Culture and Inequality

This article surveys the field of culture and inequality studies in sociology, arguing that it has entered a "post-post-Bourdieusian" stage characterized by conceptual unification, theoretical synthesis, and methodological diversity, largely vindicating Bourdieu's original arguments despite initial critiques. The discussion highlights how elite cultural tastes function as powerful status signals, with cultural matching serving as a key mechanism in institutional gatekeeping, extending beyond interpersonal interactions to include object-mediated processes in creative fields. The article documents the continued existence of a consensual highbrow/lowbrow cultural hierarchy, even as the concept of omnivorousness has emerged, reinterpreting it not as a contradiction to distinction but as a new form of elite status signaling through "conspicuous openness to diversity" that subtly polices cultural boundaries. The article concludes by acknowledging remaining lacunae in the field, particularly regarding the experiences of the working class and racial/ethnic minorities, advocating for an expanded focus beyond primarily white, middle-class elites to better understand how culture shapes inequality across various intersecting axes of difference.

Keywords: Cultural capital, Social inequality, Bourdieu, Omnivorousness, Status signals, Cultural matching

Introduction

We live in a golden age of studies of culture and inequality studies in sociology and the social sciences more generally. In the bad old days (the 1970s and 1980s), "culture" was thought to be too squishy and diffuse to serve as a plausible contender to explain patterns of inequality and stratification, especially when compared to its seemingly harder-nosed cousin "structure"(Hays, 1994). Today, the situation is quite different (Mohr et al., 2020), as we can find appeal to cultural mechanisms involved in processes of the emergence and reproduction of inequality pretty much everywhere we look (Stephens et al., 2013). Moreover, the invidious comparison of culture to its presumed antithesis of "structure" is a thing of the past, rightly considered a myopic and limited lens with which to conceptualize the relevant phenomena (Freeman et al., 2020; Patterson, 2015). When it comes to accounting for patterns of inequality and stratification, culture is all the rage.

In sociology, the seminal work of Pierre Bourdieu, along with that of the early (and critical) adopters of the Bourdieusian innovation in the United States, such as Paul DiMaggio, John Mohr, Michele Lamont, Annette Lareau, and others, has had much to do with this rather pleasant state of affairs. Nevertheless, when the field first consolidated in the 1990s, an outside observer might have gathered the impression that culture and inequality studies in sociology were a microcosm of the discipline as a whole; that is, disunified, riven by disagreements, paradigmatic wars, and controversies with regard to various theoretical precepts and the validity of assorted empirical claims.

While the classic work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) on cultural capital, taste, and inequality undoubtedly served as a foundation and starting point, this work—with some signal exceptions (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985)—was usually taken as a caricature, or a *foil*, with the case of the U.S. presumably trotted out as a *counter-example* to various claims made by Bourdieu as to how

culture helped shape inequality (Lamont, 1992).

This "post-Bourdieusian" turn included doubts as to whether Americans used the arts as a source of distinction, whether the notion of cultural capital was applicable outside of the French context, whether the idea of cultural "omnivorism" made hash out of Bourdieu's conception of how elite tastes were formed, expressed, or functioned in society, and whether Bourdieu's presumed obsession with taste, class, and status at the expense of other axes of difference and symbolic sources for cultural differentiation like ethics and morality made his approach no longer applicable (Bryson, 1996; Halle, 1993; Lamont, 1992; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Peterson & Kern, 1996).

While some isolated authors sounded the clarion call that the post-Bourdieusian critics may have been overblowing things both conceptually and empirically—e.g., with regard to the presumed anomaly of the American case (Holt, 1997, 1998)—these voices remained isolated in the wilderness during this period. Accordingly, as already noted, any rational observer would have thus concluded that culture and inequality studies were a disordered, disorganized field, split into warring "post-Bourdieusian" and "paleo-Bourdieusian" camps.

Yet, a funny thing happened in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Largely spurred by these apparently "post-Bourdieusian" developments, particularly, the idea of elites as cultural "omnivores" the field of culture and inequality studies became a flourishing, international academic industry (Cuadrado-García & Montoro-Pons, 2025; Vries & Reeves, 2022; Johnston & Baumann, 2019), with spate of studies conducted in the across dozens of national settings purporting to "test" or ascertain the continued validity of the Bourdieusian paradigm against various post-Bourdieusian upstarts (Bennett et al., 2009; Flemmen, 2013; Flemmen et al., 2017, 2018, 2019; S. Friedman, 2012; S. Friedman et al., 2015; Hazır & Warde, 2015; Lizardo & Skiles, 2015; Savage et al., 2005).

As the field has consolidated around this efflorescence of work, it also entered a new

"*post-post*-Bourdieusian" stage, in which (surprisingly to some), the early defenders of Bourdieu against his 1990s critics were largely vindicated (Atkinson, 2011; Holt, 1997, 1998; Lizardo & Skiles, 2015). That is, not only has the last two decades and a half of work in culture and inequality studies shown that elite tastes operate more or less the way that Bourdieu said they did (even in the context of elite "omnivorousness"), but even some of Bourdieu's most controversial statements, such as the existence of a largely consensual, universally accepted hierarchy of cultural genres favoring the most "highbrow" activities, have been empirically verified and shown to be largely predictive of the sorts of outcomes Bourdieu would have supposed (e.g., entry into elite and high-status fields).

This post-post-Bourdieusian context (a Hegelian negation of the original negation, which very much as in Hegel, does not necessarily return us to the original starting point, but instead sublates the original paleo-Bourdieusianism and subsequent post-Bourdieusianism into a higher order synthesis), therefore, is one of surprising unification around a core set of themes, mechanisms, and conceptions of how culture enters into inequality-generating processes, which largely align with Bourdieu's original arguments. As such, the field of culture and inequality studies in sociology is not only thriving, but it is also surprisingly conceptually unified, theoretically synthetic, and methodologically creative and diverse; a virtual *Pax Bourdieusiana*. No big paradigmatic wars abound, nor is the field riven by controversies around warring and incompatible "perspectives."

Instead, surveying the field, we can see something closer to a (non-degenerative) Kuhnian *normal science*. While this last term is usually used in the pejorative (see for instance, Thorpe & Inglis, 2022, p. 331), to refer to gray and colorless puzzle-solvers underlaboring to maintain a conceptual scheme at all costs, here I use it as a *celebratory* monicker, serving to denote a tranquil period of theoretical synthesis and generative empirical work in culture and inequality studies across a wide variety of institutional settings and national cases.

In this chapter, I survey this largely Halcyon post-post-Bourdieusian landscape with an eye to cataloguing its key conceptual and empirical claims. The goal is to highlight and isolate the hard-won conceptual and empirical gains we have made, so as to ascertain what can be considered "settled science" (rather than controversial or thinly supported statements). We will see that, after all is said and done, we do have a pretty good idea of how the link between culture, status, and dominant institutions works in contemporary societies and how culture enters into various inequality-generating processes. However, this does not mean that we know everything there is to know (no grand unified theory awaits us). At the end, I will point to various extant lacunae in our knowledge and what we can do to address them going forward.

Elite Cultural Tastes are Powerful and Consequential Signals of Status

During the bad old post-Bourdieusian days (the 1990s), the key Bourdieusian postulate that highbrow tastes are signals of high status was considered a controversial tenet in culture and inequality studies (Halle, 1993), perhaps a strange holdover from the case of 1960s France that Bourdieu studied (Lamont & Lareau, 1988), and perhaps inapplicable to the populist context of the United States, or the class-destructured context of contemporary societies at large (Pakulski & Waters, 1996). A spate of recent work shows that this initially "controversial" postulate is not only true (in the United States and elsewhere) but has significant implications for the ways people are perceived and potentially treated in the context of the labor market and other dominant fields. That is, highbrow tastes are not only "signals" of status, but powerful and consequential signals at that.

This effect was insightfully demonstrated by Thomas (2018), who provides an insightful empirical investigation into how cultural tastes operate as a form of cultural capital within the American labor market, specifically in the context of employment decisions. Thomas argues that

individuals' cultural preferences, particularly those associated with highbrow cultural forms, are not merely aesthetic choices but function as significant signals that influence employer perceptions of potential candidates and, consequently, hiring outcomes. To test this, Thomas employed a state-of-the-art combination of survey and field-experimental methods. This methodological approach allows for the isolation and estimation of the *causal* effect of signals of taste, which were strategically embedded in résumés, on critical employment outcomes such as employer evaluations and callback rates, thereby providing a direct measure of culture and status-based bias in U.S. employment. The key findings of Thomas's (2018) study reveal a clear pattern of class bias, demonstrating that employers systematically assign greater competence and polish to job applicants who signal highbrow cultural tastes in their résumés, as compared to those signaling lowbrow tastes. Furthermore, the study uncovered a *gendered* dimension to this bias, indicating that women who signal traditional highbrow tastes on their résumés experience higher rates of employer callback than women who signal traditional lowbrow tastes, suggesting that cultural capital can provide a distinct advantage for women in certain elite labor market contexts, in line with Randall Collins's early work on women and status cultures (Lizardo, 2006b).

It is notable that while Thomas's research found a significant effect of traditional high-status cultural signals on perceived competence, other work, such as that by Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) that we will discuss below, did not always observe the same effect, a difference Thomas (2018) attributed to the potentially very high quality of the résumés presented in those comparative studies. Overall, Thomas's work underscores the power of cultural tastes in shaping employer decision-making, highlighting how such seemingly subtle cultural signals contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities by influencing who gains access to valuable employment opportunities. This research

thus contributes to a broader understanding of how high-status cultural markers translate into measurable consequences in the labor market, extending the theoretical and empirical reach of paleo-Bourdieusian cultural capital theory.

This work, however, leaves open the question as to the underlying perceptual and social-psychological mechanism behind this elite taste effect. In subsequent work, Thomas (2022) used a nationally representative survey experiment to elucidate how individuals' cultural preferences influence social perceptions, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of inequality. A key idea underlying this study is that signals of traditional highbrow taste serve as potent cultural markers that positively impact how an individual is perceived in terms of social class and *competence*, addressing a gap where previous studies often relied on smaller, non-representative samples.

The empirical findings from Thomas's survey experiment reveal a threefold pattern regarding the perception of cultural tastes. Firstly, there is a positive effect of traditional highbrow taste signals on both perceived social class and perceived competence. Competence, identified as a socially valued attribute, drives emotional and behavioral responses and is frequently associated with enhanced opportunities and influence in task-oriented environments, such as professional settings (Fiske et al., 2007). Conversely, signals of traditional lowbrow taste have a negative effect on perceptions of social class, yet notably, they do not have a statistically significant effect on perceptions of competence. Secondly, the influence of highbrow taste signals on perceived competence is primarily mediated via the perception of social class, such that individuals with highbrow tastes are also perceived to be of higher social class, suggesting that the pathway to being perceived as competent due to highbrow tastes is largely contingent on first being perceived as belonging to a higher social class. Thirdly, Thomas observes that the effect of cultural taste signals on social perceptions is not uniform, varying across different cultural domains and being moderated by the respondent's gender and social class.

Thomas's findings indicate that traditional hierarchies of taste continue to persist and function as mechanisms of distinction, even amidst evolving elite cultural consumption patterns such as "omnivorousness."

Given the generality of the mechanism proposed, it is likely that the halo effect produced by the display of elite tastes translates to contexts beyond the labor market. Recent work by Nichols (2023), directly building on Thomas's, examines how cultural and economic markers of social class intersect to affect reviewers' evaluations in college admissions, extending the understanding of competence beyond the labor market context. Nichols argues that decision-makers' own social positions—specifically, whether they hold elite or non-elite university degrees—shape their interpretations and evaluations of these markers, thereby contributing to social class-based inequality. To test this proposition, Nichols employed a series of original survey experiments, creating fictitious college applicant profiles that systematically varied in their signals of economic (e.g., parental occupation, educational attainment, financial aid application) and cultural (e.g., participation in highbrow or lowbrow extracurricular activities) resources. These profiles were then presented to evaluators with either elite or non-elite college degrees, who assessed the applicants on various outcomes, including recommendation for admission, perceived performance, and perceived "fit" with professors and university culture. This methodological approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the micro-level processes of bias at the intersection of evaluators' backgrounds and applicants' social class signals.

Nichols's (2023) findings reveal a pronounced differential impact of cultural versus economic markers, contingent upon the evaluator's social position. A key finding is that cultural markers of social class significantly influence the judgments of evaluators with elite degrees, yet they do not

affect those with non-elite degrees. Specifically, highbrow cultural markers, such as participation in an orchestra, consistently and positively affect elite evaluators' decisions to recommend admission, their evaluation of the applicant's success, and their perception of the applicant's fit with professors and university culture. Replicating Thomas's (2022) findings, the positive effect is primarily mediated by the elite evaluators' perceptions of the applicant's high status and competence, rather than perceived warmth (Fiske et al., 2007). In contrast, economic markers alone do not appear to differentially affect elite versus non-elite evaluators' decisions. However, Nichols did find that economic markers can, in some instances, modify the impact of cultural markers; for example, economically disadvantaged applicants who display highbrow cultural tastes receive a premium in evaluation scores from elite degree holders that wealthier highbrow applicants do not. Ultimately, Nichols (2023) concludes that cultural markers serve as crucial "frames" through which elite decision-makers categorize, distinguish, and engage in symbolic exclusion, reinforcing existing social hierarchies and inequalities, as these markers signal familiarity and similarity to themselves.

Cultural Matching is a Meta-Mechanism Explaining Bourdieusian Effects

While not initially framed in this way, the early Bourdieu/Passeron studies introducing the idea of cultural capital in the context of student success (or lack thereof) in educational institutions were based on a simple idea that we would today call *cultural matching* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, 1990). The basic idea is that elite gatekeepers in cultural institutions favor individuals whose cultural displays match their own. The study by Nichols (2023) just summarized is a neat example of this process at work. In the post-Bourdieusian era of "controversy" in culture and inequality studies, the Bourdieu/Passeron idea of cultural matching was seen as perhaps questionable and even not applicable, sometimes crassly reduced by some scholars to the rather mundane question of whether

kids from middle-class families got better grades than working-class kids. Today, the mechanism of cultural matching as a gatekeeping effect across various dominant institutions is well-documented, representing one of the core pillars of post-post-Bourdieusian culture and inequality studies in sociology.

In this vein, Lauren Rivera's (2012) work has deservedly become a touchstone in the field by elucidating the cultural mechanisms via which social hierarchies are reproduced in elite labor markets via cultural matching processes. Rivera shows that hiring decisions in high-status professional contexts—such as investment banking, management consulting, and corporate law—are not solely predicated on objective qualifications like academic credentials or technical skills. Instead, a crucial, often decisive, factor is the perceived "cultural fit" between job candidates and the firm's existing employees. This cultural matching process operates mainly via shared leisure pursuits, common life experiences, and congruent self-presentation styles, effectively extending the network principle of *homophily*—the tendency for individuals to associate with similar others (McPherson et al., 2001)—into the formal organizational sphere. Rivera's work shows how these subtle cultural similarities operate as a powerful, albeit often implicit, gatekeeping mechanism that shapes who gains access to lucrative and prestigious occupational positions, thereby maintaining the cultural homogeneity of elite organizations.

Rivera's (2016) subsequent research meticulously unpacks the multi-layered mechanisms via which cultural matching impacts hiring outcomes, identifying several interconnected processes. First, "cultural fit" is often a formal evaluative criterion explicitly mandated by firms and integrated into candidate screening and selection protocols. Interviewers are instructed to assess whether a candidate will "fit in" culturally, a directive sometimes viewed as uniquely "American" by evaluators themselves. Second, cognitive processes lead evaluators to construct merit in their own image,

instinctively believing that culturally similar applicants are inherently better candidates, regardless of objective metrics. Third, affective processes generate an "emotional spark" or "feelings of connectedness" during interviews, which evaluators interpret as evidence of cultural alignment and often prioritize over other qualifications. The underlying rationale for this prioritization, according to interviewees, is the demanding, time-intensive nature of elite professional work; shared cultural interests are seen as making rigorous work weeks more enjoyable and fostering social cohesion, even if not directly enhancing productivity. This conversion of cultural signals into economic advantage provides a powerful demonstration of the "conversion value" of cultural capital in labor markets (Bourdieu, 1986), a proposition often hypothesized but empirically underexamined before Rivera's work.

Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) further delve into how cultural mechanisms associated with class status combine with gender dynamics to generate a "commitment penalty" dynamic for women during the cultural matching process. Here, Rivera and Tilcsik combine the idea of cultural-matching with the field-experimental survey (e.g., "audit study") approach we saw earlier in Thomas's and Nichols's work. While Rivera's earlier work showed that displays of higher-class cultural signals generally lead to a hiring advantage, Rivera and Tilcsik's audit study in elite law firms revealed a significant gendered disparity. Higher-class male applicants received considerably more callbacks than higher-class women, the reason being that while higher-class candidates are generally perceived as a better cultural fit with the elite firm's culture and clientele, higher-class women simultaneously face a competing negative stereotype that portrays them as potentially less *committed* to demanding, full-time careers. This "commitment penalty" effectively offsets any class-based cultural advantages higher-class women might otherwise gain in this context, leading to a differential impact of social class signals in this elite labor market (an effect that Thomas did not find in the general labor

market). This work highlights how cultural matching is not a one-size-fits-all process but interacts with other axes of inequality, in line with earlier (post-Bourdieusian) calls to extend cultural mechanisms beyond class narrowly defined.

Omnivorousness as a High-Status Signal in Creative Fields

The bad old post-Bourdieusian days of debate and controversy saw a penchant to contrast recent findings on the rise of omnivorousness—a penchant to report liking and engaging a broad swaths of cultural objects, categories, and activities—around certain segments of the cultural elites as a "refutation" or confutation of Bourdieu's original arguments. Today, as we will see later, this naive viewpoint is all but dead, as most work shows that the rise of the omnivore is completely compatible with the standard paleo-Bourdieuian distinction-based mechanisms governing how cultural tastes feed into inequality generating processes (Childress et al., 2021), but with the twist of the rise of conspicuous openness to diversity as a dominant institution and vocabulary of motive (V. Friedman & Ollivier, 2002). Koppman's (2016) work does one better, showing that omnivorousness itself can be a signal of "creative status" within industries in which creativity as a trait is valued, thus operating as a form of Rivera-style "creative cultural matching" in this setting.

To test this hypothesis, Koppman (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study of the U.S. advertising industry, positing that "omnivorous" cultural capital—defined by diverse and inclusive tastes and socialization—serves as a crucial signal of "creative potential" to employers. This cultural-matching style re-conceptualization of the idea of omnivorousness allows Koppman to theorize, Rivera-style, that recruitment into creative fields is not solely based on technical skills or merit; instead, entry is also shaped by a dual process involving both gatekeeper-mediated selection, where omnivorousness is a valued criterion, and individual career choice, where early omnivorous

socialization predisposes individuals toward these occupations. Koppman's work thus illuminates how, despite rhetorical claims of meritocracy, subtle class distinctions continue to exert significant influence over access to creative employment.

Koppman (2016) also details the interpersonal processes underpinning this process of cultural matching in creative fields. In terms of employer selection, she identifies three Rivera-style mechanisms generating the omnivore cultural fit effect: (1) "assessments of merit," where evaluators, often culturally omnivorous themselves, use their own broad intellectual curiosity and varied knowledge as a model for identifying creative potential in candidates; (2) "emotional reactions to work," elicited by candidate portfolios that display diverse styles and implicitly signal an ability to adapt and "change tonality," a perceived hallmark of creativity; and (3) "compatibility with the firm," where creative departments seek new hires who embody a similar distinctiveness—being "different and interesting"—through their omnivorous cultural profiles, thereby reinforcing a homophilic preference.

Concurrently, the "individual choice" dimension highlights how "omnivorous socialization," rooted in middle-class "concerted cultivation," (Lareau, 2011), exposes children to a wide array of organized leisure activities (e.g., music lessons, sports). This early, diverse cultural exposure cultivates a presumed natural affinity for creative work, which individuals later interpret as a general skill and which motivates their pursuit of creative careers. Koppman's quantitative analysis empirically confirms that this omnivorous socialization and subsequent omnivorous taste mediate the relationship between class background and entry into creative employment, thereby establishing a robust link between class-privileged upbringing and occupational outcomes (Laurison & Friedman, 2016). This intricate interplay between institutional selection and individual self-selection demonstrates how cultural capital, in its omnivorous form, is converted into professional advantage

within the creative economy.

Object-Mediated Matching in Creative Fields

In creative fields, cultural matching processes can extend beyond the interpersonal prospect-to-gatekeeper level and become entangled and mediated by cultural objects themselves. For instance, Childress and Nault (2019) specifically extend Rivera's cultural matching approach to contexts where face-to-face interaction between gatekeepers and creators is minimal. Their research, particularly in the trade fiction publishing industry, reveals that cultural intermediaries, such as editors, "culturally match" themselves to *manuscripts*, involving an evaluative process where demographic differences are associated with perceived cultural differences, and these perceptions are used to justify demographic inequalities. The "question of fit" in this context is not about the audience, about whom little is often known, but rather concerns the intermediary's affinity with the manuscript as they shepherd it through development and production. The study finds that this process of *product-based cultural matching* leads to *encultured biases* embedded in the relation between gatekeeper and object that contribute to inequalities along demographic lines, such as gender, age, and race.

The organizational conditions under which these encultured biases and product-based cultural matching are most likely to occur are characterized by high levels of uncertainty and significant intermediary autonomy in selecting products that cannot be easily de-raced, de-gendered, or de-cultured. In trade book publishing, for example, editors rely on their own tastes, interests, and experiences when making selection decisions for culturally inscribed products. Childress and Nault (2019) empirically show that intermediaries demographically match themselves to fiction manuscripts: Women intermediaries are more likely to work on "women's fiction" or "romance fiction,"

younger intermediaries on "young adult" fiction, and non-white intermediaries on "ethnic" or "multicultural" fiction. This "spark" of sentimental affiliation between an editor and a manuscript, akin to the "spark" Rivera (2016) observed in interpersonal job interviews, is interpreted as evidence of cultural fit. The consequences of this can be seen in patterns where most of the stories told via high-status book fiction end up reflecting characters, themes, and settings that are socially close to the primarily homogeneous (e.g., white middle-class) life stations of book editors. This culturally mediated process, even when individual editors are not in direct social interaction with authors, reproduces patterns of categorical exclusion based on race in the literary field.

Childress and Nault's (2019) work suggests the need to re-center cultural products as important causal factors in sociological analysis, rather than merely treating them as "expressive symbols" or "cultural goods". Their work also integrates "identification" and "rationalization" processes as cultural pathways to stratification, showing how micro-level cultural classifications can be institutionalized into meso-level organizational structures and ultimately contribute to macro-level inequalities. This framework is, of course, not limited to publishing; Childress and Nault suggest its applicability to other creative industries like recorded music, where label imprints specializing in genres like rap music may reproduce regional and racial homogeneity based on the cultural profiles of their gatekeepers.

There is a Consensual Representation of a Highbrow/Lowbrow Cultural Hierarchy

During the controversy-ridden post-Bourdieuian era of the 1990s, researchers in culture and inequality studies questioned whether Bourdieu's concept of a unitary cultural hierarchy, *equally*

internalized by both the privileged and the disadvantaged, was a valid or even sane statement to make. Perhaps such a thing could have *once* existed, but surely it did not any longer; perhaps it even never existed, and it was just a figment of Bourdieu's theoretical imagination, a crypto-Marxist addendum that nobody needed or wanted. Consistent with the post-post-Bourdieusian turn, recent research convincingly demonstrates that individuals perceive a clear hierarchy among various cultural activities, genres, and objects, with certain cultural forms seen as inherently possessing a higher social worth or status than others. This arrangement maps worth to traditionally institutionalized conceptions, placing the fine arts, fine dining, and other pursuits distinctive of the upper and middle class at higher rungs than entertainment, food, and leisure pursuits preferred by the working class.

For instance, studies in Denmark explicitly show that traditionally highbrow activities such as opera and ballet are perceived to have significantly higher status than traditionally lowbrow activities such as flea markets and techno/rap concerts (Jæger et al., 2023). This hierarchical ordering is observed across diverse lifestyle domains, including music, food, performing arts, leisure, sport, and literature, where respondents consistently rate activities like opera and classical music, caviar and oysters, and philosophy and golf as having higher implied social rank compared to heavy metal, chicken nuggets, or boxing (Jæger & Larsen, 2024).

Crucially, this perceived cultural hierarchy is largely and widely shared across different socioeconomic positions (SEP), defined by factors such as education, income, and social class (Jæger et al., 2023). Individuals from both high and low SEP groups exhibit remarkably similar perceptions regarding the relative ordering of cultural activities in terms of status. Surprisingly, this phenomenon aligns neatly with Bourdieu's (1984) "misrecognition" model of cultural stratification—once considered one of his most wildly controversial tenets—which suggests that elites, due to their control over the major institutions in charge of the valuation and evaluation of cultural goods,

establish a widely accepted cultural hierarchy that diffuses the idea that the tastes typical of the upper classes are of higher social worth.

This work suggests that even if individuals with lower socioeconomic standing do not prefer or fully understand high-status cultural forms, they nonetheless recognize them as more legitimate, demonstrating a form of "cultural goodwill" towards consensually recognized high-status pursuits (Bourdieu, 1984). This consensus on cultural valuation is a necessary condition for the cultural hierarchy to effectively legitimize status differences and for cultural tastes to be convertible into economic and social assets. This finding contrasts with alternative models, such as the picture provided by class decomposition and postmodern "cultural fragmentation" models or that yielded by models of counter-hegemonic cultural resistance, which posit either a lack of consensus or the existence of oppositional cultural hierarchies among lower-status groups.

Omnivorous Taste does not Contradict the Standard Distinction Story

As already noted, initial post-Bourdieusian interpretations of Peterson and Kern's (1996) introduction of the idea of omnivorousness—a largely empirical proposal—were taken as a *theoretical* refutation of Bourdieu's model of how tastes worked, namely, by generating distinction for elites as they connected to dominant institutions and discourses. In this way, some post-Bourdieusian analysts welcomed omnivorousness as heralding the "postmodern" de-structuration of class and status, and as empirical proof that perhaps elites were not so obsessed with distinction and hierarchy.

Post-post-Bourdieusian developments show that this initial post-Bourdieusian assessment was wrong and misguided on all counts. The key conceptual breakthrough was provided by the late Quebecois sociologist Michèle Ollivier, in conceptualizing the omnivorous turn as a form of "conspicuous openness to diversity." That is, omnivorousness as an espoused elite taste pattern itself

connected to wide-ranging recent transformations in dominant institutions at the world-societal level that began to enshrine diversity as an overarching social value (Frank & Meyer, 2002). The initial intervention by Peterson and Kern conceptualized omnivorousness as a shift in how high-status individuals manifest their cultural capital, moving away from traditional, then seen as paleo-Bourdieusian "snobbery"—characterized by an exclusive appreciation for highbrow culture and a disdain for popular forms—towards a declared receptiveness to a broad spectrum of cultural expressions. In conceptualizing this phenomenon as "conspicuous openness to diversity," Ollivier and Fridman (2002, 2004) cleverly aligned it with Veblen's (1899) original notion as applied to consumption, suggesting that this "refusal to refuse" has become an institutionalized manner of taste expression. The emerging omnivorous aesthetic, therefore, not only signifies a new "aesthetics of elite status" but also functions as a new form of class distinction (e.g., relative to those who are *not* open to diversity), particularly among those educated strata whose status is predicated on cultural capital. That is, omnivorousness can be seen as a new form of elite distinction.

In this telling, the essence of omnivorousness as "conspicuous openness" involves both a cognitive and a performative dimension, reflecting a cultivated ability and willingness to engage with diverse cultural experiences. This disposition is articulated through an explicit valorization of terms such as "diverse," "open," "hybrid," "fluid," "eclectic," "global," and "cosmopolitan," which are favorably contrasted with negatively connoted attributes like "unitary," "homogeneous," "local," "static," and "closed". This expansive cultural repertoire serves a dual function: it operates as a marker of distinction, projecting a "modern" and adaptable self, and concurrently as a valuable social resource that facilitates access to wider social networks (Erickson, 1996). The capacity to navigate varied cultural codes and to strategically "culture-switch" across different social milieus becomes a highly valued aptitude in both personal and professional spheres. This form of cultural capital, which Bryson

(1996) termed “multicultural capital,” is defined by a familiarity with a broad yet “predictably exclusive” range of cultural styles.

Crucially, while this “openness” appears inclusive, it does not signify the dissolution of social hierarchies or the indiscriminate embrace of all cultural forms. Ollivier, echoing Bryson’s (1996) insights, contends that this cultural tolerance is nonetheless “patterned”. Elites, while demonstrating an appreciation for diversity, frequently employ subtle mechanisms of symbolic exclusion, often by rejecting cultural forms associated with perceived “localism,” lack of sophistication, or those deemed overly routinized and mass-produced (e.g., romance novels, reality television). This nuanced form of distinction allows high-status individuals to maintain boundaries against less privileged groups, especially those perceived as “intolerant and narrow-minded,” thereby preserving and reconfiguring social stratification rather than dismantling it.

Furthermore, A critical implication of the idea of this post-post-Bourdieusian approach to omnivorousness is that diversity discourse, despite its seemingly inclusive language, can paradoxically function as a mechanism to reinforce existing status differentials. The capacity to acquire and articulate this valued “openness” is inherently unequal across social strata (Ollivier, 2004). The continuous emphasis on diversity, eclecticism, and cosmopolitanism as desirable traits serves to reintroduce scarcity and new forms of social closure in a context of abundant cultural choices. This dynamic creates new criteria for “worthy” individuals, where cultural resources like extensive knowledge of diverse codes, coupled with the ability to navigate varied social milieus, provide strategic advantages. Thus, the very celebration of openness can inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation or generation of new forms of social inequality by establishing novel, albeit subtle, criteria for distinction.

A Post-Post Bourdieusian Perspective on the Omnivore Phenomenon

Most contemporary scholars align this post-post-Bourdieusian approach to the study of omnivorousness. One key implication is that if omnivorousness is a "status culture," then it should not be uniformly distributed across the social landscape but should be predominantly concentrated among specific strata. Following this line of reasoning, Lizardo and Skiles (2012) identify omnivorousness as the contemporary form of the "asethetic disposition," that Bourdieu talked about in his original work (Holt, 1998), and thus as the characteristic purview of culturally capital-rich occupational groups, such as artists, intellectuals, and higher education professionals, whose status is often derived more from cultural than economic capital. Formal educational institutions play a pivotal role in the process of both instilling, valuing, and disseminating omnivoursness, reinforcing and refining the capacity to apply an "aesthetic disposition" to a wide array of cultural objects (Lizardo, 2018). The ability to display "omnivorous" taste can thus be seen as a product of early socialization in culturally privileged households, further honed through formal schooling and extracurricular engagement, which collectively instill a capacity for "aesthetic adaptation" essential for the culturally privileged (Koppman, 2016; Lareau, 2011).

Ollivier (2008) further refined the empirical understanding of the phenomenon of aesthetic openness to diversity via interviews conducted in Quebec. Her research disaggregated the broad concept of openness into four distinct ideal-typical modes of expression: the *humanist* mode, often observed among high-cultural-capital individuals, involves a selective, often intellectualized, appropriation of popular culture within a highbrow framework, driven by a desire for mental stimulation and learning. This humanist approach is the one most characteristic of the elite omnivores who display the contemporary form of the aesthetic disposition, emphasizing aesthetic

form over specific content (Lizardo & Skiles, 2012, 2015). The *populist* mode, more common among middle-status individuals, is characterized by an explicit rejection of elitism and a general tolerance for diverse cultural forms, frequently linking to ethnographic definitions of culture and personal integration. The *practical* mode of openness is rooted in instrumental motivations, where individuals engage with diverse cultures to acquire knowledge or skills for problem-solving or professional utility. Finally, the *indifferent* mode describes individuals who exhibit few strong cultural preferences, indicating a general lack of significant investment in or disinterest towards cultural engagement, often expressed as "liking everything indiscriminately" without deep appreciation. These modes are not mutually exclusive and can be combined by individuals, correlating with specific types of cultural involvement and varying levels of cultural and economic capital.

Other lines of post-post-Bourdieusian work on cultural omnivorousness as the new form of elite distinction establish three things. First, rather than being indifferent or reveling in the blurring and destruction of cultural boundaries, elite omnivores care very much about protecting and policing boundaries across cultural genres and objects, as this is the basis of their "poly-purist" approach to distinction. Furthermore, elite omnivores are very much aware of the performative contradiction that comes from their presumed "populist" allegiance to an external cultural code emphasizing diversity, acceptance, rejection of cultural hierarchies, and the like, and their practical approach to cultural consumption that very much depends on the construction of hierarchical distinction in modes of consumption and invidious distinction from less tolerant others, creating a discourse/practice and self-presentation dilemma for elite omnivores. Finally, recent work has begun to uncover the mechanisms via which omnivores seem to pull off the feat of saying acceptance and doing distinction, noting that while elite omnivores are able to perform openness to diversity at the level of genres, they are able to perform distinction in their intra-genre object choices. We consider each of these

elements in turn.

Omnivores Care About Cultural Boundaries

First, as noted, omnivores care very much about reinforcing and policing cultural boundaries. Research by Goldberg, Hannan, and Kovács (2016) challenges the prevailing assumption that a broad range of cultural tastes inherently signifies openness or boundary erosion. Their work synthesizes insights from research on cultural omnivorousness and category dynamics in markets, proposing a model that differentiates between two key dimensions of cultural preference: *variety* and *atypicality*. Variety refers to an individual's propensity to engage with a diverse array of cultural types or genres, often operationalized as the volume of cultural items consumed or liked. Atypicality, in contrast, denotes a preference for cultural practices that actively defy conventional categorical boundaries. Through this dual-dimensional framework, Goldberg et al. (2016) argue that cultural omnivores are paradoxically often the most ardent protectors of cultural boundaries and display less receptivity to atypical cultural innovations. They posit that omnivores, particularly those they term "poly-purists," tend to seek variety primarily within the confines of established categories, showing an aversion to practices that subvert these cultural codes.

This apparent contradiction is resolved by understanding the social motivations underlying omnivorousness as a strategy of distinction. Goldberg et al. (2016) contend that for poly-purists, demonstrating distinction through a diverse array of tastes relies on the clear legibility of the categories themselves. If genre boundaries are blurred or transgressed by atypical cultural forms, the social meaning and "multicultural capital" (Bryson, 1996)accrued from appreciating variety could be devalued. Thus, the very act of signaling an appreciation for diverse cultural forms necessitates the maintenance, and even active policing, of the boundaries between those forms. Their analysis

indicates that omnivorousness, when understood as variety-seeking, functions not as a force for boundary erosion but rather for its protection, requiring genre boundaries to render consumption breadth socially meaningful. This perspective aligns with the post-post-Bourdieusian theory of cultural taste as a ritual of social distinction, suggesting that even in an age where overt snobbery is often delegitimized, social exclusion persists through more subtle, yet equally effective, boundary-drawing practices within diverse cultural landscapes.

Omnivores are Ambivalent About their Commitments to Diversity and Hierarchy

Second, omnivores are conflicted about their simultaneously discursive commitment to anti-hierarchy and lack of judgment of others' choices, and their distinction-oriented modes of consumption. For instance, Jarness and Friedman's (2017) work highlights a constant tension inherent in contemporary elite self-presentation: the public performance of an "honorable self" that is tolerant and non-judgmental, juxtaposed with an underlying "visceral" self attuned to hierarchies of value and forms of cultural exclusion. This dynamic is not merely an individual inconsistency but a strategic negotiation of social legitimacy within societies that increasingly value egalitarianism while simultaneously experiencing persistent inequalities (V. Friedman & Ollivier, 2002). As a result, elites cultivate a persona characterized by openness, tolerance, and a deliberate disavowal of snobbery, often expressed through phrases such as "live and let live" or "who am I to judge?". This phenomenon of "downplaying of difference" serves as an embodied practice to align themselves with accredited societal values of conspicuous openness to diversity (Ollivier, 2004), thereby deflecting potential accusations of unfair advantage and presenting themselves as "decent" and "accommodating".

In their comparative study of elite discourse in Denmark and the UK, Jarness and Friedman reveal how these legitimation strategies vary cross-nationally; for instance, UK elites tend to

emphasize innate talent, portraying themselves as "talent meritocrats," whereas Danish elites more commonly highlight an unusual work ethic and contributions to civil society as "hard work meritocrats". These distinctions underscore how nationally specific "repertoires of evaluation" shape the public narratives of merit that elites deploy to justify their success. However, Jarness and Friedman's interview data also show that this public display of tolerance often conceals powerful, "visceral" sentiments of hierarchy and distaste. Their methodological approach, which uses the interpretative analysis of in-depth interviews designed to probe beyond initial responses by eliciting meta-feelings and recollections of cross-class interactions (Pugh, 2013), is instrumental in exposing these contradictions. Interviewees, after articulating egalitarian views, frequently express emotional aversions to tastes and lifestyles associated with lower social strata, such as specific music genres or fast food.

Jarness and Friedman's work is consistent with the pivotal post-post-Bourdieusian insight, best articulated by Jarness (2015), that cultural distinction increasingly accrues less to what cultural objects people consume and more to how they appropriate them. Culturally privileged individuals may engage with ostensibly "lowbrow" cultural forms. Still, they do so in "distanced, ironic, and intellectualising ways," signaling their elevated cultural capital through a "style of appreciation" rather than outright rejection. This subtle mechanism constitutes a "strategy of condescension," enabling elites to benefit from contemporary norms of openness and tolerance while privately maintaining feelings of distinction and securing the persistence of class-cultural boundaries "under the moral radar of egalitarianism". Thus, their work reveals that cultural exclusion in modern, seemingly egalitarian societies is not always overt but is often maintained through complex, negotiated performances that allow elites to sustain their privileged positions without openly appearing snobbish.

Subsequent work by Marcel van den Haak and Nico Wilterdink (2019) offers a related sociological examination of elite cultural taste in the Netherlands, critically engaging with the tension between normative egalitarianism and persistent social inequality in modern Western societies. Their qualitative study, based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 90 Dutch individuals, delved into people's preferences across various cultural domains, including music, film, television, theatre, and visual arts. A central finding is the widespread presence of "inconsistent and ambivalent attitudes towards hierarchy versus equality" within their narratives about cultural taste. Participants frequently draw on both "hierarchical" and "egalitarian" repertoires, often employing them simultaneously, even in the same interview. For instance, an interviewee might initially express disdain for tastes associated with lower social classes, but later assert that concepts like "low culture" are based on prejudice and should not be used, revealing that while elite omnivores continue to make cultural distinctions, they often do so with reluctance, acknowledging aesthetic differences while morally objecting to overt snobbery or high-low categorizations. The methodology consciously sought out these ambivalences, with particular attention paid to "downplaying remarks" indicative of these internal tensions.

The Death of the Snob Was Greatly Exaggerated

Another casualty of the post-post-Bourdieuian turn has been the tendency to view omnivorousness as the opposite or the "death" of Bourdieusian snobbery. Instead, what post-post-Bourdieusian work shows is not only that plain old snobbery is very well alive (and was hiding in plain sight all along), but that the people who best qualify as "omnivores," may also be the most persistent Bourdieusian snobs. The most forceful version of this post-post-Bourdieusian approach can be found in the work of Will Atkinson (2011), who develops a compelling critique of the

naive post-Bourdieusian version of the cultural omnivorousness thesis, showing that what often appears as broad and inclusive cultural taste, particularly among privileged groups, is in fact a kind of mirage. Rather than indicating a departure from Pierre Bourdieu's established theories of class-based distinction, Atkinson contends that these seemingly diverse tastes are, upon closer inspection, deeply rooted in the very class dynamics Bourdieu theorized, thus buttressing Bourdieu's original framework. He contributes to a "qualitative counter-attack" against the statistical findings that musical tastes are increasingly omnivorous, especially among the elite. Atkinson questions the notion that this signals a new "open" or "cosmopolitan disposition" requiring a (post) "post-Bourdieu" era of cultural sociology.

When discussing their predilections, Atkinson's interviewees (from Bristol, UK), regardless of their social standing, frequently describe their tastes using terms such as "varied," "diverse," or "eclectic". However, Atkinson argues that this stated breadth and mix of tastes, seemingly indicative of omnivorousness, does not arise from novel experiences provided by global media or an inherent drive to blend disparate genres. Instead, his qualitative analysis uncovers the underlying genesis of these orientations, revealing that they are generated in a manner thoroughly consistent with Bourdieu's conceptualization of the class-based origins of taste. He posits that Bourdieu's original account of the social structuring of cultural consumption, far from being outdated, "proves as robust today as it did thirty years ago". This perspective challenges the interpretation of omnivorousness as a sign of indiscriminate liking or genuine cultural tolerance, instead framing it within a framework where distinction persists, albeit in more nuanced forms.

Lizardo and Skiles (2012) draw on Atkinson's (2011) findings to explain that while omnivores may express fewer dislikes overall than others, they consistently reject forms of popular culture that are "most obviously routinized and mass produced," such as romance novels and reality television.

This rejection is not an arbitrary preference but stems from these cultural forms being "most resistant to aestheticizing and ironic recuperation," implying that the aesthetic disposition, central to Bourdieu's theory, continues to guide taste, even when applied to a broad range of cultural items. The ability to engage with diverse genres, yet still apply a discerning, often intellectualizing, lens to them, allows for a subtle yet effective form of boundary drawing, distinguishing the "omnivorous" elite from those whose consumption of popular culture might be less mediated by such a disposition.

As Atkison notes, a lot of the qualitative data in his study, and subsequent studies, can reveal the underlying "snob" hiding behind the presumed omnivore uncovered by survey data. How can we reconcile this contradiction? Recent work by Childress et al. (2021) offers a solution, ingeniously disengaging omnivorousness for *abstract genre categories* from snobbish intra-categorical distinction at the level of *objects* nested within those categories. Their research thus directly addresses the apparent paradox of contemporary higher-status tastes, which often present as both inclusive and exclusive. Moving beyond a simplistic "either/or" framework, they propose that culturally privileged individuals adeptly manage these seemingly contradictory impulses by leveraging the inherent "affordances" of different "levels of culture". Specifically, they contend that cultural genres (e.g., music genres, film genres) readily lend themselves to expressions of inclusivity, allowing individuals to signal an Ollivierian populist openness to diverse cultural forms (Ollivier, 2008). Conversely, specific objects within those genres (e.g., particular artists, films, or shows) afford mechanisms for exclusivity, enabling individuals to demonstrate discerning judgment and refined taste even within broadly accepted genres. This conceptual disaggregation of cultural levels provides a crucial lens for understanding how elites can maintain a façade of broad appreciation while simultaneously enacting subtle, yet potent, forms of hierarchy and social boundary drawing.

Childress and colleagues further elucidate the developmental pathways via which this

nuanced configuration of tastes is *acquired*—showing that the standard Bourdieusian mechanisms of the *genesis* of elite taste still apply—by identifying distinct socializing influences for each level of cultural engagement. Their findings suggest that familial socialization plays a significant role in fostering an inclusive, democratic, and open orientation toward cultural genres. Early exposure within the family environment habituates individuals to a wide array of cultural forms, laying the groundwork for broad genre preferences (Lizardo, 2018). In contrast, formal schooling is posited as a key mechanism for cultivating discernment and exclusivity at the object level. Education, in this framework, "ratchets up" the capacity for sophisticated judgment, enabling individuals to appreciate specific cultural objects with a more critical and refined aesthetic disposition. The current configuration of higher-status tastes, characterized by genre inclusivity and object exclusivity, is thus a product of independent, yet complementary, socialization processes that imbue individuals with the "capacity or an ability" to navigate cultural landscapes in a manner that reinforces their social position.

Childress et al's work is crucial for understanding how cultural omnivores can indeed function as "snobs" in a contemporary context. By being inclusive at the genre level but exclusive at the object level, higher-status individuals subtly police cultural boundaries. For instance, one might profess a liking for "rap music" (genre inclusivity) but only appreciate artists deemed "authentic," "intellectual," or "innovative" (object exclusivity), implicitly rejecting more commercial or mass-produced manifestations of the genre. This form of distinction, often marked by a "knowing" disposition or an "ironic" mode of appropriation, even for popular culture (Jarness, 2015), allows elites to project an image of open-mindedness while still asserting their superior cultural capital and taste. The practical utility of such a configuration is evident in its alignment with particular social-structural positions: it enables individuals to forge "weak ties" across diverse groups (facilitating genre inclusivity) while

simultaneously maintaining "strong ties" within high-status networks (reinforcing object exclusivity) (Lizardo, 2006a).

Concluding Remarks

With this, we come to the end of our necessarily selective (but perhaps unnecessarily opinionated) romp through the contemporary post-post-Bourdieusian landscape of culture and inequality studies in sociology today. As noted, the post-post-Bourdieusian negation of the original post-Bourdieusian negation of paleo-Bourdiesianism, while vindicating the latter in many respects, hardly implies that the field has simply returned to some kind of gray and drab "orthodox" Bourdieusian position. The very state of the field belies such an assessment, as the field is arguably more heterodox, both empirically and theoretically, than ever before, precisely as Bourdieu (1988) would have wanted. In addition to the various concepts and models we covered in the preceding, the traditional empirical workhorse of culture and inequality studies, namely, the arts participation survey, now shares space with a litany of phenomenologically rich interview-based studies, ethnographic fieldwork, Geometric Data Analysis, and even work done under the banner of computational social science. Some of the field's best post-post-Bourdieusian exemplars combine multiple theoretical and methodological approaches (Bennett et al., 2009).

While at some point the presumed Bourdieusian "orthodoxy" was interpreted by some upstart post-Bourdieusians as requiring that we swallow and accept what they saw as a whole bunch of bizarre, controversial, or plain old misguided ideas (Goldthorpe, 2007), we have seen that even some of the paleo-Bourdieusian ideas that once were thought to be *least likely* to be empirically true have proven to be boringly true (Childress et al., 2021; Jæger et al., 2023; Jæger & Larsen, 2024). So being a post-post-Bourdieusian today simply means accepting, as more or less settled normal science, the

broad outlines of the model of cultural stratification and inequality laid out in *Distinction* (Lizardo, 2014, 2018), which at this point is wholly and resolutely non-controversial.

Note the emphasis on the phrase "broad outlines"; the prevailing post-post-Bourdieuian perspective in culture and inequality studies hardly implies that we have to take every micro-belief, francophone wordplay, or wayward footnote that Bourdieu wrote as catechism. Instead, as Lizardo (2008) argued in the middle of the transition from post-Bourdieusianism to post-post-Bourdiuesianism, what post-post-Bourdieusianism does imply is a flexible, "bricoleour" style approach to Bourdieu's legacy, where we take different parts of the model, subject it to empirical test, modify what does not work, throw out what is outdated or actually weird, and add in new parts that Bourdieu never had the time, opportunity, aptitude, or imagination to consider. No need to think that by being a post-post-Bourdieusian scholar, you are joining some kind of cult. We all live under the comfortable aegis of the *Pax Bourdieusiana*.

As exemplified by the work considered earlier, this is precisely what has happened in the contemporary post-post-Bourdieusian era. In patterning the original cultural matching model mainly after educational institutions, Bourdieu completely missed how such dynamics could play a pivotal (perhaps even more pivotal) role in the labor market. Accordingly, Bourdieu never considered how cultural matching could be as important in fields located toward the "high cultural capital/high economic capital" side of his famous diagrams, as in Rivera's elite professional legal and financial services firms. Bourdieu had a love/hate (and mostly hate) relationship with the (perhaps very American) idea of social networks, and because of that reason, missed the obvious fact that one of the main mechanisms via which culture contributes to inequality is via the conversion of cultural capital into social capital (something his approach opened up as a logical possibility but one that he never pursued empirically), which is a key area of emphasis of the cultural matching model at the center of

many studies in the post-post-Bourdieusian era. In the same way, while Bourdieu deeply considered the structuring of fields around the duality and homology of persons and the cultural objects they produce, he never could have imagined that the same cultural matching dynamic he and Passeron described in the case of educational institutions could also operate in this object-mediated fashion in creative industries.

The other dynamic that Bourdieu also missed, but which is central to understanding the contemporary dynamics linking status and inequality in the contemporary setting, was the rise to institutional dominance (and today to institutional contestation) of the discourse of conspicuous openness to diversity so brilliantly described by Ollivier. One thing that post-Bourdieusians did get right is that Bourdieu lived in a mostly "humanist" Parisian world, where cultural distinction operated via the standard hierarchical framework separating the "best" from the rest. While the death or dissolution of this system has been greatly exaggerated by post-Bourdieusian scholars, Bourdieu did not anticipate the current situation, which is one of Swidlerian "unsettled times" as elites try to manage to walk the very perilous tightrope between hierarchical humanism and anthropological non-judgmentalism (with somewhat mixed and mostly less than successful results).

Does that mean that everything is hunky dory in a post-post-Bourdieusian world? Hardly. Yet, the end of the "Bourdieu wars" offers us an opportunity to take stock and deal with long-standing lacunas in the field, some of which have been a permanent fixture, straddling the post-Bourdieusian and post-post-Bourdieusian eras. One of them is obvious and easy to point to. For the most part, a significant portion of the work features respondents from the middle to upper-middle class (this is particularly the case for the interview-based work). Accordingly, the working class and, in particular, the working-poor are an absent presence in culture and inequality studies, conspicuous by not being there. Their voices are hardly heard, and accounts of how cultural processes enter into their everyday

life and interact with dominant institutions are mostly missing. This omission is particularly crucial at the present juncture not only because this segment of the population clear has their own tastes, conceptions of the cultural hierarchy, and is subject to various forms of institutional exclusion and domination, but also, because theory are increasingly being attracted to a "populist" cultural discourse that frames itself as the precise opposite of the conspicuous openness to diversity that cultural elites are so enamored with.

The other significant lacuna that warrants mention is the post-Bourdieusian complaint that, at the time of its formulation (Hall, 1992), carried considerable merit and remains an important analytical problematic today; namely, the fact that class status *seldom* acts alone Instead, class and status dynamics are always reflected and refracted through their intersectional encounter with other axes of difference, including race and ethnicity, gender, migration status and generation, urban/rural status, and many others. Gender is a particularly surprising, and in fact egregious omission, one that is relevant for understanding core dynamics of interest for culture and inequality scholars, as we saw earlier in the Rivera and Tilcsik study, but which continues to be understudied as recently noted by David Inglis (Thorpe & Inglis, 2022, p. 334).

Race is in equally significant understudied subject in the field. Consider that outside of the work of scholars such as Patricia Banks, Prudence Carter, and Natasha Warikoo (Banks, 2010, 2012, 2024; Carter, 2005; Warikoo & Carter, 2009), we actually know very little about how cultural processes related to inequality figure in the lives of racial and ethnic minorities and whether the "generic" processes described earlier connected to the display of conspicous openness, tensions between hierarchy and egalatrianism, cultural omnnivoorsess, cultural matching, conceptions of the boundaries between cultrual objects, or perceptions of the cultural hierarchy operate in the same way

among racial and ethnic minorities, a very unlikely possibility.

Overall, as we enter the second quarter of the twenty-first century, the field of culture and inequality studies thus presents itself with an opportunity. With many conceptual and empirical gains at hand, the field is poised to expand its range, moving its focus from the mostly white, mostly middle-class elites and expanding its coverage of people across the entire social space. This expansion should also be done with respect to the master categories that have organized the field, mainly connected to class status and objectified cultural capital connected to educational institutions to examine how culture shapes inequality processes at the point where various interlocking axes of difference, distinction, differentiation, and oppression meet.

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