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Gender and Generation in the Social Positioning of Taste

The authors examine the intersection of gender and generation for the field of cultural consumption in the United States, considering their interplay in the social positioning of taste. The authors' prior work found that while cultural capital in the United States largely parallels the field structure observed in 1960s France, the form of cultural capital in the United States discriminates between nurturance and community, on one side, and aggressiveness and individualism, on the other. To investigate this seemingly gendered and ideological positioning of taste, the authors locate individuals as "occupants" of this social field, distinguishing them by gender and age, and find that gender no longer structures a preference for a particular form of cultural capital among younger citizens. This blending of gendered identities in younger Americans suggests a realignment of the notions of gentility and community as defining femininity and coarseness and individualism as defining masculinity. The gendered patterns of cultural consumption that defined older generations do not define younger ones.

Keywords: Bourdieu; correspondence analysis; cultural capital; distinction; gender; generational cohort; intersectionality

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It is now widely recognized that cultural goods—fashion, art, sports, food, and media—circulate as forms of power, as markers of distinction among classes. As Bourdieu (1979/1984) originally formulated, based on his observations of 1960s French society, class status is gained and lost through consumption. People acquire access to social circles by displaying appropriate taste, manners, and culture, with much of this gained through forms of consumption that maintain patterns of power and inequality. In this way, the economy of cultural goods, the conditions for their consumption, and the positioning of taste that assign these goods their value function as cultural capital. As Friedland et al. (2007, 32) note, "Bourdieu's great innovation was to connect the production, consumption, and valuation of cultural capital with the social practices of establishing hierarchies, maintaining distances,

and legitimating differences." From this starting point, Bourdieu and those who have followed him have argued that the classification of taste reveals struggles between the dominant and the dominated: "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (Bourdieu 1979/1984, 6). This framework has been used for various purposes, including recent efforts to reproduce the field of consumption observed by Bourdieu in other social and national contexts (Holt 1997a, 1997b, 1998; Lamont and Lareau 1988).

In this article, we extend analyses of cultural consumption in the United States, considering how the intersection of gender and generation structures the social positioning of taste. Our prior work (Friedland et al. 2007) found that cultural capital in the United States largely parallels the field structure that Bourdieu (1979/1984) observed in 1960s French society, except that the form of cultural capital in the United States discriminates among refinement, nurturance, and community, on one side, and coarseness, aggressiveness, and individualism, on the other. This seemingly gendered and ideological positioning of cultural capital demands further attention; attention should be paid especially to whether it continues to define the tastes of younger generations.

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Accordingly, this article uses the 2000 DDB Lifestyle Study to locate individuals as "occupants" of this field of consumption, distinguishing among respondents of different genders and ages. We examine whether the social positioning of taste varies at the intersection of gender and generation. Given that the shift in gender role attitudes has been linked to generational replacement of older cohorts with younger groups who have more liberal views (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004), the interplay of these factors may help to explain changes in the social positioning of taste. The potential for reimagining gendered identities in younger Americans might harken a realignment of the notions of gentility and community as defining femininity, and those of coarseness and individualism as defining masculinity. That is, the gendered patterns of cultural consumption that defined older generations may not define younger ones.
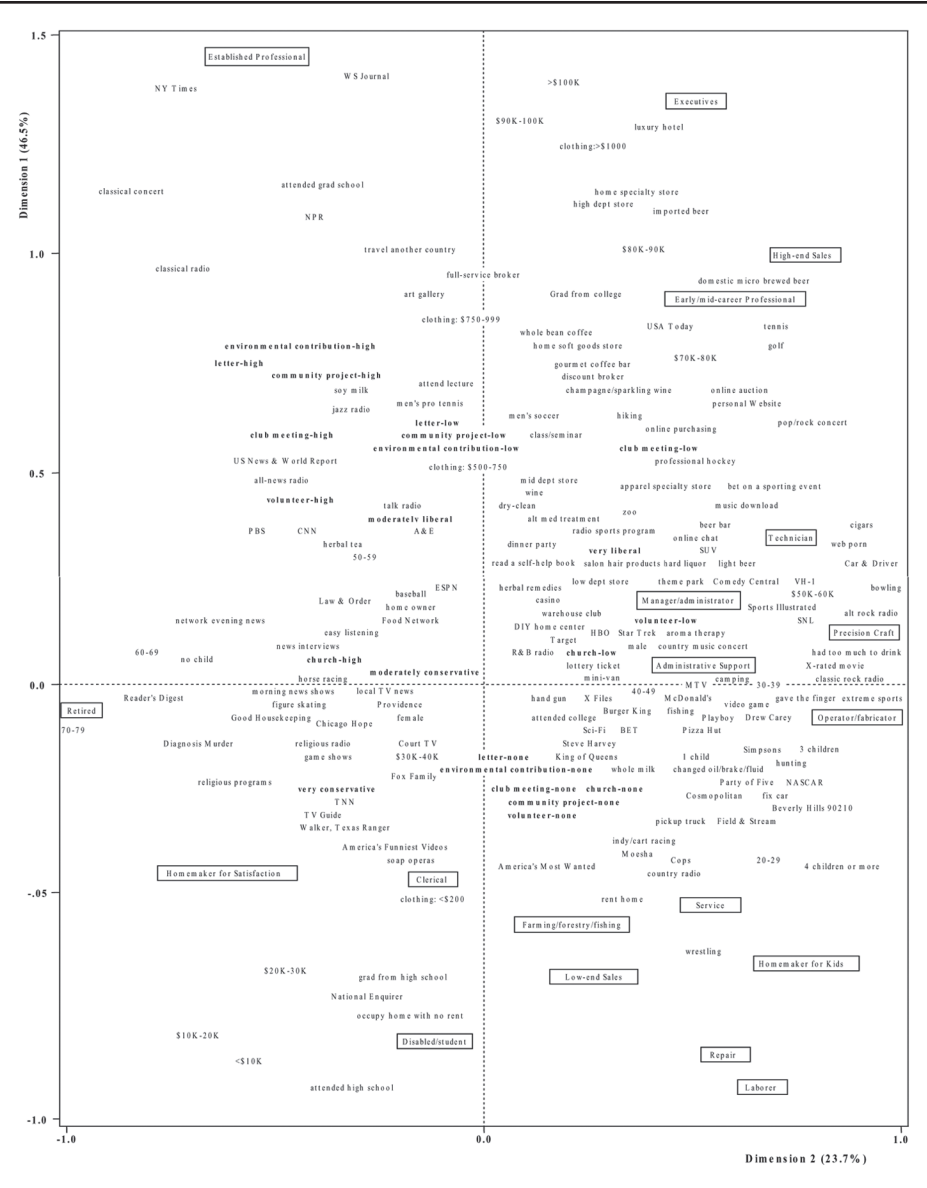
Cultural Capital in Twenty-First-Century America

The field of consumption for any society is situated within a particular national and historical context. What signaled high class status in 1960s French society differs dramatically from the markers of affluence and sophistication in the United States at the turn of the millennium. That is, the underlying system of dispositions that shapes perceptions, preferences, and patterns of action, that is, the habitus, vary from one context to the next. Further differentiating the contemporary context of our study from the 1960s French context of Bourdieu's original work, the United States in the twenty-first century reflects a context in which consumption is less clearly the outcome of the intersection of class and culture and more often a source of it.

Friedland and colleagues (2007) considered these differences by visualizing the field of consumption, using the same technique of correspondence analysis favored by Bourdieu, to analyze whether the theorized categories applied to the U.S. context. Correspondence analysis advances a relational approach to examining taste judgments, viewing every preference as "nothing other than *difference*, a gap, a distinctive feature, in short, a relational property existing only in and through its relation with other properties" (Bourdieu 1994/1998, 6).

Their analysis of the field of consumption in the United States produced a two-dimensional map of the social positioning of taste (see Figure 1). Paralleling Bourdieu, the two dimensions, or axes, represent the volume or quantity of capital (the vertical dimension [dimension 1]) and the composition or form of capital (the horizontal dimension [dimension 2]). On the vertical axis, low volume of capital occupies the bottom and high volume inhabits the top. On the horizontal axis, the left side holds the goods and activities that emphasize cultural capital relative to economic capital, whereas the right side contains markers that emphasize economic capital over cultural capital.

In contrast with Bourdieu's mapping of cultural capital, for which occupation was a distinguishing factor on the horizontal dimension, the mapping of the field of consumption in the United States revealed that profession is less important than are media preferences, consumption habits, and civic behaviors in

FIGURE 1
Correspondence Map of Social Space with Lifestyle Variables Superimposed

defining this dimension. For example, as Figure 1 depicts, those on the left side revealed a strong preference for print and broadcast news as well as family and social dramas. This was coupled with preferences for international travel, art galleries, herbal tea, and figure skating, along with comparatively higher levels of civic participation.

In contrast, those on the right side of the map favored entertainment content, such as sitcoms, rock music, and lifestyle publications. In terms of consumption choices, these same respondents preferred camping, beer bars, hard liquor, and NASCAR, and were less likely to join in civic activities (see Figure 1). Friedland and colleagues interpreted the horizontal axis as "characterized by refinement, nurturance, and moderation (i.e., a communal orientation) on the left side and coarseness, excess, and aggressiveness (i.e., an individual orientation) on the right" (2007, 39).

The Intersection of Gender and Generation

The patterns that Friedland and colleagues (2007) observed were based on a representative sample of adults and, therefore, provide a relational portrait of the field of consumption in the United States. We rely on that same dataset here but take a different approach to the analysis of these data.[1] Rather than engaging in multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to map the lifestyle variables of all respondents into the social space, we plot the "coordinates" of each respondent, locating individuals as "occupants" of this field of consumption within these two dimensions, and then cluster them by gender and generation to examine how these factors intersect to shape the social positioning of taste.

We do so for theoretical and empirical reasons. Theoretically, we are attentive to the move toward *intersectionality* in gender studies (Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005), a framework for analyzing how a wide range of "social and cultural categories intertwine" with gender (Knudsen 2006, 61). By evoking the image of cross-cutting streets, intersectionality calls attention to the ways individuals live with multiple, layered identities, as members of many communities simultaneously. These identities, derived from social relations, history, and the operations of power, may sometimes be at odds. Scholars working in this area have made special note of the intersection of gender and generation (Taefi 2009). As Shields notes (2008, 303), intersectionality provides "a generally applicable descriptive solution to the multiplying features that create and define social identities . . . not [just] race-class-gender, but also age."

Empirically, recent work on the growing support for gender equality and less restrictive views of gender roles over the past 50 years point to generational cohort replacement as one of the major determinants of these changes (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004, 110). These scholars find evidence that the change in gender attitudes is a product of the ongoing replacement of older generational groups by younger ones, which "differ systematically in their childhood experiences and subsequent attitudes, including . . . intergenerational transmission of attitudes toward gender" (see also Moen, Erickson, and Dempster-McClain 1997).

These insights resonate with previous theorizing about the critical role played by generations in the formation of preferences (Bourdieu 1994/1998; Mannheim 1970; Gramsci 1973). Whether referring to age, age cycles, demographic cohorts, or generational groups, the assumption shared among these scholars is

that generational cohorts are grounded in a symbolic position that follows them as they move through history. As Plummer notes (2010), all people are embedded in a specific set of historical moments, "moving together within a particular generational cohort or set of experiences, common to them, bonding them but also creating major differences with others who are not part of this generation" (p. 171). Accordingly, we examine the intersection of gender and generation in the social positioning of taste in the United States.
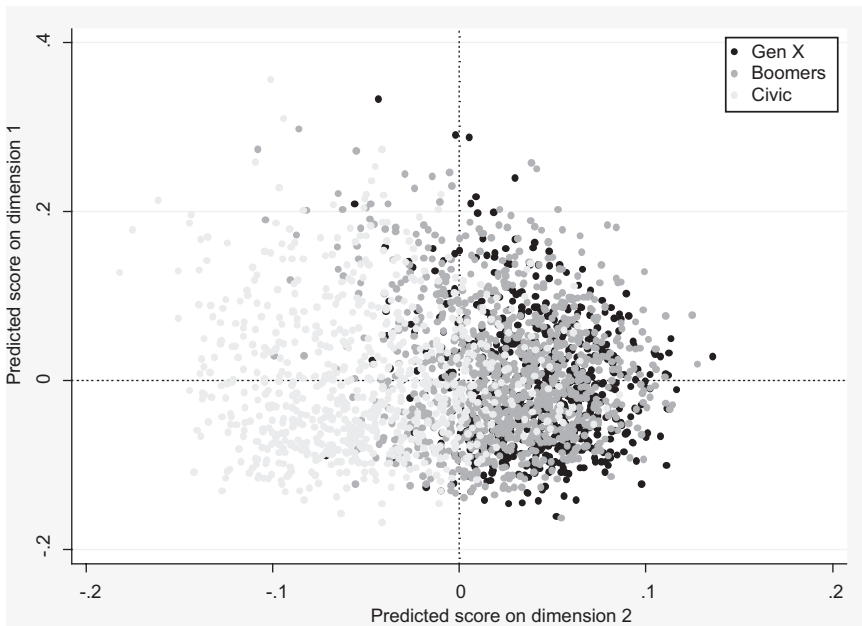
Data and Analytic Strategy

To further examine the field of cultural consumption in the United States and its intersection with gender and generation, we revisited the DDB Needham survey conducted by Market Facts in 2000 (hereafter, DDB 2000). DDB 2000 was a mail survey of a national sample of 3,122 (for details of this survey, see Shah, McLeod, and Yoon 2001; Friedland et al. 2007). In our initial analysis (Friedland et al. 2007), we linked, through MCA, a number of variables representing socioeconomic factors, cultural markers, and taste culture to extract the core dimensions of their relationships with one another.

We then presented each of these variables (and their category values) on a two-dimensional correspondence map, where vertical and horizontal axes represent the volume or quantity of capital (the vertical dimension) and the composition or form of capital (the horizontal dimension). On the vertical axis, low volume of capital occupies the bottom and high volume inhabits the top. On the horizontal axis, the continuum is "characterized by refinement, nurturance, and moderation (i.e., a communal orientation) on the left side and coarseness, excess, and aggressiveness (i.e., an individual orientation) on the right" (Friedland et al. 2007, 39).

To deepen our understanding of the core dimensions and of the role of gender and generation in defining those dimensions, we place our survey respondents onto this correspondence map. To locate our survey respondents as "occupants" of the social and cultural space defined by MCA, we calculated "coordinates" for each respondent on the map's vertical and horizontal axes by following a procedure similar to the ones used to calculate factor scores in factor analysis or component scores in component analysis.

Specifically, we determined each individual's location on the map by plotting a point on a two-dimensional plane, where a horizontal line originating from the estimated score on the first dimension (or the vertical axis of the volume of capital) and a vertical line originating from the estimated score on the second dimension (or the horizontal axis of the composition of capital) cross one another. Individual scores on these dimensions were estimated by summarizing category values for each individual registered on the thirty-six variables (occupations and indicators of economic and cultural capital) that we used to define the map and by weighting each category by corresponding principle inertias (i.e., statistics indicating the contributions of each variable to defining the dimensions). In this way, all respondents were mapped into the field space.

FIGURE 2
Correspondence Map of Individual Scores on Dimensions, by Generational Groups

Results

Correspondence analysis of generation

Figure 2 displays the correspondence map of individual scores on the two principle dimensions. On this map, our survey respondents were represented as points, whereas our previous map (see Figure 1) displayed category values of the variables that we used to extract these dimensions. The map in Figure 2 also highlights the fact that the two dimensions represent the most prominent ways in which our respondents can be differentiated or distanced from one another (see Friedland et al. [2007] for deeper interpretations of the dimensions).

To examine the role of generation in shaping our core dimensions, we marked each point by the generational group to which each individual belongs. We defined three generational groups or age cohorts: Generation X (GenX-ers), Baby Boomers, and Civic Generation. The GenX-ers group (*n* = 758) contains adults born after the year of 1964 (or aged between 18 and 35 in 2000). The Baby Boomer group (*n* = 1,236) is defined as those individuals who were born between 1946 and 1963 (or aged between 36 or 53 in 2000). The Civic Generation group (*n* = 942) contains adults born between 1924 and 1945 (or aged between 54 and 75 in 2000). All respondents born before 1924 (*n* = 186) were dropped from the analysis so the focus could remain on these three groups.

As shown in Figure 2, the three generational groups were found to occupy distinct spaces on the map, especially along the second dimension (i.e., the horizontal axis). Overall, GenX-ers were located on the right side of the map, while the members of the Civic Generation mostly occupied the left side of the map. The space inhabited by the Baby Boomers overlaps with those occupied by the Civic Generation, on the left, and the GenX-ers, on the right, but is clearly located in the middle along the second dimension. This pattern strongly suggests that our second dimension is powerfully determined by the positions occupied by different generational groups and distinctive cultural tastes they have developed over a long period of time.

In contrast, generation did not appear to play a significant role in defining the first dimension that represents the volume of capital. However, the GenX-ers exhibited a smaller degree of variation along the first dimension than did the older generations, as few GenX-ers occupied the uppermost areas of the map. This is not surprising given that the youngest cohort has not yet attained its full professional potential and, thus, has a lower volume of capital.
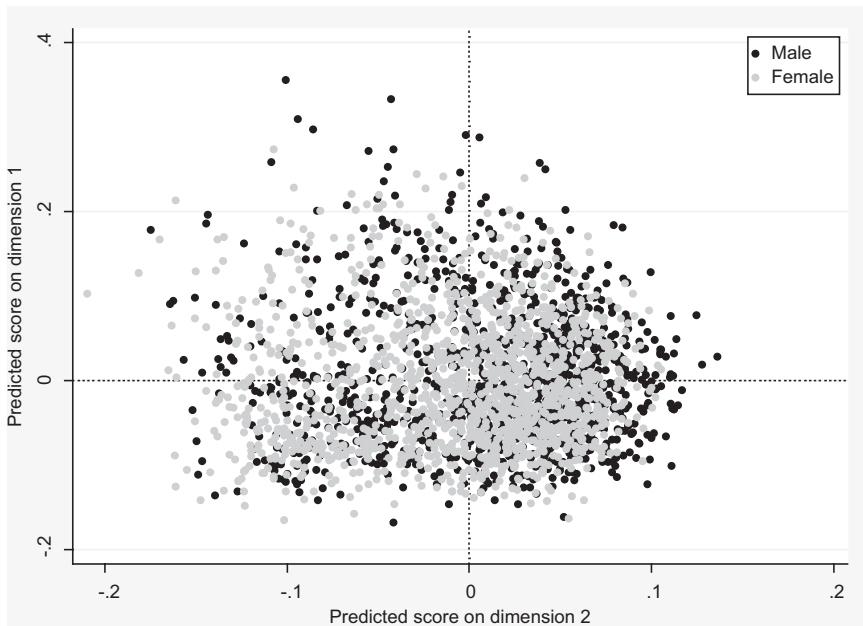
Correspondence analysis of gender

We extended this type of analysis to further examine the contribution of gender to the formation of our social and cultural space. Figure 3 presents the same correspondence map that we showed above, with the points now marked by gender. Unlike the pattern we observed in relation to generation, we could not observe any distinctive spaces associated with gender. Male and females respondents were scattered across the plane. Neither gender is associated with any particular area of the map. This is somewhat surprising given the seemingly gendered reading of the horizontal dimension, which appeared to map onto traditional gender roles.

Correspondence analysis intersecting gender and generation

As theories on intersectionality suggest, it is important to consider gender and generation simultaneously to see how they connect at multiple levels to influence our cultural consumption and taste. To explore how gender and generation jointly determine our dimensions, we ran a series of MCA within each generational group. For this subgroup analysis, we generated different social-cultural spaces for each generational group on the basis of occupation, income, education, and a host of other social and cultural markers (for details on the variables used to determine the correspondence map, see Friedland et al. 2007). We then placed our respondents onto the corresponding map, following the same procedure that we used above to calculate individual scores on the first two dimensions. Figure 4A through Figure 4C present the results of this analysis. On each map, we marked each point representing each individual by gender.

As shown in Figure 4A, gender plays a prominent role in defining the second dimension within the Civic Generation group. Male respondents were primarily

FIGURE 3
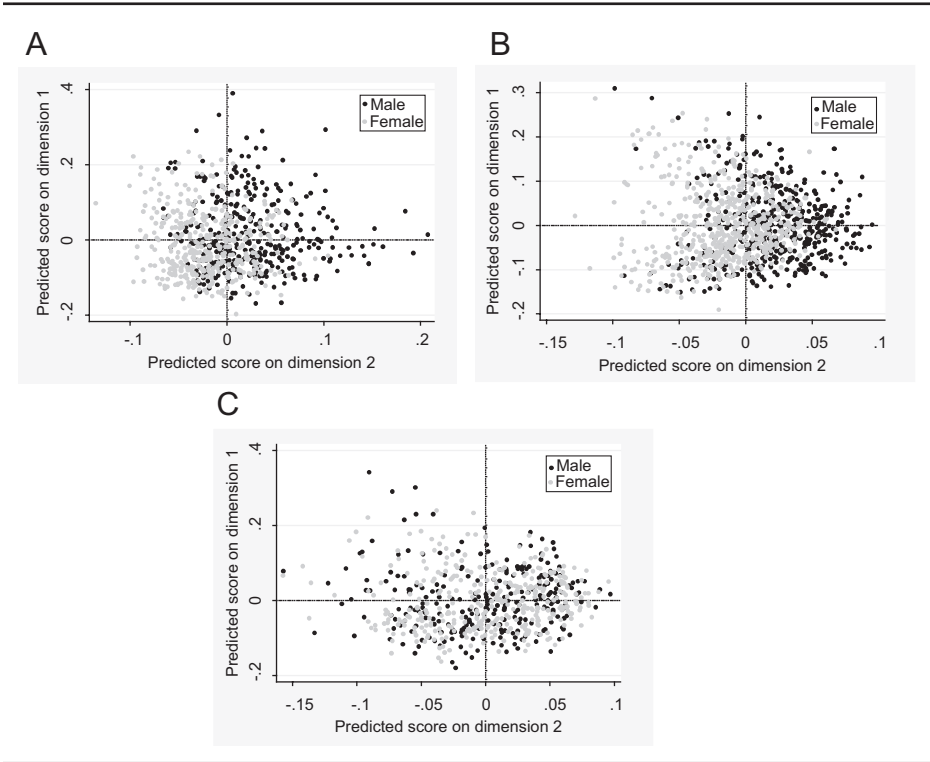Correspondence Map of Individual Scores on Dimensions, by Gender

situated on the right side of the map, whereas female respondents were concentrated on the left side of the map. Figure 4B shows a similar pattern among Baby Boomers, though skewed toward the right; each gender occupies a distinctive space along the horizontal axis, yet women appear to occupy social space previously occupied exclusively by men. However, this same pattern did not replicate among the GenX-ers (see Figure 4C). Neither the first dimension nor the second dimension differentiated our respondents in terms of gender. For the Generation X group, gender appears to play a very limited role in the mapping of cultural capital on either the horizontal or vertical dimension. As such, the gendered patterns of cultural consumption that seemingly defined older generations do not appear to define younger ones.

Discussion

Nevertheless, gender and generation do appear to shape the field of consumption in important ways. This effort extends Friedland et al.'s (2007) analysis of the general structure of the social positioning of taste in the United States, which

FIGURE 4
Correspondence Map of Individual Scores on Dimensions, by Gender and Generation: A. Civic Generation (born 1924–1945, or ages 54–75); B. Baby Boomers (born 1946–1963, or ages 36–53); C. Generation X (born after 1964, or ages 18–35)

found that while cultural capital in the United States largely parallels the field structure observed in 1960s France, the form of cultural capital in the United States discriminates between nurturance and community, on one side, and aggressiveness and individualism, on the other. In this article, we observed strong evidence of the intersection of gender and generation in cultural capital. Specifically, for the youngest generational cohort in our analysis, Generation X, the seemingly gendered alignment of taste that characterized previous generational groups no longer held sway. This blending of gendered identities in younger Americans may suggest a realignment from the notions of gentility and community as defining the feminine, and coarseness and individualism as defining the masculine. If so, this would mark an important shift in the social positioning of taste and gender attitudes.

   This shift is not at odds with Bourdieu's theory regarding the role of generational cohorts in defining social cleavages. As Plummer (2010) writes, "Conflicts between the young and the old . . . are not simply about age but about

generational standpoints, with all the symbolic content that this often implies. For Bourdieu (1993, 95), conflicts often highlight not just class but generation, and the clashes between systems of aspirations found in different periods" (p. 182). This seeming realignment of aspirations and accompanying shift in taste has important implications for attitudes toward gender roles, women's equality, and cultural attitudes more broadly (see Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004). As such, it demands more attention.

Mapping individuals from our representative sample of Americans onto the dual axes of volume and composition of capital yielded a number of other interesting findings, including the fact that older generational groups tend to occupy the left side of the social space, aligning with refinement, nurturance, and community over coarseness, aggressiveness, and individualism. However, for younger generational groups, the opposite was true, with Generation X favoring the right side of the social space over the left. Although this first exploration does not answer why this is the case, it takes us a bit closer and provides an agenda for further exploration.

Before we comment further on these findings, we should note some meaningful limitations of our data. First, while the DDB 2000 is among the most comprehensive datasets on consumption patterns in the United States, it is conducted by a marketing communications firm and, as such, tailors its questions toward certain sectors of consumption. It underrepresents the very rich and very poor and, as a result, may distort our analysis of the field of consumption at the extremes of high and low volumes of capital.

Second, while Bourdieu began with a precise analysis of class, based on occupational and income categories along with parental education and class position, our mapping was based on categories from subsets of these variables. While we believe we were able to reproduce the general field structure observed by Bourdieu in France, there are gaps that themselves could contribute to a somewhat discontinuous structure of the field. Nonetheless, the alignment and composition of the field can be validated against previous research and existing theory regarding the composition of cultural capital in the United States (Holt 1997a, 1997b, 1998).

Even with these limitations, the central finding of this article—that the members of Generation X do not align themselves with the taste preferences of the Boomers and Civic Generation—suggests an important shift in social mores and social relations. It appears from these findings that younger people largely cluster on the right side of the field space, suggesting that both men and women are adopting a more aggressive, individualistic approach to cultural production and consumption. However, this only tells part of the story. The deeper narrative speaks to the shift from the gendered positioning of taste preferred by their parents and grandparents to one where men and women can legitimately display a sense of taste that includes refinement, nurturance, and moderation (i.e., a communal orientation) or coarseness, excess, and aggressiveness (i.e., an individual orientation). While the analysis here is limited to consumption practices, this

shift may portend a larger realignment of attitudes regarding gender roles and social practices with implications beyond consumption.

Indeed, if cultural goods circulate as forms of power, as markers of distinction among groups, the dissolution of this distinction along gender lines among younger citizens is particularly meaningful. Status is less likely to be gained and lost through patterns of consumption that are structured along the individual-communal continuum for members of Generation X. This seemingly gendered alignment will hold less sway in maintaining patterns of power and inequality in the United States. This indicates cultural capital differs not only across national contexts but also across generational groups—a worthy direction for further inquiry.

Note

1. The data in this study were gathered in a 2000 DDB Needham mail survey conducted by Market Facts, using a stratified quota sampling procedure. To do this, Market Facts began with a large list of names and addresses acquired from commercial list brokers. A sample, counterbalanced along demographic characteristics to account for expected differences in response rates, was then drawn from a pool of approximately five hundred thousand individuals. Then, the final sample of approximately five thousand individuals is drawn annually to best approximate the distributions within the nine census divisions of age, income, household size, and population density. This starting sample is then adjusted within a range of subcategories that include race, gender, and marital status to compensate for differences in return rates, with more surveys mailed to population categories that respond at lower rates. Although this panel may underrepresent transient populations—the very poor, the very rich, and certain minority groups—the data have been verified as an effective barometer of mainstream America (Shah, McLeod, and Yoon 2001). Indeed, these data have been shown to produce responses that are highly comparable to conventional probability sampling procedures (Putnam 2000).

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