have been brought to the attention. Eclectic cultural taste (omnivorism), cosmopolitanism, and trendiness have been suggested as increasingly important forms of embodied cultural capital (e.g. Bellavance, 2008; Prieur & Savage, 2013; Taylor, 2009). These forms of capital might thus help to explain how symbolic and cultural boundaries are upheld today.

Several scholars have pointed out that, in order to understand cultural stratification, we need to study not only the cultural objects people consume (for example, what music they listen to), but how they consume these objects, what practices they engage in, what meanings they attach to cultural items and how they evaluate quality.

Building on the idea that traditional status hierarchies and symbolic meanings are shifting and status distinction might happen in ever more subtle forms, this dissertation makes a contribution to understand how status distinction works and on what grounds boundaries are being drawn between different social groups today. I therefore investigate differentiating discourses on cultural taste and consumption and examine the boundaries created and reinforced by these discourses. By drawing on 59 interviews about clothing, music, visual arts and people, I will explore which underlying values connect these domains and how different social groups distance themselves from others in these discourses. To study discourses on cultural taste as well as how they are used for cultural 'boundary work' (Lamont 1992) in different social groups, I compare the discourses of people from a similar age group that differ in their cultural and economic capital.

I provide preliminary answers to the following research questions:

- (I) What are central boundaries emerging in the discourse on taste?
- (II) Which status hierarchies can be observed in discourse on taste in fashion, music and visual arts?
- (III) How do 'emerging forms of cultural capital' (e.g., omnivorousness, trendiness, authenticity) relate to the traditional cultural hierarchies to which Bourdieu referred?
- (IV) How do socio-demographic background characteristics relate to the way people draw cultural boundaries and negotiate their identity with taste?

This dissertation focusses on three cultural domains. First, music is deeply embedded in our everyday life. Music can offer a sense of belonging or community but also be 'used' for individual mood management (DeNora, 2000). Together with painting, music has been described as the most legitimate area of the arts (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 14). At the same time, different forms, genres and creators of music span all symbolic positions. Music is probably one of the most widely investigated but also most dynamic and widely spread cultural forms. Much of cultural lifestyle research in the last decades has built its conclusions on the analysis of musical taste (Coulangeon & Lemel, 2007; Coulangeon, 2015; Peterson, 1992, 1997b; Van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). Depending on genre, music covers very prestigious highbrow culture to mass culture and everything in between. As these categories are also changing over time, assessing how music taste is discussed by different social groups can reveal a lot about form of cultural capital and cultural value.

Secondly, the visual arts have functioned as a common and widely shared high status marker in western societies (Roose, 2015, p. 558). While traditional highbrow culture may be in decline, there are still many different ways to appreciate visual arts and it may remain a relevant field of status distinction (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014; Hanquinet et al., 2013).

Thirdly, fashion and dress are also deeply connected to the everyday, yet we know relatively little on status distinction in today's discourses on dress and fashion. Trendiness and novelty were suggested more recently as rendering prestige; clothing is the field where these are rather obviously relevant. Fashion can symbolize very high levels of cultural capital and prestige, while mass fashion is often seen as a superficial form of expression, associated with mass consumption.

In order to develop a deeper understanding about symbolic boundaries and hierarchies in these three domains, I sampled three different social groups of North-Western Europeans. In order to get a clearer picture of current discourse of relatively young people, this research deals with people in their 20s and 30s. This age group thus shares a similar life stage; most have chosen a direction for their career but are not fully settled yet. They represent relatively young cultural consumers that mostly have their own income and might be potentially taking part in the newest trends in music or fashion (Crane, 1999). Further this research focusses on people living in urban centers of North-Western Europe. From this wide population, sub-groups were selected according to occupation as well as cultural capital possession. In order to analyze the meaning of interviewees' positions in the social field, they were recruited from three different 'class fractions'.

The first group are people in possession of a great amount of cultural capital, deeply involved in urban cultural life. These people are expected to engage with traditional as well as innovative, avant-garde art and style, possibly being modern "hipsters", trendsetters and potential members of the (future) cultural elite. These participants are of particular importance for exploring the relevance of trendiness as a status distinction mechanism.

The second group are business professionals in the early stages of a business-career, working for multinational companies, highly educated people with the potential to become part of the economic elite. This group is relevant to study in order to capture recent distinction and inclusion mechanisms in corporate culture, with a larger orientation towards economic capital.

The third group are people with comparatively low social status (lower education and relatively low occupational status). Interviews were conducted with retail merchants, technicians and care-workers. These fields constitute the most popular vocational trainings in the Netherlands and Germany where the interviews took place. Lower status groups have been identified by survey research as culturally rather inactive or univorous. Yet, in what ways this group relates to, for instance, highbrow culture or how they spend their leisure time remains to be explored. Here, notions of culture, dominance and field-struggle are to be explored more in-depth. As this group tends to be a little less mobile within Europe (Verwiebe et al., 2014) and potentially more oriented towards local culture, it involves interviewees from only two cities, Rotterdam in the Netherlands and Hamburg in Germany.

### **Research methods**

Individual in-depth interviews provide opportunities for capturing subtle ideas and meaning-construction of the interviewees. The data is approached using a discourse analysis. As our knowledge of the world is shaped by language which mirrors and organizes reality (Tonkiss, 1998), language offers an important means to study cultural hierarchies and boundary work. I am thus looking at what is constructed by the discourse and how it is embedded in the social context in order to understand how cultural hierarchies and boundaries are perceived and constructed.

I present the analysis and results in four main chapters. Chapter 4, titled 'It's really not hip to be a hipster: Negotiating trends and authenticity in the cultural field', zooms in on the culturally involved group. For these eager consumers, who are often also producers of culture, crossing boundaries and experimenting with different styles allows for the creation of taste schemes as expressions of the self that are perceived as 'close to oneself' and therefore authentic. Following new trends and subcultures is dismissed as boring, shallow and fake. Authenticity and uniqueness, even idiosyncrasy, are highly valued and useful for identity work and for careers in the cultural field. Being unique and individual in one's taste, which can be expressed through personal style, music consumption and production, represents what is perceived as an authentic persona. Exploring trendiness as a potential status marker, taste-affiliations and aversions in urban cultural scenes reveal promising insights into the crucial importance of authenticity in symbolic boundary-work.

Chapter 5, 'Highbrow culture for high-potentials? Cultural orientations of an economic elite in the making' explores the cultural taste of young business

professionals and the relevance highbrow cultural taste has in their everyday lives and social connections. Earlier research ascribes a rather conservative highbrow taste to economic elites, while recent studies have indicated the benefits of omnivorousness for business professionals. The cultural consumption practices of young business professionals are discussed in relation to their social networks (social capital) and career advancement. The interviews reveal that within their discourse on taste, relevant boundaries are often based on morals rather than aesthetics. While they demonstrate openness towards many forms of cultural participation, highbrow discourse appears rather irrelevant. Cultural consumption plays a modest role in the lives of the interviewees, who consider sociability and work ethic more relevant when engaging in social and professional relations. The fact that even someone who doesn't enjoy the Louvre would still go there on his trip to Paris indicates a prevailing aura of legitimacy and normativity surrounding the visual arts. Yet, contrary to past theorizations, there is little shame to acknowledge the absence of true fascination or expertise. Also, being more deeply involved and knowledgeable about visual arts, as a few of the business professionals are, seems to render little symbolic profit for them in their environment. Overall, distinction among the business professionals rarely happened on the basis of aesthetic appreciation of culture but was rather grounded in the realm of morals and work ethics.

Social connections were perceived as very important for the careers of the business professionals (at least in their current career stage). As described in the interviews, social connections do not come from long established family connections, but grow on the work floor and the social life around it. They do not seem to require a lot of highbrow cultural knowledge but social intelligence and 'soft skills'. Instead, talking about a variety of topics, partly work related but also sports and traveling might relate to rather subtle yet essential forms of cultural capital.

Chapter 6, 'Me, I am busy with very different things': An expedition into pastimes, music and apparel taste of lower status people addresses the cultural taste of the third group under study. Most survey research has found this social group culturally relatively 'inactive', with a univorous, local and popular taste. The interview data in this study however suggest a more complex picture of cultural participation, which ranges from deep subcultural engagement over embracing of the mainstream to very specific niche expertise. Many interviewees have developed expert knowledge in very particular niches such as foreign football-leagues, animals, 60s fashion or free masonry. Cultural participation surveys hardly capture these domains. These findings then call for a more open, inclusive approach to measuring participation.



This group appears to be the most diverse in their cultural orientations. While some people displayed cultural goodwill or emphasized barriers to consume visual arts, others were rather open about their disliking of museums and inaccessible, abstract art. At the same time, most also declared themselves open for the possibility to go to museums and the like if, for example, someone would invite them or ask them to join. There is thus little general, outspoken rejection among my interviewees.

Chapter 7, 'Negotiating difference and taste in style: Comparing Northern European class fractions', compares the three groups in their discourse on clothing and dress. It explores orientations on trends in their clothing choices and contrasts notions of bad taste.

Fashion is a contested field, social change, norms, values and ideologies reflect and manifest in the dress and style of individuals. The three groups of young Northern Europeans that differ in their education, occupation and level of cultural involvement have a range of discourses on clothing in common. There is an almost inescapable trend awareness among these city inhabitants. They differ in their trend orientation, whereby from every group some are more actively orienting their styles on current trends than others.

The adaption of trends however differs. While some see trends as a means to stay up-to-date and display a sense of fashionability and style, others, especially among the business group and the lower status group, describe adhering to trends as a rather safe space. The most outspoken clothing styles that use fashion as a playful expression are found among the culture group. Here, playing with symbolic meanings of fashion requires a mastery of these symbols while both other groups tend to shy away from breaking style boundaries.

Fashion trends to some extent define what is normal in this group of young Northern Europeans. Yet, some interviewees of all groups reject trends as a cultural concept that does not concern them while others acknowledge that it inevitably influences them after a while. Here, following trends is seen as going against logic or practicality but adopting to group norms. Among all groups there is also a widely shared sense that wearing clothes only because they are trendy is not appreciated. Instead, they select the fashions they deem to fit with their personality and body alongside preferred colors and details which give a sense of own style. A common boundary, especially among the business professionals and lower educated group, is drawn towards inappropriate, too revealing dress, which is partly associated with ideas about ethnicity and body-norms. Here, we might see signs of cultural

goodwill and cultural marginalization. Interestingly, especially the culture group draws boundaries on the basis of authenticity rather than 'decency'.

## **Conclusions**

A central value within all three groups was openness. This openness is, at least to some extent, a discursive product, a way of portraying the self, rather than a universal acceptance of difference. Among the interviewees in the culturally involved sample, openness and authenticity stood out as very central values and fundamental grounds by which to draw boundaries.

Trendiness remains a tricky thing – the tension between innovation and imitation often makes it a slippery slope and a sensitive topic for many. In the realm of dress, being ahead or on the forefront of trends can be a source of pride, emphasizing the innovativeness and daringness of the self. Being the first means not being tainted by the suspicion of copying. Being too interested in trends however already raises suspicion for some. Being in the know without being a copy-cat is considered to be desirable. Interviewees from all groups in this study stressed the importance of not following trends blindly but selecting those suitable to one's own body and personality. In line with this, some interviewees are rather dismissive of trend-followers. While there seems no systematic difference between groups, trends are more relevant for some and more openly rejected by others in every group. Concerns about trendiness flow along other considerations in outfit selections, while most interviewees are aware of trend-developments at least to some extent and position themselves toward these developments.

Thinking a little more about traditional high status forms that were discussed, music and visual arts are two rather different domains. Classical music is used as a means for relaxation by some of the business professionals and lower status groups. Described in this way, it is far away from being appreciated in a legitimate way. At the same time, it is also still a subject of cultural goodwill, something one 'should' listen to more often. However, for some the term classical music is so broad that it accommodates nearly any instrumental music from movie soundtracks. A few interviewees from each of the groups seem to have a bit more extensive knowledge in this domain, often socialized into it by parents.

For the visual arts, there is a more prevalent, obvious access barrier. It is a domain with striking differences between the social groups interviewed here. Yet, today it is easy to find acceptable other cultural forms to appreciate. Not going to an art museum does not make a person 'barbaric'. Rather, what comes forward as

important is to display an openness towards different kinds of cultural experiences. Refusing to consider the option then could come across as narrow-minded.

The opposition between a more cultural and a more economic orientation, described by Bourdieu as the dominant and the dominated fraction of the dominant class appears still very relevant today and manifests itself not only in how boundaries are being drawn, but also to what individuals aspire. These two groups, here approximated by the young business professionals and the culturally involved, move in rather different value spheres and often geographic spaces of the same cities.



### **Negotiating Normalcy and Difference:**

#### **Discourses on cultural taste and symbolic boundaries**

What meaning do people attach to their taste in music, clothing and visual arts and how do they talk about it? This thesis investigates discourses on cultural taste and consumption. By analyzing interviews with three distinct social groups in North-Western Europe, it explores the values underlying cultural taste and how this taste is used to draw symbolic boundaries. This research discusses the importance of openness, trendiness and authenticity as status markers and emerging forms of cultural capital. Furthermore, it demonstrates the importance of moral categories for aesthetic judgement.

ISBN: 978-90-76665-29-0

