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Hidden (Dis)Advantages of Class: How Cultural Signals of Class Shape U.S. Labor Market Outcomes

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**HIDDEN (DIS)ADVANTAGES OF CLASS:
HOW CULTURAL SIGNALS OF CLASS SHAPE U.S. LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES**

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ABSTRACT

While the status attainment literature posits a direct relationship between family socioeconomic background and occupational attainment, sociologists tend to focus on supply-side factors, like schooling and social capital, to account for this effect, neglecting demand-side explanations like discrimination. My dissertation addresses this theoretical and empirical gap by using survey- and field-experimental methods to examine how cultural signals of class influence the evaluation and selection of U.S. job applicants.

Drawing on sociological theory and original survey data, I propose that Americans commonly draw on cultural measures of status—namely, indicators of cultural taste—to discern the class positions of others. Through two survey-experimental studies, I investigate the extent to which these cultural signals of class influence how people are socially perceived and stereotyped in the U.S. I conclude that Americans attribute a higher class position, greater levels of competence, and greater employability to individuals with traditionally highbrow tastes.

I then explore the extent to which these cultural signals influence the hiring decisions of U.S. employers. Results from an audit study conducted in four major U.S. cities and a survey-experimental study of 1,428 hiring managers reveal the hidden value of highbrow taste in the U.S. labor market and, simultaneously, its hidden cost. I find that applicants with high status cultural tastes experience a significantly higher probability of employer callback if they are (1) women and (2) applying to customer-facing jobs. However, this probability becomes negative and non-significant among male and/or non-customer-facing job applicants. Survey-experimental evidence suggests that these differing patterns of employer callback may be

explained by the positive effect of high status cultural signals on perceptions of demeanor and competence and their negative effect on perceptions of warmth.

Together, the survey and audit study findings presented in this dissertation offer unique insight into the cultural content of American class bias and the gendered nature of its labor market consequences.

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infinitely improved the quality of my life with your humor, love, and adventure. You knew me when a Ph.D. was just a glimmer in my eye and you have always been there for me, whatever the distance between us.

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Lastly, I'd like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Trudy Sopp and Hayden Thomas. As I write this, I am overwhelmed by the love and gratitude I feel towards you both. My greatest education in sociology came from being raised by you. You gave me the sociological imagination to pursue this dissertation and the determination to complete it. If the work I do in my life is even half as meaningful and impactful as the work you have done in yours, I will die a happy sociologist.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Social class origin is one of the most powerful predictors of social mobility in the United States today. Studies estimate that 40% of children born into the bottom quintile of the occupational and income distribution will remain there as adults, and levels of mobility are found to be even lower among women than men (Beller and Hout 2006; Urahn et al. 2012). To account for these patterns, researchers typically point to class-based inequalities in the human and social capital workers bring to the labor market (Lin 1999). Often overlooked, however, are the hidden forms of class bias workers encounter as they attempt to enter the labor market, regardless of the human or social capital they possess. When two applicants with similar qualifications but observably different class backgrounds apply for a job, are they treated differently?

While little attention has been paid to the social class biases that operate in U.S. hiring, much attention has been paid to the cultural forms of class bias in U.S. education. According to studies of educational inequality, class reproduction occurs, in part, because cultural markers of social class background, including leisure pursuits, arts participation, style of dress, and language use, bias how individuals are treated in schools. Greater opportunities and rewards are afforded to students with traditionally high status cultural traits like a penchant for jazz, fine art, or lacrosse, advantaging upper-middle class children with the parental resources to acquire such traits at home (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; DiMaggio 1982a). A growing literature also suggests that class-exclusionary cultural standards may be more stringent for females than males, as cultural consumption has historically been viewed as the “separate sphere” of women (Christin 2012; Collins 1988; Collins 1992; Tepper 2000).

To what extent do these cultural forms of class bias and exclusion persist beyond the walls of the classroom and into the U.S. labor market? Often, our social and cultural backgrounds are inescapable at the point of hire. They are embedded in our résumés via the organizations we work for, the schools we attend, and the more personal details we include to set ourselves apart. The Bureau of Labor Statistics explicitly advises high school and college students with limited work experience to include extracurricular activities in their résumés to signal initiative and leadership experience (Crosby 2009). However, the precise impact these cultural signals have at the hiring interface remains unclear. Rivera's (2012; 2015) ethnographic study of elite professional service firms offers qualitative evidence that cultural signals of class can inform the hiring decisions of American employers in elite occupations while Jackson's (2009) audit study of employment discrimination offers a quantitative measure of their effect in a British labor market. Yet, scholars have yet to quantitatively measure the effect of such cultural signals of class on labor market outcomes in the United States. And so, the literature continues to obscure what may be a cultural mechanism of class inequality in the U.S. labor market.

This dissertation aims to address this theoretical and empirical gap by examining how cultural signals of class influence the ways in which employers evaluate and select job applicants. First, I develop a theoretically grounded technique for signaling class in social experiments—cultural taste—and I empirically validate this technique through a national survey experiment. Second, I uncover an important form of class bias faced by female workers prior to the interview stage: employment discrimination on the basis of indicators of cultural taste. Third, I develop an empirically-based model of how these cultural signals of class influence labor market outcomes, identifying key social factors that mediate and moderate their effect. This model is rooted in findings from two survey experiments and one multi-site audit study.

I begin in Chapter Two¹ with the general question of how to conceptualize and operationalize social class in a study of U.S. employment discrimination. To understand how beliefs about social class organize and bias the hiring decisions of American employers, one must first understand what Americans believe social class to be and how employers might infer social class from a résumé. Traditional approaches tend to define class in “objective” structural terms, showing little regard for individuals’ subjective understandings. And so, I develop an alternative measure of class in this dissertation: class as it is socially constructed in everyday life. I draw on the sociological literature to motivate this social constructivist approach and I use original survey data to identify cultural measures of social class that are meaningful to U.S. residents and directly observable to employers. I propose that Americans systematically perceive cultural preferences, including preferences for music, sports, and food, as indicators of social class.

I then investigate, in Chapter Three², how people who signal these cultural preference are socially perceived and stereotyped by U.S. residents. For this chapter, I developed an original survey experiment that measures the stereotype content of a variety of music listeners, sports participants, and food consumers. As hypothesized, I find that Americans do judge others on the basis of their cultural preferences, attributing a higher class position and greater levels of competence to individuals with highbrow tastes, particularly highbrow univores. Meanwhile, in their evaluations of warmth, respondents express a high degree of tolerance towards individuals with lower status cultural tastes. Based on these findings, I propose that in competitive, task-oriented contexts, like the labor market, where evaluations of competence are weighed more heavily than evaluations of warmth, Americans will favor and reward those who signal exclusively highbrow tastes.

I test this proposition in Chapter Four³ by incorporating cultural signals of class into job résumés to explore their effect on U.S. residents' perceptions of job applicants. For this chapter, I distributed a survey experiment to a sample of 635 Mechanical Turk users to compare the effects of cultural signals (i.e. cultural tastes) and economic signals (i.e. mentions of parental socioeconomic status) of social class on the perceived competence and employability of job applicants. The study finds that cultural and economic signals function similarly, both conveying differences in the class origin of applicants, but that economic signals alone sensitize respondents to the upward mobility of lower class applicants. Consequently, when class differences are conveyed through economic signals, respondents, who assign greater competence to both the upper class and the upwardly mobile, are egalitarian in their evaluations, privileging neither the upper class applicant nor the lower class applicant. However, when class differences are conveyed through culture, respondents are class-biased in their evaluations, privileging the applicant they perceive to be higher class.

Findings from Chapter Four suggest that culture may be a key basis for social class discrimination in hiring. I test this conclusion in Chapter Five by investigating how cultural signals of class shape the real-life labor market outcomes of U.S. workers. I conducted an audit study of callback discrimination in four large U.S. cities (New York, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles), sending fictitious résumés to apply for customer-facing and non-customer-facing job openings posted on one of the largest employment websites in the U.S. Employers were sent two résumés a day apart: one résumé with traditionally high status cultural indicators, including participation in a classical music club and tennis league, and one résumé with traditionally low status cultural indicators, including participation in a country music club and bowling league. I then tracked employers' responses to the résumés and analyzed how employer responses varied

according to the customer-orientation of the hiring position and the status of the hiring organization. Results reveal that applicants with high status cultural tastes receive a significantly higher rate of callback from employers if they are (1) women and (2) applying to customer-facing jobs. Meanwhile, cultural signals of class have no significant effect on the callback rates of male and/or non-customer-facing job applicants.

What mechanisms lead employers in one context but not others to favor applicants with high status cultural tastes? I address this question in Chapter Six by exploring the social-psychological factors that underlie employers' applicant preferences. For this chapter, I fielded a survey experiment to a sample of 1,428 hiring managers in the U.S. On average, respondents reported a greater interest in interviewing applicants with high status cultural tastes, particularly those applying for the customer-facing position of Customer Service Representative, versus the non-customer-facing position of Accounting Clerk. Additionally, I find that this preference for high status applicants is driven primarily by perceptions of demeanor and, secondarily, by perceptions of competence. Hiring managers are more likely to interview applicants with high status tastes because they expect them to be more articulate, intelligent, and sophisticated than their lower status peers. Yet, when differences in perceived demeanor are held constant across applicants, it is revealed that hiring managers actually prefer applicants with low status cultural tastes, largely because they perceive them as warmer and more likable. I conclude that the differing callback rates of women versus men, customer-facing versus non-customer-facing job applicants, reflect the social value of highbrow taste as a signal of demeanor and competence and its social cost as a signal of warmth.

In combination, the survey- and field- experiments presented in this dissertation offer insight into the cultural content of American class bias and the gendered nature of its labor

market consequences. While some have questioned the value of institutionalized high status culture to U.S. employers, I provide evidence that status-based cultural traits are fairly agreed-upon markers of social class and that these cultural signals of class do matter for employment outcomes, but only under certain circumstances. Due to their positive effect on perceptions of both competence and demeanor, high status cultural traits are a significant source of class advantage in contexts where expectations of demeanor are high and conceptions of demeanor are intimately intertwined with conceptions of workplace competence: among female workers applying to customer-facing jobs. However, the cultural advantages of higher class applicants are not insuperable. First, they appear to fade when the inherited economic advantages of such applicants are made explicit. Second, the negative effect of high status cultural traits on perceptions of warmth appears to disadvantage some applicants in contexts where expectations of demeanor are low: among male and/or non-customer-facing job applicants.

My hope is that this dissertation work will contribute to theoretical and methodological debates in the sociological literature on class, culture, and labor market stratification and bring to a public light the oft-concealed ways in which class inequalities are reproduced in the United States.

ENDNOTES

1. A portion of Chapter Two and earlier versions of Chapters Five and Six were presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting in 2015, the Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting in 2015, and the University of Michigan's Inequality, Family, and Demography Working Group in 2014.
2. An earlier version of Chapter Three was presented at the Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting in 2016.
3. An earlier version of Chapter Four was presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting in 2013 and Princeton's CSSO Workshop in 2012.

CHAPTER TWO

Measuring the “Class” in Class Discrimination

1. Introduction

Like race and gender, social class origin is one of the most important predictors of labor market position in the United States today. Studies show that socioeconomic background is strongly linked to occupational attainment such that workers from economically disadvantaged families struggle to gain access to the same types of jobs as workers from economically advantaged families (Blau and Duncan 1962; Hauser and Mossel 1986; Lin 1999; Sewell et al. 1969). To account for inequalities in occupational attainment and income, scholars tend to offer supply-side explanations (Bills 2003). Some cite class-based differences in the human capital job applicants possess (Sewell et al. 1969; Haller and Portes 1973); others cite class-based differences in the social networks upon which applicants draw to learn about and gain access to jobs (Granovetter 1974; Lin 1999). Most neglect demand-side explanations like class-based employment discrimination, the central inquiry of this dissertation.

Today, little is known of whether and how perceptions of social class influence employers’ evaluation and sorting of job applicants. This is surprising given the prominent role discrimination plays in accounting for hiring inequalities related race, sex, motherhood, sexuality, and disability. Yet, this gap in the literature may be attributable, in part, to the unique theoretical and methodological challenges class research entails. How does one conceptualize and operationalize social class in a context like the U.S., where class is neither an institutionally recognized nor socially agreed-upon category?

To understand how beliefs about social class organize and bias the hiring decisions of American employers, one must first understand what Americans believe social class to be. To this end, traditional class analyses offer little guidance, as they tend to define class in objective, structural terms, showing little regard for individuals' subjective understandings. In this dissertation, I depart from these traditional conceptualizations of class in order to develop an alternative measure of social class that is rooted in Americans' folk understandings. I propose that these understandings are an important part of how employers infer unobservable characteristics like competence and warmth in labor markets.

In the sections below, I draw on the sociological literature to motivate this social constructivist approach and I use original survey data to identify cultural measures of social class that are meaningful to Americans. These are the measures I will use throughout my dissertation to signal differences in social class among job applicants and to identify patterns of class-based discrimination among employers.

2. Class Reproduction in U.S. Hiring

Today, there are two leading approaches to studying class inequality at the hiring interface. The first comes from the status attainment literature, the second from the employment discrimination literature. In the status attainment literature, access to human capital (education, experience, skills) and social capital (connections to friends, acquaintances, and kin who can provide information about or access to good jobs) figure most prominently as the mechanisms through which inequalities in class origin are reproduced at the hiring interface. Classic hiring models assert that employers make hiring decisions according to their assessments of competence and productivity, which they typically discern from the educational attainment and

occupational history of applicants (Farkas 1996; Lin 1999). These assessments then influence whether or not applicants are hired and where in the organizational hierarchy they are placed. It follows from this perspective that any observed class inequalities in hiring and job placement are the result of differing levels of human capital (Farkas 1996).

Studies also show that the density and strength of workers' social networks can play an important role in mediating the relationship between parental socioeconomic status and occupational attainment (Granovetter 1974; Lin 1999). Often, workers will rely on their contacts to learn about job openings. Likewise, organizations often draw on informal networks and referrals to maximize the social similarity of their employees (Fernandez et al. 2000; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Some positions in a firm rely more on social capital than other positions. For example, management-level positions and positions that deal with people are more likely to be filled by those who have access to the right social networks (Lin 1999). This leads to disadvantages in hiring and job placement for low status populations with limited access to such networks (Lin 2000).

The weakness of these status attainment models, however, is their inattention to the mechanisms of status-based discrimination: to the differential treatment workers receive regardless of the human or social capital they possess. This has been rectified in the last few decades by an ever-growing experimental literature. Today, a number of survey- and field-experimental studies suggest that inequalities in the U.S. labor market are attributable in part to the discriminatory preferences of employers. Researchers find that status characteristics like race, sex, motherhood, disability, and sexual orientation bias employer decision-making at the point of hire (Correll et al. 2007; Pager and Shepherd 2008; Pager et al. 2009; Tilcsik 2011).

The question remains, however, whether signals of social class have a similar causal effect on employer decision-making. Does class-based discrimination exist in the U.S.? While prior studies suggest that considerations of class may influence the hiring evaluations made by U.S. employers (Moss and Tilly 2001; Rivera 2011; Rivera 2012; Rivera 2015), the qualitative methods used in these studies ultimately do not lend themselves to causal inference.

3. Conceptualizing Social Class in the U.S.

Adapting experimental methods pioneered in the study of race and gender discrimination to the study of social class discrimination presents unique theoretical and methodological challenges. As a category of analysis, class is widely debated and sociologists still lack a common conceptualization and measure (for reviews, see DiMaggio 2012 and Wright 2005). In fact, there are those who question the very existence of social classes in the U.S. (Kingston 2000; Paluski and Waters 1996).

One of the most famous proponents of class analysis, Karl Marx, defined class as relationship to the means of production (Marx [1867]1978). Current-day approaches that build on Marxian theory conceptualize class as rooted in such job characteristics as autonomy, authority, and control (Wright et al. 1982; Wright 2005). Others, however, define class in terms of market relations, including those rooted in property ownership, authority relations, occupation, and education (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Grusky and Sorensen 1998; Treiman 1977). This conceptualization of class builds on the work of Weber ([1922]1958), who theorized class situation as one's position in various markets for property, labor, and commodities (DiMaggio 2012; Wright 2005).

While they differ in many respects, what these approaches to class analysis have in common is that each treats social class as a category of analysis derived from objective economic or social conditions. Generally, the study of class as an analytic category is divorced from the study of class as a socially constructed category. Yet I propose that the ways in which ordinary people define, express, and perceive social class in their daily lives have real, material and symbolic, consequences. The study of class as it is practiced and perceived is as central to its analysis as the study of class as a set of objective, material circumstances.

In his theoretical work, Bourdieu makes a similar critique of the common opposition between structuralist and constructivist conceptualizations of social class. He posits that "...a class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*, by its consumption...as much as by its position in the relations of production (even if it is true that the latter governs the former)" (Bourdieu 1984: 483). Bourdieu then challenges this ontological divide by uncovering the ways in which individuals' cultural practices and tastes are shaped by and, in turn, shape their positions in the class structure. In doing so, Bourdieu reconciles constructivist and structuralist conceptualizations of social class.

The weakness of Bourdieu's "constructivist structuralism," however, is his inattention to how individuals themselves cognitively construct, or conceive of, social class. While Bourdieu argues that social perceptions are an essential part of what makes a social class, these perceptions are never investigated in his own work. Furthermore, the way in which perceptions of social class influence how individuals evaluate and distribute resources to one another receives little theoretical elaboration or empirical attention. And so, while I share Bourdieu's constructivist aim, I depart from his approach by asking how class is defined not by social theorists but by people in everyday life.

According to studies of subjective class identification in the U.S., Americans tend to perceive class as gradational and often draw on socioeconomic indicators, including income, occupation, and education, to identify gradations of social class (Coleman et al. 1978; Hout 2008). However, socioeconomic information is often not immediately available to individuals in everyday social interactions, so they must rely on other cues to perceive and evaluate others. Studies show that when two strangers are meeting for the first time, it is largely through expressions of taste, aesthetic knowledge, leisure pursuits, language use, symbolic goods, and styles of self-presentation that similarities and differences in social standing or class are communicated and socially experienced (Bourdieu 1984; Coleman et al. 1978; Yodanis 2006).

According to Weber ([1922]1958), these aspects of “status” or “status culture”¹ are analytically distinct from measures of social class. However, Weber and others agree that a “status situation can be the cause as well as the result of a class situation” (Lizardo 2010). Prior research suggests that status cultural participation is integral to the performance and reproduction of class in social life (Bourdieu 1984; Coleman et al. 1978; DiMaggio 2012; Warner and Lunt 1941; Yodanis 2006). Thus, as a category of practice, class is often best understood through observations of status-cultural participation.

4. Operationalizing Social Class in the U.S.

4.1. Past Findings

What precise cultural markers do Americans draw on to discern and express gradations of social class? For decades, the cultural mechanisms through which class is instantiated in social life have been of central concern to sociologists of culture (DiMaggio 2012). Within this literature, scholars cite interactional style, accent, speech cadence, style of dress, parenting

strategies, moral values, bodily comportment, and cultural taste as key markers of class position (Bourdieu 1984; Bernstein 1975; DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Lamont 1992; Lamont 2000; Lareau 2003; Weininger et al. 2015).

Cultural tastes—the focus of this dissertation—include preferences for music, art, food, and leisure, and studies show that social class is a key predictor of the status level of an individual's cultural tastes (Bourdieu 1984; Veblen [1899]1967). For example, educational attainment and occupational prestige are positively associated with a taste for musical forms institutionalized as high status, including classical music, opera, and jazz, and a distaste for musical forms institutionalized as low status, including country and gospel music (Bryson 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992). Furthermore, researchers find that individuals' cultural preferences are heavily influenced by their family backgrounds. Children with advantaged class backgrounds, who are raised in families high in socioeconomic status and/or cultural capital, are more likely to develop high status cultural tastes than children with disadvantaged class backgrounds (Bogt et al. 2011; Mohr and DiMaggio 1995; van Eijck 1997).

It is important to note that the classification of some tastes as high status and others as low status is not the inevitable outcome of inherent differences in the quality or value of these cultural forms (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio 1982b). According to DiMaggio's (1982b) historical analysis of nineteenth century Boston, such status distinctions were rarely made in the U.S. before 1850. Instead, high status culture was institutionalized by Boston elites in an effort to legitimate their authority and class position over a growing population of working class Irish immigrants (DiMaggio 1982b). Thus, status-based cultural differences are not only meaningful indicators of social class differences but, in fact, emerged during periods of elite class formation and social closure.

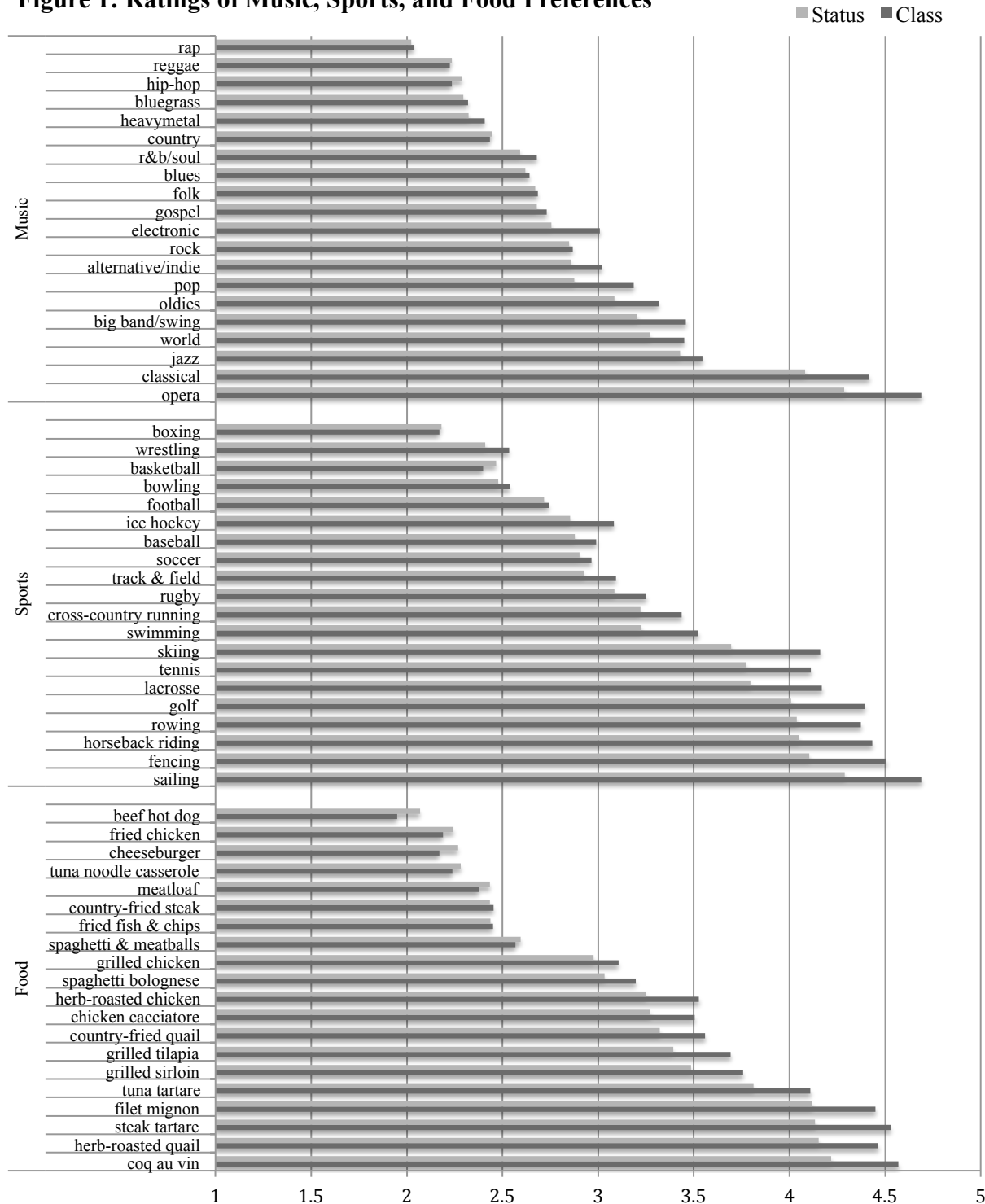
4.2. An Empirical Test

Bourdieu (1984) cites music, sports, and food as three important cultural domains in which differences in class may be expressed through differences in taste. But do Americans themselves perceive differences in taste for music, sports, and food as indicators of differences in social class? To identify cultural tastes with differing class associations in the U.S., I rely not on a priori assumptions but instead draw on empirically-based measures.

Those who have examined the stereotypes associated with various musical subcultures in the U.S. find that people do perceive differences in the socioeconomic backgrounds of those who listen to traditionally high or low status musical genres (Lewis 2008). To test whether sports and food preferences, like music preferences, convey differences in status as well as social class, I distributed three exploratory surveys on Amazon.com's crowdsourcing website, Mechanical Turk, in May 2013. Approximately 200 U.S. residents were sampled for each survey. One survey asked respondents a series of questions about people with differing musical preferences; the second asked respondents about people with differing sports preferences; the third asked respondents about people with differing food preferences.

To measure the perceived status of music, sports, and food preferences, I used a well-established measure of status developed by Fiske et al. (2002) and applied widely in social psychology. Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all...5=extremely), how economically successful, well educated, and prestigious in occupation people with differing preferences were likely to be. To measure perceptions of class, respondents were asked to rate the social class (1=poor...5=upper class) of the same people. From these questions, I derived average rankings of the perceived status and perceived class of individuals with various music, sports, and food preferences.

Figure 1: Ratings of Music, Sports, and Food Preferences



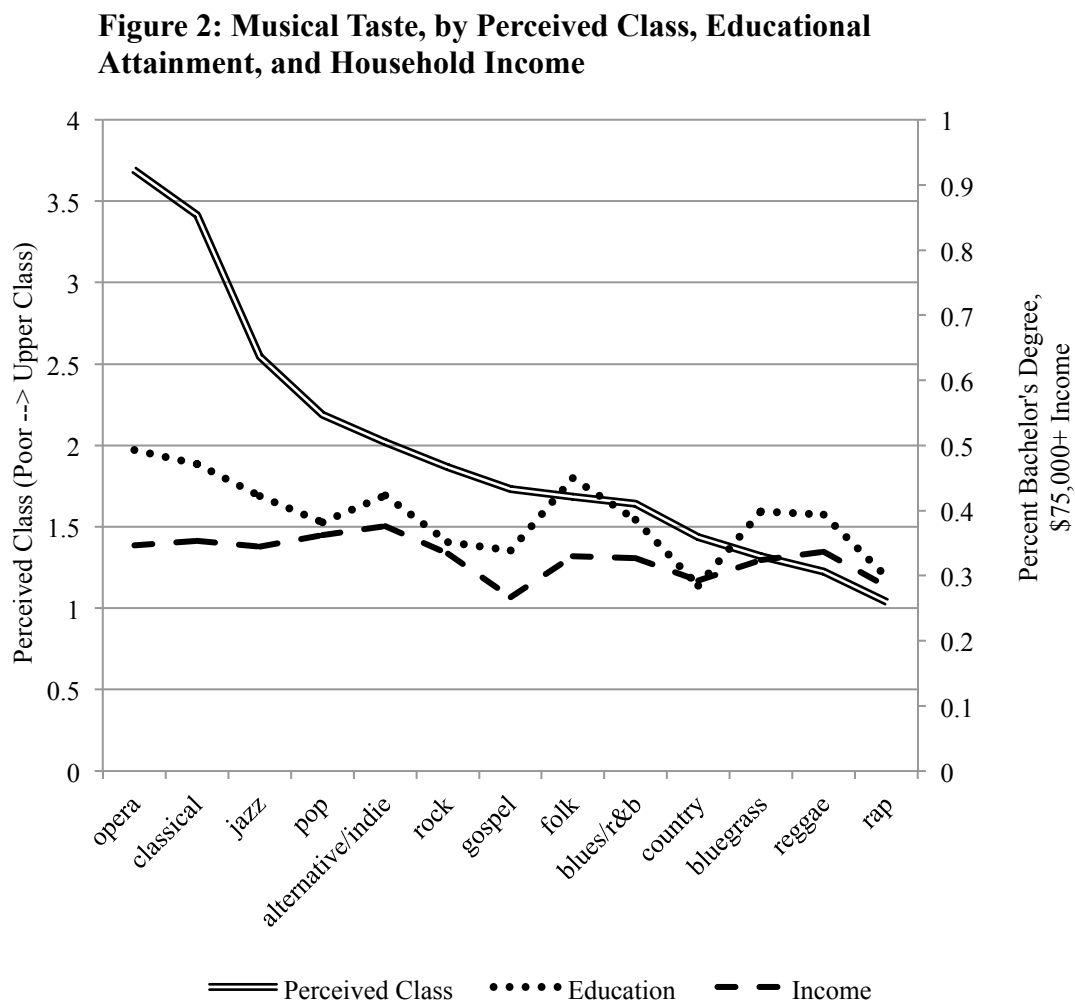
Note: This figure displays average ratings of status and social class for people with varying music, sports, and food preferences. To measure status, respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all...5=extremely), how economically successful, well educated, and prestigious in occupation people with differing preferences were likely to be. To measure class, respondents were asked to rate the social class (1=poor...5=upper class) of the same people.

The Mechanical Turk users surveyed were approximately 70% white, 55% female, 60% under the age of 35, and 40% college educated. Mechanical Turk samples more closely match the U.S. population than traditional university samples (Paolucci et al. 2010) but they are not nationally representative. To account for the distinctive demographic composition of Mechanical Turk users, I analyzed the effect of key sociodemographic factors on the rankings of taste reported in Figure 1. I do not find that the relative ranking of these preferences varies substantially by respondent gender, age, or educational background, so there is generally a consensus across demographic groups.

Mean results from the surveys are shown in Figure 1. From the surveys, it is clear that perceptions of status and class are strongly correlated. Statistical analysis confirm that, for music, sports, and food, the correlation between perceptions of status and perception of class is greater than 0.8. On average, individuals with a taste for stereotypically high status musical genres like classical music, opera, and jazz are perceived as statistically significantly higher class ($p < 0.001$) than individuals with a taste for stereotypically low status musical genres. This extends to sports and food as well. For instance, individuals who participate in sports like sailing, golf, and tennis or like traditionally European dishes like coq au vin and filet mignon are perceived as statistically significantly higher status and higher class ($p < 0.001$) than individuals who participate in sports such as boxing, basketball, and bowling and prefer familiar dishes like cheeseburgers and tuna noodle casserole. I conclude that Americans systematically perceive cultural preferences as indicators of social class and there is substantial consensus across demographic groups.

To what extent do these subjective differences in social class reflect objective differences in structural circumstance? In Figure 2, I plot the perceived social class of various music

consumers, taken from Figure 1, alongside data on their educational attainment (% bachelor's degree) and household income (% income of \$75,000 and over), taken from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. It is interesting to note that, in Figure 2, the class differences Americans perceive between people with high and low status tastes are greater than the educational and economic differences that exist between them. For example, a person who



Note: In this figure, data on the perceived class of music consumers come from a Mechanical Turk survey of 200 U.S. residents. Data on the educational attainment and household income of music consumers come from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

expresses a taste for opera music is 57% more likely to have a bachelor's degree and 25% more likely to make over \$75,000 than a person who expresses a taste for opera. However, he or she is attributed an average social class rating that is almost 4 times that of the person who likes rap. This discrepancy between the real and perceived probability of an opera music fan belonging to a higher social class than a rap music fan reflects a classic reasoning error, what Kahneman and Tversky (1972) refer to as the representativeness heuristic. Americans overestimate the class difference between opera and rap music fans because they do not take into account the relative size of class categories—namely, that the upper class is much smaller and, therefore, anyone's likelihood of belonging to it is quite low. Instead, respondents assume that opera music fans are more likely to belong to the upper class because a taste for opera is more representative of the upper class than the lower class.

That said, I find that that the class positions Americans attribute to varying music consumers are still strongly and statistically significantly correlated with their educational background ($\text{corr}=0.74$) and, at marginally significant levels, moderately correlated with their household income (0.52). The stronger correlation found between educational attainment and perceived social class is not surprising given that educational attainment is often found to be a better predictor of musical taste than income.

5. Conclusion

Based on these findings, I conclude that Americans systematically perceive cultural preferences as indicators of social class. Furthermore, individuals' subjective, or perceived, differences in social class are significantly associated with objective differences in structural circumstance. By both subjective and objective measures, individuals with traditionally high

status cultural tastes are more likely to belong to the upper-middle class than people with traditionally low status cultural tastes. Consequently, I may infer that any hiring decisions made on the basis of status differences in cultural taste are essentially hiring decisions made on the basis of perceived differences in social class—hiring decisions that reflect and reproduce real, structural inequalities among job applicants.

END NOTES

1. Status culture refers to the set of cultural traits that confer social honor while social class refers to one's market position and access to material resources (Weber [1922]1958).

CHAPTER THREE

The Psychology of Distinction: How Cultural Tastes Shape Class Perception and Impression Formation in the U.S.

1. Introduction

A key psychological premise of the sociological literature on taste is that our cultural preferences shape how we are socially perceived (Bourdieu 1984). In Chapter Two, I systematically find that the preferences we express for particular types of music, food, and sports signal our social class origins to others. Beyond “classifying” us, Bourdieu (1984) also contends that these cultural signals of class directly influence our social positions by biasing the impressions we form of one another. According to Bourdieu, a hierarchical cultural system exists in which we interpret the highbrow¹ tastes of the “dominant” class as signs of greater merit and moral worth than the lowbrow tastes of the “dominated” class (Bourdieu 1984). Extending this theory to the United States, a rich literature now documents the positive outcomes correlated with high status cultural tastes in education, marital selection, and social network building (Bourdieu 1973; DiMaggio 1982a; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). Researchers infer from these findings that, as Bourdieu observed in France, so, too, do Americans make judgments of merit and social worth on the basis of cultural taste.

And yet, while many researchers agree that a hierarchy of cultural taste exists in the United States, they disagree about the particular combinations of taste Americans prize most. In particular, a growing number of researchers now question the assumption that it is cultural exclusivity—an exclusive taste for high culture—and not cultural “omnivorousness”—a taste for a variety of cultural forms—that contemporary Americans define as elite and that they value most (Peterson 2005; Peterson and Kern 1996). These scholars point to survey evidence that,

since the 1990s, individuals high in socioeconomic status increasingly prefer a diverse array of high *and* low status cultural forms over the exclusive consumption of high status culture (Peterson 1997; Bryson 1996; Erickson 1996; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Lopez-Sintas and Katz-Gerro 2005; Khan 2011). They conclude that omnivorousness has supplanted highbrow exclusivity at the top of the pecking order of taste (Bennett et al. 2009; Khan 2011).

Meanwhile, scholars like Lamont (1992) and Halle (1993) challenge the very existence of a coherent or widespread hierarchy of taste. Halle (1993) contends that the cultural preferences of Americans are not particularly bounded by class nor are they particularly deep. Lamont (1992) observes that many Americans express a “laissez-faire” tolerance towards friends and acquaintances with diverse cultural tastes.

The challenge for U.S. researchers is now to adjudicate these competing theories of taste. Despite their insights, each theory still rests on imperfect evidence. In support of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural hierarchy, I find in Chapter Two that Americans attribute a higher class position to individuals with traditionally highbrow tastes. Whether Americans consequently form more favorable impressions of highbrow “univores” is the questions. In the U.S., studies show that a preference for high culture is correlated with a high socioeconomic status and better social outcomes (Bryson 1996; DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Peterson and Simkus 1992). Scholars often interpret this correlation between highbrow tastes and positive status attainment outcomes as evidence that Americans attribute greater intelligence and merit to those who exhibit such tastes (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; DiMaggio 1982a). However, these statistical correlations do not rule out alternative interpretations and, as Kingston (2001) points out, correlation is not causation.

The literature on cultural omnivorousness suffers from similar shortcomings. While studies show that omnivorous tastes are correlated with a high socioeconomic status (Bryson 1996; Peterson 2005; Peterson and Kern 1996), we cannot assume that people therefore attribute greater merit and moral worth to those with omnivorous tastes. Moreover, research increasingly reveals (1) that patterns of omnivorousness may be on the decline (Rossman and Peterson 2015) and (2) that measures of omnivorousness used in the U.S. and France disguise multiple and distinct patterns of taste tied to varying social backgrounds (Bryson 1996; Coulangeon and Lemel 2007; Goldberg 2011; Tampubolon 2008). Additionally, no research to my knowledge has offered evidence that signals of omnivorous taste have a positive, causal effect on how people are evaluated or perceived.

Research in support of a theory of cultural *laissez-faire* addresses some of these shortcomings, as Halle (1993) and Lamont (1992) ask U.S. residents themselves what they think of high and low cultural forms and the people who consume them. However, the weakness of these studies is that they are based on non-random samples and they take the attitudes of their select respondents at face value. Furthermore, they assume that the absence of an explicitly articulated cultural bias among American interviewees challenges the existence of a cultural hierarchy (Holt 1997). According to Holt (1997), this logic is problematic as it may simply be that cultural hierarchy in the U.S. is more “implicit and psychologized.”

Ultimately, there is little we can definitively say about the effect signals of cultural taste have on Americans’ evaluation of one another. Do Americans form more favorable impressions of those who display cultural tastes they perceive to be of a higher class? To address this question, I turn to a methodology never before applied to the study of taste: a survey experiment distributed to a national Internet sample of 1,520 U.S. residents. A survey experiment addresses

the shortcomings of past studies by providing *causal* estimates of the effect signals of cultural taste have on *person perception*. In the survey experiment presented below, respondents were asked to review part of a fictitious online social media profile in which the music, sports, and food tastes listed as “favorite” interests varied randomly. They then answered questions about the target’s social class as well as the target’s competence and warmth.

According to the stereotype content literature in social psychology, competence and warmth are the two primary criteria people use to form impressions of others (Cuddy et al. 2007; Fiske et al. 2002). They have consistently emerged from psychological studies of person perception, social-value orientation, and stereotype content as evaluative criteria that are widely used and socially consequential in the U.S. According to Cuddy et al. (2007) perceptions of competence and warmth account for most of the variance in people’s judgments of others and tend to drive perceivers’ emotional and behavioral reactions.

In the first part of my analysis, I measure the effect that signals of music, sports, and food preference have on perceptions of the target’s social class. As in Chapter Two, my analysis reveals that U.S. residents do classify others on the basis of their cultural tastes. More specifically, they attribute the highest class position to exclusive consumers of highbrow culture, consistent with the hierarchical cultural system theorized by Bourdieu (1984). I also find that these taste-based classifications have important psychological consequences. Lending further support to Bourdieu’s theory of cultural hierarchy, respondents attribute higher levels of competence to targets with at least one highbrow taste and the highest levels of competence to highbrow univores.

Signals of cultural taste, however, have little effect on perceptions of warmth. Indicative of a laissez cultural system in the U.S., respondents attribute fairly equal levels of warmth to

their targets. Among highbrow univores, however, this is because the high levels of warmth lower educated respondents attribute to them counteract the lower levels of warmth higher educated respondents attribute to them. When I analyze the variation in response by respondent education, I find that educational elites perceive highbrow univores as more competent than their lower status peers but not as more likable or warm.

Together, these findings reconcile theories of cultural hierarchy and a cultural *laissez-faire* in the U.S. While Americans may favor highbrow univores and disparage lowbrow univores in their appraisal of ability and intelligence, many express a high degree of tolerance towards individuals with diverse cultural tastes in their appraisal of whom to like and trust, to the point that elites actively dislike highbrow univores for their exclusivity.

In a further analysis, I explore differences in the independent effect of music, sports, and food preferences on perceptions of class, competence, and warmth. Given that music, sports, and food constitute different cultural domains, it is plausible that different hierarchies of taste operate within them. Indeed, while respondents perceive a cultural hierarchy in each domain, signals of musical taste have a larger and stronger effect on their perceptions of class, competence, and warmth than do signals of sports or food taste. As Bourdieu (1984) once wrote, I systematically find within the context of this study that nothing more “infallibly classifies” than musical taste. I conclude that the judgments of taste we uncover in the U.S. are contingent not only upon the questions of competence or warmth we ask but also upon the cultural domains we observe.

2. Impression Formation in the United States

According to Fiske et al.’s (2002) well-supported model of social cognition and intergroup bias, social groups are often evaluated on the basis of their position in the social

structure. Their evaluations tend vary along two key dimensions: perceived competence and perceived warmth (Cuddy et al. 2007; Fiske et al. 2002). *Competence* refers to a series of traits related to intelligence, skill, and efficiency that shape one's ability to carry out intended goals (Fiske et al. 2002). *Warmth* refers to a series of traits related to morality, trustworthiness, sincerity, and friendliness that shape a person's goals and intentions towards others (Fiske et al. 2002). Attributions of warmth are made based on appraisals of the potential harm or benefit posed by the target group's perceived goals; attributions of competence are made based on appraisals of the target group's ability to carry out those goals.

With regards to social class, Fiske et al. (2002) uncover the following group stereotypes. They find that the upper class tend to be attributed higher levels of competence than the middle and lower classes but their greater perceived competence comes at the cost of their perceived warmth. They are attributed significantly lower levels of warmth than the middle class—levels of warmth similar to those attributed to the working class. To the extent that signals of cultural taste shape attributions of social class, we should expect them to have a similar effect on attributions of competence and warmth. The sociological literature on taste offers a series of theories regarding the effect signals of cultural taste are likely to have on class perception and impression formation in the U.S.

2. Theories of Cultural Taste in the United States

2.1. Cultural Hierarchy

The notion, predominant in the sociological literature, that cultural tastes are stratified by class and that they are themselves class-stratifying was popularized in 1984 with the publication of Bourdieu's *Distinction*. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) challenges the Kantian notion that

cultural tastes are “disinterested” asocial phenomena. Instead, pointing to empirical evidence from France, Bourdieu theorizes a hierarchical cultural system in which displays of taste influence how individuals classify, evaluate, and ultimately distribute resources to one another. According to Bourdieu (1984), a social class is defined “as much by its *being perceived* as by its *being*,” and it is on the basis of cultural consumption and taste that social class is perceived. A taste for high culture signifies a “dominant” class position while a taste for low culture signifies a “dominated” class position, with important social consequences.

By enabling us to “classify,” signals of cultural taste also shape the impressions we form of another. According to Bourdieu (1984; 1973), individuals with the tastes of the dominant class are generally viewed in a more favorable light—often attributed greater merit, social legitimacy, and moral worth—than individuals with the tastes of the dominated class. These cultural elites are consequently afforded greater opportunities and rewards than their lower status peers, making the exclusive consumption of high culture a form of “capital” and a mechanism of class reproduction in France (Bourdieu 1986)

Bourdieu’s model of cultural hierarchy was developed according to the case of late 1960s France. However, studies suggest that a similar cultural hierarchy may be found in the U.S. First, studies show that patterns of cultural taste are moderately correlated with socioeconomic indicators of social class. For example, DiMaggio, Mohr, Useem, Peterson, and Simkus (DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Mohr and DiMaggio 1995; Peterson and Simkus 1992) all find that educational attainment and occupational prestige are positively associated with taste for cultural forms institutionalized as high status, including classical, opera, and jazz music. Likewise, studies show that individuals with low educational attainment are more likely to exclusively

consume popular or lowbrow cultural forms like country music and gospel (Peterson and Simkus 1992; Bryson, 1996; Bryson, 1997).

Second, the U.S. literature on cultural capital shows that individuals with exclusively highbrow tastes are more likely to experience positive outcomes in institutions. For example, students with a preference for high cultural forms like classical music and opera tend to receive better grades in school and are more likely to be accepted into college (Bourdieu 1973; DiMaggio 1982a; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). Researchers infer from these findings that highbrow culture is “capital” in the U.S.—that Americans reward displays of highbrow taste because they perceive the class privileged as more competent and likable than their lower class peers.

This literature also suggests that the social evaluations people make on the basis of cultural taste may vary according to their class background. The classification and evaluation of others is, in and of itself, an expression of taste with unique classificatory power. As Bourdieu (1984) writes:

“Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.”

If this Bourdieusian logic holds, respondents’ own class backgrounds should influence how they evaluate the cultural tastes of others. Given the benefits educational elites, in particular, accrue from propping up a cultural system that favors their own cultural preferences, we would expect the highly educated to assign greater social value than the lesser educated to individuals who display exclusively highbrow cultural tastes. In support of this theory, studies show that elite

universities are more likely than non-elite universities to admit applicants with traditionally highbrow cultural traits (Kaufman and Gabler 2004).

Statistical accounts of the effect of highbrow cultural consumption on status attainment are consistent with but do not confirm the above psychological inferences. As Kingston (2001) points out, an equally plausible interpretation of the correlation between high status cultural taste and status attainment is that it is spurious—that high status cultural tastes are not consequential in and of themselves but simply correlated with other consequential but unobservable social traits. Though theories abound, the sociological literature lacks systematic evidence of the causal effect cultural tastes have on social perceptions. It is still unknown whether people who display traditionally highbrow cultural tastes are perceived as more intelligent or capable than people who display traditionally lowbrow cultural tastes. Consequently, the claim that highbrow cultural taste, in and of itself, constitutes a socially valued form of “capital” in the U.S. remains undemonstrated.

2.2. Cultural Omnivorousness

While Bourdieu’s theory of a cultural hierarchy has been widely used in the U.S., it has also been met with skepticism. It is now an increasingly popular view that cultural omnivorousness, rather than highbrow cultural consumption, is the primary marker of an elite class position in the contemporary U.S. According to proponents of this view, a class-based cultural hierarchy exists but it is broad cultural engagement and tolerance, rather than cultural exclusivity, that Americans perceive as elite and that they value most (Peterson 1992; Peterson and Simkus 1996; Peterson 1997; Peterson 2005). Displays of cultural omnivorousness tend to have two defining characteristics: the quantity of cultural tastes (people like a lot of things) is

high and the status composition of tastes is varied (Peterson 2005). The latter is the dimension of omnivorousness I focus on in this chapter.

The theorized shift among elites from “snobbish exclusion” to “omnivorous appropriation” has received some empirical support (Peterson 2005). It originated with Petersen and Kern’s (1996) study of patterns of musical taste, in which Peterson and Kern find that a high socioeconomic status is increasingly correlated with a taste for a diverse array of musical genres. Since then, numerous studies have followed suit with similar findings (Peterson 1997; Bryson 1996; Lopez-Sintas and Katz-Gerro 2005; Khan 2011). Researchers infer from these correlational studies that a taste for high culture has lost its elite signifying power and thus its social currency in the U.S. The question is whether contemporary Americans themselves perceive cultural omnivorousness as the primary marker of an elite class position and, consequently, whether they form more favorable impressions of omnivores than they do of highbrow univores. Proponents of the omnivore thesis have yet to provide evidence that possessing omnivorous tastes has a positive effect on how one is evaluated or treated by others. Furthermore, recent research suggests that omnivorousness may be on the decline as an elite class signifier in the U.S. (Rossman and Peterson 2015).

2.3. Cultural Laissez-Faire

Some scholars carry the omnivorousness argument a step further and use it to challenge the very notion that an agreed-upon cultural hierarchy exists in the U.S. They point to cultural regionalism, commercialization, and racial/ethnic diversity as factors that undermine the stability and widespread adoption of class-based cultures and hierarchies (Lamont and Lareau 1988). According to Halle (1993), individuals’ cultural preferences are not particularly bounded by

class nor are they particularly deep. In fact, as Kingston (2001) notes, the correlations between measures of cultural taste, like musical preference, and measures of socioeconomic status are moderate in the U.S.

Moreover, in interviews with white, upper-middle class males in the U.S. and France, Lamont (1992) finds that most Americans express great tolerance for a variety of high and low status cultural styles. It is rarely on the basis of cultural taste that attributions of worth are made. Instead, according to Lamont, the cultural repertoires of U.S. elites are broad and varied, indicative of a “laissez faire” cultural system that prizes cultural diversity and tolerates cultural difference. Based on interview with upper-middle class American men, Lamont (1992) concludes: “The values of friendliness, conflict avoidance, and cultural egalitarianism all reinforce the marginalization of intellectual and high culture in American society as they stress the cultural sovereignty of the individual and the primacy of moral criteria of evaluation over cultural criteria.”

Holt (1997), however, points out that the “catholic” evaluations of taste Lamont’s respondents display are not necessarily evidence of a lack of cultural hierarchy or bias. Instead, it may simply be that the cultural biases of Americans are more “implicit and psychologized,” making it unlikely that they would surface in interviews.

3. Data and Methods

To test the theories of taste outlined above and measure the effect signals of cultural taste have on attributions of social class and, in turn, perceptions of competence and warmth, I conducted an online survey experiment, detailed below.

3.1 Data

The data for this study were drawn from an online survey experiment distributed to an internally-randomized sample of 1,520 U.S. residents registered as workers on Amazon.com's crowdsourcing platform, Mechanical Turk. Descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Demographic Characteristics	% of Sample (N=1520)
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	54.14
Female	45.86
<u>Age</u>	
18-34	67.7
35-59	29.28
60+	3.03
<u>Race</u>	
White (Non-Hispanic)	75.07
Black (Non-Hispanic)	7.57
Hispanic	5.26
Asian	9.01
American Indian	0.79
Other	2.3
<u>Education</u>	
Less than HS	0.99
HS diploma/GED	9.87
Some college	34.34
Associate's degree	9.21
Bachelor's degree	33.16
Master's/Prof/PhD	12.43

According to Table 1, the sample is slightly more male than female, fairly young (mean age: 32), and fairly educated. Approximately 45% of the sample has received a Bachelor's degree. The sample has a larger majority of non-Hispanic whites than the national average. However, with respect to race, age, gender, and education, the composition of the sample more closely matches the U.S. population than the university student samples traditionally used in survey experiments (Paolucci et al. 2010). It is also a larger and more diverse sample than the snowball samples typically obtained in interview studies.

A recent study comparing the results of three vignette experiments on a Mechanical Turk sample and a population-based sample shows that a Mechanical Turk sample provides estimates comparable to those provided by a population-based sample (Weinberg et al. 2014). According to Weinberg et al. (2014), this is especially the case when potentially consequential demographic differences are adjusted for in the statistical analyses, including age, gender, and race. Following Weinberg et al.'s recommendation, I include controls for respondent age, gender, race, and education in the statistical analyses shown in Tables 3 and 4.

3.2. Experimental Design

In this study, I employ a between-subjects experimental survey design in order to isolate the effect that signals of cultural taste have on person perception. The advantage of a survey experiment is that it moves beyond the discursive accounts of individuals documented in interview studies and probes for deeper forms of cultural bias that individuals may not be aware of or that they may suppress in interaction. An experimental method also allows the researcher to control for factors that may confound the effects of cultural taste, allowing the researcher to derive causal estimates regarding the independent effect that signals of cultural taste have on

person perception. In experimental work, this internal validity often comes at the cost of external validity. However, I mitigate this cost by drawing on a large and heterogeneous sample of U.S. residents.

In the survey experiment, each respondent was asked to review a portion of an online personal profile in which the music, sports, and food tastes listed as “favorites” (under the heading of “Interests”) varied randomly. Respondents were randomly assigned to a profile that listed one of six possible musical tastes, one of six possible sports tastes, and one of six possible food tastes. Of the six possible music preferences, two were highbrow, two were middlebrow, and two were lowbrow. This was also the case for the six possible sports preferences and food preferences. I derived these highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow preferences from the status rankings of taste shown in Figure 1 of Chapter Two. Based on this figure, I classify taste for classical music and opera, participation in sports like tennis and golf, and the consumption of gourmet, European dishes like coq au vin and filet mignon as highbrow. I classify taste for pop and rock music, mainstream sports like baseball and soccer, and foods like grilled chicken and spaghetti as middlebrow. I classify taste for heavy metal and country music, bowling and wrestling, and the consumption of casseroles and burgers as lowbrow.

Aside from the music, sports, and food preferences listed as “favorites,” each profile also included five small photos (none of the photos included the target’s face), a stereotypically white and male first and last name (“Jack Miller”), as well as information about the target’s ethnicity (“white”), gender (“male”), hometown (“Columbus, Ohio”), current location (“Chicago, Illinois”) and date of birth (“March 27, 1987”). An example of the experimental treatment is shown in Figure 1. This particular example is signaling uniformly highbrow tastes.

Figure 1: Experimental Treatment Example



Jack Miller

Lives in **Chicago, Illinois** * From **Columbus, Ohio**



Personal Info

Sex: **Male**

Ethnicity: **White**

Birthday: **March 27, 1987**

Interests

Favorite Music: **classical music**

Favorite Sport: **golf**

Favorite Food: **filet mignon**

All “personal” information, photos, names, and geographic information were held constant across each treatment so that only the signals of music, sports, and food preference varied. This 6x6x6 factorial design produced 216 possible treatments, or profiles with 216 different combinations of music, sports, and food tastes. For the purposes of analysis, I group the 216 taste combinations into seven categories based on the individual statuses of the combined tastes (see Table 2 for a breakdown of these categories).

In Table 2 and throughout the chapter, the term “Lowbrow Univore” refers to profiles with only traditionally lowbrow tastes, “Middlebrow Univore” refers to profiles with only traditionally middlebrow tastes, and “Highbrow Univore” refers to profiles with only

Table 2: Experimental Design

MUSIC	SPORTS	FOOD		
		Highbrow	Middlebrow	Lowbrow
Highbrow	Highbrow	Highbrow Univore <i>57</i>	Omnivore (Mid-High) <i>57</i>	Omnivore (Low-High) <i>53</i>
	Middlebrow	Omnivore (Mid-High) <i>52</i>	Omnivore (Mid-High) <i>61</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid-High) <i>63</i>
	Lowbrow	Omnivore (Low-High) <i>56</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid-High) <i>57</i>	Omnivore (Low-High) <i>57</i>
Middlebrow	Highbrow	Omnivore (Mid-High) <i>58</i>	Omnivore (Mid-High) <i>61</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid-High) <i>52</i>
	Middlebrow	Omnivore (Mid-High) <i>59</i>	Middlebrow Univore <i>56</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid) <i>57</i>
	Lowbrow	Omnivore (Low-Mid-High) <i>56</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid) <i>65</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid) <i>54</i>
Lowbrow	Highbrow	Omnivore (Low-High) <i>54</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid-High) <i>54</i>	Omnivore (Low-High) <i>54</i>
	Middlebrow	Omnivore (Low-Mid-High) <i>55</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid) <i>65</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid) <i>57</i>
	Lowbrow	Omnivore (Low-High) <i>47</i>	Omnivore (Low-Mid) <i>56</i>	Lowbrow Univore <i>57</i>

Note: Sample size in italics

traditionally highbrow tastes. Among those classified as omnivorous, “Low-Mid Omnivore” refers to profiles with a mixture of lowbrow and middlebrow tastes, “Low-High Omnivore” refers to profiles with a mixture of lowbrow and highbrow tastes, “Mid-High Omnivore” refers to profiles with a mixture of middlebrow and highbrow genres, and “Low-Mid-High Omnivore” refers to profiles with one lowbrow, one middlebrow, and one highbrow taste.

3.3. Survey Design

After reviewing their assigned profile, respondents completed a survey questionnaire in which they were asked to rate the person in the profile on a series of traits using a 5-point Likert-type scale (not at all...extremely). Five of the traits measured were competence-related (*capable, efficient, organized, skillful, intelligent*) and five were warmth-related (*good natured, sincere, warm, trustworthy, tolerant*). Mean ratings of competence and warmth were then developed based on these traits (Fiske et al. 2002; Cuddy et al. 2004).

Following the survey questions about competence and warmth outlined above, respondents were asked to identify the target's social class position (*poor, working class, lower-middle class, upper-middle class, upper class*). They were also asked a series of questions about their own demographic characteristics and were provided an optional space to comment on the survey. As a complement to my quantitative findings, these qualitative data proved illuminating.

4. Main Results

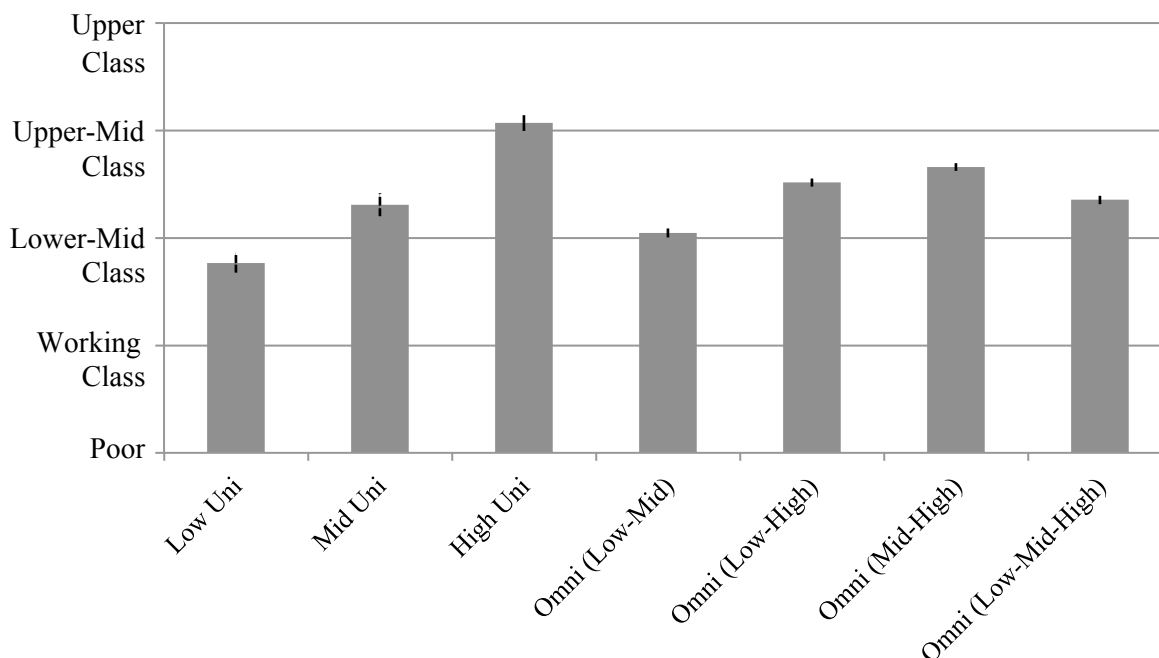
4.1. Perceptions of Class

To measure the effect that signals of cultural taste have on perceptions of social class, I examine the mean class position respondents assigned to individuals with differing patterns of music, sports, and food preferences (see Figure 2). According to Figure 2, average ratings of class tend to hover around the working to lower-middle and upper-middle class categories, which suggests that taste alone does not mark a person at the extremes, as poor or as upper class. However, signals of cultural taste still have a highly significant effect on perceptions of social class. For example, individuals with exclusively highbrow tastes are attributed an average position of upper-middle class while individuals with exclusively lowbrow tastes are attributed a

statistically significantly lower position between working class and lower-middle class.

Additionally, I find that the class position attributed to individuals with uniformly highbrow tastes exceeds that attributed to individuals with omnivorous tastes, regardless of the composition of the omnivores' tastes.

Figure 2: Mean Perceptions of Class



Note: Dashed lines represent standard errors. All mean values shown in this table are statistically significantly different from one another.

One college-educated respondent (Hispanic, male) offered a comment at the end of his survey that illustrates the association often made between highbrow tastes and the upper-middle class: “Opera and golf reek of middle- and upper-middle class activities. I’m in that class, I think, but would rather listen to Lil’ Wayne and watch basketball.” The college-educated may increasingly prefer diverse cultural content (Peterson and Kern 1996; Rossman and Peterson

2005) but even those who self-identify as omnivorous and upper-middle class still perceive class differences in cultural taste that equate highbrow culture with the upper-middle class.

Omnivorous tastes are not altogether disregarded by respondents. However, the composition of omnivorous tastes does matter. The following comment from a white, college-educated, female respondent illustrates how signals of both highbrow and lowbrow taste were weighed:

I will tell you that liking country music automatically made me feel as though this person was lower class and less successful. I find this interesting that I felt that. I never had really THOUGHT that through before now. The golf trait makes it more likely that they are in fact of a higher class. This person also clearly travels and is white and in his mid twenties. This automatically makes it more LIKELY that they do have some status or some economic success.

Omnivores with at least one highbrow preference are attributed a significantly higher class position than univores with middlebrow or lowbrow preferences, but the difference is small and their perceived class position, which lies between lower-middle class and upper-middle class, still does not match that of highbrow univores. Contrary to the claims of the cultural omnivore thesis, I find that omnivorousness has not supplanted highbrow exclusivity as the elite class signifier in the U.S. Instead, the effect of signals of taste on perceptions of class is cumulative: the higher the average status of one's tastes, the higher the class position one is attributed. Based on these findings, I conclude that cultural tastes are perceived as meaningful indicators of social class in the U.S. and that individuals with exclusively highbrow tastes are attributed a higher class position than individuals with omnivorous or traditionally lowbrow tastes. Of course, it is important to note that respondents are evaluating these cultural tastes in isolation of other class markers, like educational background, neighborhood context, etc. When additional class markers are present, the value of highbrow taste may diminish or change. Research shows that, in elite schools, the norm among elite students is to refrain conspicuously signaling their class

position to their peers by consuming diverse cultural content (Khan 2011). So, an individual with omnivorous cultural tastes may be evaluated more favorably than one with highbrow tastes if he or she can assert, via other signals like school or neighborhood context, that he or she has a high class status. It is likely that highbrow cultural signals are most rewarded in the absence of other signals, when an individual's class status is ambiguous or uncertain.

4.2. Perceptions of Competence

In Table 3, Model 1, I report findings for the effect that signals of cultural taste have on perceptions of competence. According to this model, individuals with uniformly highbrow tastes, highbrow-lowbrow omnivorous tastes, or highbrow-middlebrow omnivorous tastes are the only individuals attributed statistically significantly more competence than individuals with uniformly lowbrow tastes. For example, signaling exclusively highbrow versus exclusively lowbrow tastes is associated with a 0.61-point increase in one's perceived competence. In their evaluations of competence, respondents distinguish not between omnivores and univores but between people with and without at least one highbrow taste. Among omnivores, the presence of one highbrow preference often trumps the presence of any lowbrow preferences. Even the most cautious respondents felt they could discern personality traits from the presence or absence of highbrow taste. As one white, college-educated female respondent commented: "I would need LOTS more information before I could depart from median values! All I could say for sure was that his musical tastes are sophisticated enough to include jazz."

It should be noted, however, that while both highbrow univores and highbrow omnivores were rated highly, respondents attributed significantly more competence to highbrow univores

Table 3: OLS Regression Coefficients Measuring the Effect of Cultural Tastes on Perceptions of Competence and Warmth, Mediated by Perceptions of Class

VARIABLES	Competence			Warmth		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<u>Target Characteristics</u>						
(Lowbrow Univore=0)						
Middlebrow Univore	0.157 (0.123)	0.156 (0.159)	-0.025 (0.115)	0.110 (0.127)	0.168 (0.164)	0.051 (0.161)
Highbrow Univore	0.607*** (0.122)	0.679*** (0.164)	0.170 (0.117)	0.153 (0.126)	0.421* (0.169)	0.142 (0.168)
Omnivore (Low-Mid)	0.014 (0.093)	0.048 (0.118)	-0.077 (0.087)	0.109 (0.097)	0.217 (0.122)	0.157 (0.119)
Omnivore (Low-High)	0.243** (0.094)	0.257* (0.119)	-0.007 (0.089)	0.181 (0.097)	0.293* (0.123)	0.128 (0.122)
Omnivore (Mid-High)	0.282** (0.093)	0.331** (0.118)	-0.018 (0.089)	0.179 (0.097)	0.319** (0.121)	0.129 (0.121)
Omnivore (Low-Mid-High)	0.116 (0.094)	0.106 (0.119)	-0.080 (0.088)	0.170 (0.097)	0.250* (0.122)	0.122 (0.120)
Perceived Class			0.339*** (0.022)			0.211*** (0.024)
<u>Respondent Characteristics</u>						
BA or greater ($\geq$ BA)	-0.064 (0.034)	-0.000 (0.181)	-0.081** (0.031)	-0.007 (0.035)	0.299 (0.187)	0.273 (0.182)
White	-0.009 (0.039)	-0.011 (0.039)	0.019 (0.036)	0.073 (0.040)	0.070 (0.040)	0.088* (0.039)
Age	0.021 (0.032)	0.022 (0.032)	0.009 (0.030)	0.002 (0.033)	0.003 (0.033)	-0.004 (0.032)
Female	0.101** (0.034)	0.102** (0.034)	0.061 (0.032)	0.032 (0.035)	0.036 (0.035)	0.011 (0.034)
<u>Target Taste X Resp. Education</u>						
Middlebrow Uni $X \geq$ BA		-0.008 (0.253)			-0.188 (0.261)	-0.178 (0.255)
Highbrow Uni $X \geq$ BA		-0.159 (0.250)			-0.618* (0.258)	-0.600* (0.252)
Omni (Low-Mid) $X \geq$ BA		-0.089 (0.194)			-0.304 (0.200)	-0.294 (0.195)
Omni (Low-High) $X \geq$ BA		-0.044 (0.195)			-0.310 (0.201)	-0.287 (0.197)
Omni (Mid-High) $X \geq$ BA		-0.126 (0.194)			-0.379 (0.201)	-0.367 (0.196)
Omni (Low-Mid-High) $X \geq$ BA		0.004 (0.194)			-0.243 (0.201)	-0.226 (0.196)
Constant	2.938*** (0.103)	2.914*** (0.121)	2.047*** (0.113)	2.995*** (0.107)	2.882*** (0.125)	2.331*** (0.137)
Observations	1,520	1,520	1,520	1,520	1,520	1,520
R-squared	0.050	0.051	0.176	0.007	0.012	0.060

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

than to omnivores with highbrow tastes. The coefficient reported for highbrow univores in Model 1 is more than twice the value of the coefficients for any highbrow omnivores. Moreover, while the average level of competence attributed to omnivores with highbrow tastes is statistically significantly higher than that attributed to lowbrow univores, I find, in analyses not shown, that it does not differ significantly from the level of competence attributed to middlebrow univores. Highbrow univores are singular in the high level of competence they are attributed, lending support to Bourdieu's theory of a cultural hierarchy.

In Model 2, I explore whether the effect of signals of cultural taste on perceptions of competence varies according to the educational background of respondents (whether or not they have at least a Bachelor's degree). I find that education has no statistically significant moderating effect. On average, all respondents attribute the highest levels of competence to those with exclusively highbrow tastes, regardless of their educational background.

To what extent are the cultural taste effects observed in Model 1 mediated by perceptions of social class? In Model 3 of Table 3, I include perceptions of class as a predictor to estimate the extent to which perceptions of class mediate the effect of signals of cultural taste on perceptions of competence. I find that all previously statistically significant cultural taste coefficients diminish in size and lose their statistical significance when I adjust for perceptions of social class. I conclude that it is by virtue of their perceived ties to the upper-middle class that highbrow univores and highbrow omnivores are attributed the greatest levels of competence. Yet, it is important to note that differences in perceived class do not always correspond with differences in perceived competence. For example, respondents perceive individuals with exclusively middlebrow tastes as significantly higher class than individuals with exclusively lowbrow tastes but they do not perceive them as significantly more competent. In their

evaluations of competence, respondents appear to distinguish mainly between those with and without at least one highbrow preference.

4.4. Perceptions of Warmth

As we would expect based on the social psychological literature (Fiske et al. 2002), the pattern I observe in respondents' evaluations of competence above does not extend to their evaluations of warmth. In Table 3, Model 4, I find that signals of cultural taste have no significant main effect on respondents' evaluations of whom to like and trust. This was ever-present in the comments respondents posed at the end of their surveys as well. It was clear from the comments that respondents aspired to be generous and egalitarian in their evaluations—evidence of the “laissez-faire” tolerance Lamont (1992) observed in her interviews. Yet, respondents simultaneously invoked notions of cultural hierarchy that implicitly or explicitly undermined consumers of lowbrow culture, particularly with regards to their intelligence—evidence of the cultural hierarchy theorized by Bourdieu (1984). For example, after reviewing a profile that signaled a taste for heavy metal music, a white, male, college-educated respondent commented: “[Jack] could be a cool guy. He could be one of those genuine, good-hearted people that was just misguided into liking metal. It happens.” Another respondent, also white, college-educated and male, wrote at the end of his survey:

I don't think heavy metal, nor tuna casserole, is problematic. However, profiles are like resumes and one should be tactical about them. A person who does not know this, and puts such items as tuna casserole on a profile is ignorant of how things work and thus less likely to be successful in an age where employers check these things out.

Like the above respondent, not one survey-taker openly expressed personal dislike or disdain for consumers of lowbrow culture, and this sentiment translated into generally egalitarian

ratings of warmth. Where notions of a cultural hierarchy were invoked, both in respondents' comments and in their survey responses, they were invoked around questions of class and competence. Often, a person with lowbrow tastes was described by respondents as likable but as lacking in a certain competence or know-how—in, as the above respondent put it, the kind of traits an employer would look for in a résumé.

This tolerance for consumers of lowbrow culture was particularly prevalent among college educated respondents. In fact, I find that higher educated respondents perceived highbrow univores as significantly less likable than lowbrow univores. In model 5 of Table 3, I estimate the moderating effect of educational background on perceptions of warmth. I find that, at statistically significant levels, respondents with at least a Bachelor's degree attribute significantly *lower* levels of warmth to highbrow univores than to lowbrow univores. All other interaction terms are non-significant, confirming that Americans adopt a fairly laissez-faire attitude towards all other displays of cultural preference. Thus, while the main effect of exclusively highbrow taste on perceptions of warmth was found to be non-significant in Model 4, this is only because the higher levels of warmth attributed to highbrow univores by lower educated respondents counteract the lower levels of warmth attributed by higher educated respondents. Among educational elites, signals of exclusively highbrow taste carry a social reward as well as a social penalty.

In Model 6 of Table 3, I include perceptions of class as a predictor to estimate the extent to which perceptions of class mediate the cultural effects observed in Model 5. I find that, among non-college-educated respondents, perceptions of class account for the positive effect of signals of exclusively highbrow taste on ratings of warmth. In other words, among lower educated respondents, the higher perceived class of highbrow univores acts as a “halo,” signaling

both high competence and high warmth. I also find the direct effect of perceptions of class on perceptions of warmth to be statistically significant and positive. This finding runs contrary to the inverse, U-shaped relationship social psychologists typically observe between social class and perceived warmth (Fiske et al. 2002). Yet, this is likely because respondents still perceive highbrow univores as belonging to a part of the middle class—the class category typically attributed the greatest levels of warmth. According to Fiske et al. (2002), ratings of warmth decline most at the class extremes—among the rich and poor—but I do not find that respondents associate cultural tastes with extremely wealthy or impoverished class positions.

Interestingly, in Model 6 of Table 3, the interaction term estimating the effect that signals of exclusively highbrow taste have among college-educated respondents remains statistically significant, meaning the lower levels of warmth college-educated respondents attribute to highbrow univores cannot be explained by perceptions of class. It is exclusively highbrow taste in and of itself, independent of its class association, which college-educated respondents deem less likable. A likely explanation is that the high competence highbrow univores are believed to possess, and the rewards they are likely to receive because of it, makes them a competitive threat to the status and resources of the college-educated. Research shows that the more competitive a group is perceived to be, the less warmth they are often attributed (Fiske et al. 2002).

Alternatively, studies show that the norm among many elites is to tolerate and consume diverse cultural content (Khan 2011; Peterson and Kern 1996). It may be that elite respondents dislike highbrow univores because their cultural exclusivity violates this elite norm.

4.5. Cultural Hierarchy *and* a Cultural Laissez-Faire?

I have demonstrated that a class-based cultural hierarchy exists in the U.S.—that signals of highbrow taste, in particular, have a positive effect on impression formation, mediated by perceptions of social class. Yet, I have also shown that this effect only surfaces in certain contexts: namely, when questions of competence are considered more so than questions of warmth. Around questions of warmth, I observe no statistically significant main effects for signals of cultural taste.

Together, these findings lend partial support to both theories of cultural hierarchy and a cultural laissez-faire in the U.S. They suggest that in contexts where perceptions of warmth are weighed more heavily than perceptions of competence—for example, when meeting a stranger or making friends—signals of cultural taste should have little average effect on how people evaluate and, therefore, treat one another. Of course, given that lower educated respondents attribute statistically significantly more warmth to highbrow univores than higher educated respondents, highbrow univores may receive more admiration and assistance in lower educated than in higher educated social circles. On the other hand, in contexts, like the classroom and labor market, where perceptions of competence are weighed more heavily than perceptions of warmth, highbrow univores are likely to occupy an advantaged social position in all social circles.

Like high status people everywhere (Cuddy et al. 2008), highbrow univores are systematically perceived as more competent than warm. They may not always be the most liked, but they are consistently the most respected, evidence that highbrow culture acts as a kind of “capital” in the U.S. Because their perceived competence is greater than their perceived warmth, the envy or “begrudging admiration” (Cuddy et al. 2007) highbrow univores elicit may, in some

cases, limit the kinds of friends they make, which may explain why individuals with highbrow cultural tastes are found to have smaller and more exclusive social networks than individuals with more popular cultural tastes (Lizardo 2006a). As Lizardo (2006a) writes, highbrow tastes build “fences,” not “bridges.”

Yet, the work of Cuddy et al. (2007) suggests that, due to their widely perceived intelligence and ability, highbrow univores are likely to encounter high levels of cooperation from others and access to important material and symbolic rewards. According to Cuddy et al. (2007), these experiences of “passive facilitation” will be most prevalent in task-oriented settings, where competence is valued more heavily than warmth. This may explain why individuals with highbrow cultural tastes are found to experience better outcomes in the classroom than those without. Studies show that participation in high status cultural activities is associated with better grades, better teaching evaluations, and a higher likelihood of being accepted into college (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; Bourdieu 1973; DiMaggio 1982a; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). That said, if highbrow univores are systematically perceived as more competent than their peers, they are likely to experience additional advantages beyond the realm of the classroom, as they graduate and compete for jobs, promotions, and leadership positions.

4.6. Music, Sports, and Food: A Comparison

In matters of class and competence, I find that respondents are far more discerning in their judgments of taste than in matters of warmth. Yet, estimates of the average effect that signals of music, sports, and food preferences have on person perception presuppose that these preferences are evaluated in the same way. In reality, categories of taste like music, sports, and

food constitute different cultural domains and it is plausible that different hierarchies operate within these domains.

For this reason, I will now explore the independent effect that music, sports, and food preferences have on perceptions of class, competence, and warmth. Results from this analysis are shown in Table 4. In Table 4, I estimate the effect that highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow categories of preference have in each domain, controlling for respondent age, gender, and race. In each domain, I find that most categories of preference have a significant effect on attributions of social class. However, the coefficient for highbrow music preferences, which include classical and opera music, is 1.5 to 2 times as large as the coefficient for highbrow sports and food preferences. Respondents perceive larger class differences in taste for music than in taste for sports or food. In the case of food, no significant differences are observed in the ratings of lowbrow or middlebrow preferences.

In model 2 of Table 4, I find that the effect of these cultural signals on perceptions of competence is not gradational but largely dichotomous, just as I found in my first analysis. According to Table 4, the major distinction respondents make in their evaluations of competence is between highbrows and non-highbrows. No distinctions are made between people with lowbrow and middlebrow preferences. Once again, the coefficient for highbrow music preferences is more than twice that of sports and food preferences. Respondents are more discerning in their judgments of people's musical tastes than in their judgments of people's sports and food tastes. This musical taste effect extends to perceptions of warmth, where, in model 3 of Table 4, signals of highbrow music preference have a small but significant positive effect on perceptions of warmth.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients Measuring the Effect of Status Categories of Taste on Attributions of Class, Competence, and Warmth, by Cultural Domain

VARIABLES	Class (Odds Ratio) (1)	Competence (OLS) (2)	Warmth (OLS) (3)
<u>Target Music Taste</u> (Lowbrow Music=0)			
Middlebrow Music	1.806*** (0.220)	0.065 (0.040)	0.040 (0.042)
Highbrow Music	5.748*** (0.761)	0.327*** (0.041)	0.165*** (0.042)
<u>Target Sports Taste</u> (Lowbrow Sports=0)			
Middlebrow Sports	1.554*** (0.191)	0.054 (0.040)	0.050 (0.042)
Highbrow Sports	2.938*** (0.375)	0.118** (0.041)	0.013 (0.042)
<u>Target Food Taste</u> (Lowbrow Food=0)			
Middlebrow Food	1.111 (0.134)	0.010 (0.040)	-0.034 (0.042)
Highbrow Food	2.567*** (0.332)	0.140*** (0.041)	-0.045 (0.042)
<u>Respondent Characteristics</u>			
BA or greater	1.130 (0.116)	-0.062 (0.033)	-0.004 (0.035)
Age	0.783* (0.094)	-0.002 (0.039)	0.077 (0.040)
Female	1.108 (0.108)	0.017 (0.032)	0.000 (0.033)
White	1.453*** (0.151)	0.099** (0.034)	0.031 (0.035)
Constant	...	2.872*** (0.071)	3.080*** (0.074)
Observations	1,520	1,520	1,520
R-squared		0.068	0.016

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Together, these findings remind us that, in evaluating the tastes of others, Americans make distinctions not simply between categories of high and low culture but between cultural domains. Respondents perceive hierarchies of taste in each domain—music, sports, and food—but the hierarchy they perceive in taste for music is far stronger and more stable. That said, cultural hierarchy may simply look different in cultural domains like sports and food. For example, in the domain of food, I find that preferring a low status cheeseburger to a high status filet mignon has a relatively small effect on how one is perceived. Yet, a growing number of researchers find that it is not solely the type or status of the culture one consumes but the way one consumes it that often distinguishes elites from non-elites (Holt 1997; Prieur and Savage 2013). The study presented here establishes the hierarchies U.S. residents perceive among people who consume high versus low status culture across cultural domains, but more research is needed to uncover the hierarchies of taste U.S. residents perceive *within* these categories of high and low culture. This additional research may show that, in the domain of food, it is not whether one consumes a cheeseburger but where and how one consumes that cheeseburger—whether it well-done or medium-rare, ordered at McDonald’s or a gourmet restaurant—that matters most.

5. Robustness Check: A Closer Look at Music

The design of the above study does not allow me to test for the effect of exclusive versus omnivorous tastes in each cultural domain. For this reason, and because theories of cultural hierarchy and cultural omnivorousness in the U.S. are derived mainly from observations of one cultural domain in particular—music—I conducted an additional study of 506 U.S. residents on Mechanical Turk to test the robustness of my previous findings. In this study, I examine how signals of musical taste alone shape perceptions of class, competence, and warmth. The design

Figure 3: Experimental Treatment Example



Jack Miller

Lives in **Chicago, Illinois** * From **Columbus, Ohio**

Personal Info

Sex: **Male**

Ethnicity: **White**

Birthday: **March 27, 1987**

Interests

Favorite Music:

Classical, Opera, and Jazz

of this study was similar to the design of the previous study. Respondents were randomly assigned to one experimental treatment—a treatment similar to the one shown in Figure 1. However, the categories of “Favorite Sport” and “Favorite Food” were omitted and, instead, the treatment listed three different musical genres under the heading of “Favorite Music.” An example of this treatment can be found in Figure 3. In this example, the treatment is signaling exclusively highbrow music taste.

A reduced number of 50 combinations of musical taste were generated from the same two highbrow, two middlebrow, and two lowbrow musical genres used in the previous study, producing the same six treatments: lowbrow univore, middlebrow univore, highbrow univore, lowbrow-middlebrow omnivore, lowbrow-highbrow omnivore, and middlebrow-highbrow omnivore. To signal exclusivity, which required three musical genres of the same status, I added a third highbrow (jazz), middlebrow (electronic), or lowbrow (bluegrass) genre to the univore

treatments. The order in which the musical genres were listed was randomized and counterbalanced. The findings from this experiment are reported in Table 5. Due to the smaller size of the sample, statistical significance is measured at the level of $p < 0.10$.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients Measuring the Effect of Musical Tastes on Perceptions of Class, Competence, and Warmth

VARIABLES	Class (Odds Ratio) (1)	Competence (OLS) (2)	Warmth (OLS) (3)
<u>Target Music Tastes</u>			
(Lowbrow Univore=0)			
Middlebrow Univore	1.72 (0.66)	0.07 (0.14)	0.04 (0.15)
Highbrow Univore	4.47*** (1.83)	0.32** (0.14)	0.20 (0.15)
Omnivore (Low-Mid)	0.82 (0.27)	0.12 (0.12)	-0.02 (0.12)
Omnivore (Low-High)	1.19 (0.38)	0.23* (0.12)	0.11 (0.12)
Omnivore (Mid-High)	1.33 (0.44)	0.25** (0.12)	0.11 (0.13)
Omnivore (Low-Mid-High)	1.57 (0.59)	0.24* (0.14)	0.22 (0.14)
<u>Respondent Characteristics</u>			
BA or greater	0.93 (0.16)	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.07)
White	0.75 (0.16)	0.22*** (0.07)	0.25*** (0.08)
Age	1.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Female	1.10 (0.19)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.07)
Constant	...	3.04*** (0.16)	3.10*** (0.17)
Observations	506	506	506
R-squared		0.04	0.03

Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

In model 1 of Table 5, I estimate the effect of signals of exclusive and omnivorous musical taste on perceptions of social class. Once again, I find that respondents perceive the target with exclusively highbrow musical tastes as statistically significantly higher class than the target with exclusively lowbrow musical tastes as well as the targets with middlebrow and omnivorous musical tastes. The size of these differences in perceived class across treatments, however, are smaller than in the previous study and respondents do not perceive the target with omnivorous musical tastes as statistically significantly higher class than the target with exclusively lowbrow tastes.

In model 2, I estimate the effect of these treatments on perceptions of competence. As in the previous study, I find that respondents attribute statistically significantly higher levels of competence to highbrow univores as well as omnivores with at least one highbrow preference—evidence that, around questions of competence, U.S. residents distinguish not between omnivores and univores but between those with and without highbrow tastes. Around questions of warmth, I find, once again, that the effects of taste grow weak. In model 3, I observe no statistically significant differences in the levels of warmth attributed to targets, regardless of their cultural tastes. I conclude that the patterns of class perception and impression formation I observed in my previous study of music, sports, and food hold regardless of whether the signals of taste are being manipulated across cultural domains or within the domain of music.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

A longstanding theory in the sociological literature is that our cultural preferences do more than reflect our position in the social order; they influence it as well. According to Bourdieu (1984; 1986), individuals subscribe to class-based notions of cultural hierarchy that

privilege the highbrow tastes of elites over the lowbrow tastes of non-elites. This theory of a cultural hierarchy, however, was born out of observations of Western Europe. Its relevance to the U.S. has been hotly debated. On the one hand, a rich array of survey-based studies show that highbrow tastes are correlated with positive status attainment outcomes in the U.S. (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; DiMaggio 1982a; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). Many infer from these studies that highbrow culture constitutes a socially valued form of “capital” in the U.S. Other researchers, however, challenge such claims. Among these critics, some posit that it is increasingly cultural omnivorousness, rather than highbrow exclusivity, that Americans perceive as elite and that they value most (Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson 1997; Peterson 2005). Others contend that cultural hierarchy in the U.S. is weak, that a culture of laissez-faire tolerance predominates instead (Halle 1993; Lamont 1992).

To test these competing theories surrounding the social psychology of taste and provide causal estimates of the effect that signals of cultural taste have on person perception, I conducted an online survey-experimental study of 1,520 U.S. residents measuring the effect that signals of music, sports, and food preferences have on perceptions of class, competence, and warmth. My analyses reveal that signals of cultural taste do matter. In a country where omnivorousness is widespread and an ideology of egalitarianism predominates, people make social judgments on the basis of cultural taste— judgments patterned by perceptions of social class. U.S. respondents attribute a higher class position and greater competence to consumers of highbrow culture, particularly highbrow univores. In their assessments of warmth, however, the average effects of taste grow weak.

Together, these findings reconcile theories of cultural hierarchy and a cultural laissez-faire in the U.S. They suggest that in contexts where evaluations of warmth matter most—for

example, when meeting strangers or making friends—Americans will express a high degree of tolerance and flexibility towards individuals with varying combinations of high and low status cultural tastes, to the point, in the case of higher educated respondents, of penalizing highbrow univores for their exclusivity. Meanwhile, in competitive, task-oriented contexts where evaluations of competence are weighed more heavily—for example, in college admissions, the labor market, or workplace—Americans are likely to favor and reward those with highbrow tastes, particularly highbrow univores. They are also willing to forgive displays of lowbrow taste if they are made in the presence of displays of highbrow taste. Further research could test these predictions by examining how people with differing cultural tastes are evaluated and treated in social contexts where competence and warmth are more or less salient.

The discrepancy I observe in how signals of taste shape evaluations of competence versus warmth may help to explain why Lamont (1992) finds in her own study that upper-middle American interviewees are so tolerant towards those with lower status tastes. Many of Lamont's respondents expressed a willingness to befriend and associate with consumers of lowbrow and middlebrow culture. Lamont (1992) concludes that the majority of upper-middle class Americans are "more likely to laugh off their friends' poor taste, seeing it as a superficial matter irrelevant to their friendship, and affirming that other considerations, particularly moral ones, are more crucial in the selection of friends." These conclusions align with the egalitarian comments made by respondents in my own study and the penalty higher educated respondents appear to apply to highbrow univores in their ratings of warmth.

Yet, Lamont's findings do not capture the effect that signals of cultural taste have on perceptions of competence. Holt suggests that the unwillingness of the majority of Lamont's respondents to openly judge others on the basis of cultural taste may be attributable to a social

norm of egalitarianism in the U.S. (Holt 1997). However, it may also be that the level of cultural tolerance or intolerance American respondents display varies according to the questions we, as social scientists, ask. Lamont's respondents may have expressed tolerance towards friends and acquaintances with varying cultural tastes, yet had they been asked to select one of their highbrow, middlebrow, or lowbrow peers for a competitive job or a team project—essentially, had they been asked to judge competence and not warmth—the results of this study suggest that a preference for consumers of highbrow culture would have emerged.

Moreover, I propose that the strength and stability of the cultural hierarchies Americans invoke in their social judgments vary across cultural domains. Respondents in this study were far more likely to form impressions of others on the basis of their musical preferences than on the basis of their sports or food preferences, lending support to Bourdieu's (1984) claim that "Nothing more clearly affirms ones 'class,' nothing more infallibly classifies, than taste in music." Despite technological change, the increasing availability of diverse music to consumers, and Rossman and Peterson's (2015) finding that patterns of musical taste have grown increasingly diffuse, the value of musical taste as a marker of class and status has persevered. In search of cultural "distinction" in the U.S., sociologists were right to look to music. Music remains a popular tool for distinguishing elites from non-elites, the competent from the incompetent, the trustworthy from the insincere.

Yet, what I find to be the unique classificatory power of music in this study should serve as a reminder to researchers that the study of musical taste is not entirely generalizable to other cultural domains. The cultural hierarchies we uncover in studying judgments of taste are contingent not simply upon the questions of competence or warmth we ask but also upon the

cultural domains we observe. For this reason, it is critical that sociologists look beyond the domain of music for a more comprehensive understanding of taste and its social significance in the U.S.

END NOTES

1. Throughout this chapter, I use the terms “highbrow,” “high,” and “high status” culture interchangeably. Likewise, I use the terms “lowbrow,” “low,” and “low status” culture interchangeably.

CHAPTER FOUR

Class Mobility or Class Privilege?: What Americans Value Most in a Job Applicant

1. Introduction

In line with Bourdieu's highly influential theory of cultural hierarchy and class reproduction, Chapter Three reveals that U.S. residents consistently attribute a higher class position and greater levels of competence to consumers of traditionally highbrow culture, particularly highbrow univores. Consequently, highbrow univores are likely to encounter high levels of cooperation from others and access to important material and symbolic rewards, generating an upper-middle class bias in task-oriented contexts like the labor market. In the context of hiring, for example, we would expect job applicants with highbrow cultural markers to receive more positive hiring evaluations and better hiring outcomes than those without.

This expectation of an upper-middle class bias in hiring, however, flies in the face of the United States' widely espoused value of class egalitarianism and mobility. A common U.S. narrative well documented by social scientists is that those who experience, and attempt to overcome, a disadvantaged parental economic background are attributed exceptional moral worth compared to those who do not (McNamee and Miller 2004; Wuthnow 2006). Experimental research shows that a story of upward mobility may even win American political candidates votes (Sadin 2012). If this valuation of upward mobility extends to the context of hiring, we would expect hiring decision-makers to favor working-class job seekers if they perceive them to be upwardly mobile. And so, class bias exists but it rewards class mobility rather than class privilege.

Which of these models of class reproduction and class mobility best characterizes hiring attitudes in the U.S.? For a preliminary test of the two models, I turn to a survey experimental study of hiring attitudes among 592 U.S. residents. This preliminary study informs the larger scale experimental work I pursue in Chapters Five and Six.

First, I explore how two signals of class origin—cultural taste and parental economic background—shape perceptions of a job applicant’s social class. I then examine how these perceptions of class shape perceptions of the applicant’s competence, warmth and, ultimately, their employability. I find that, when class is signaled through cultural taste, respondents favor job applicants they perceive to be higher class, largely because they perceive them as more competent. However, when class is signaled through parental economic background alone or in combination with cultural taste, respondents rate the employability of job applicants equally—a reflection of the greater competence they attribute to both the upper class and the upwardly mobile.

I conclude that class is a consequential lens through which people in the U.S. evaluate job applicants. Whether signals of class origin shape perceptions of employability, however, depends largely on the class information applicants provide. While implicit class information like cultural taste triggers a bias in favor of the class-privileged, explicit class information like parental economic background triggers displays of class egalitarianism, leveling the playing field between applicants of equal qualification but unequal class origin. The implications of these findings for real-world hiring decisions are twofold. First, they suggest that exclusion on the basis of culture may be a key mechanism of social class discrimination in hiring. Second, they suggest that the cultural advantages of higher class applicants are not insuperable, as they fade when the inherited economic advantages of higher class applicants are made explicit.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Class Reproduction Model

A central tenet of Bourdieu's (1973; 1984; 1990) model of class reproduction is that individuals make class attributions on the basis of cultural participation and taste that systematically bias the social worth they assign to others. More specifically, individuals interpret as "merit" the "high status" cultural practices and tastes cultivated in upper class families while penalizing the "low status" cultural practices and tastes cultivated in lower class families. Consequently, taste for and participation in the high status culture of elites, including classical music, fine art, and theater, constitutes a form of "cultural capital" from which elites derive further legitimacy and social rewards (Bourdieu 1990). The heritability of cultural capital in families is often invisible to individuals and institutions (Bourdieu 1990). Thus, while social norms prohibit the differential distribution of rewards on the basis of ascribed class origin, displays of cultural capital are perceived as a product of achievement rather than ascription and are rewarded or penalized as such (Swartz 1977).

Scholars who have applied Bourdieu's model to the case of the United States find that high status cultural practices and tastes are more likely to be cultivated among children raised in middle and upper class families (Bogt et al. 2011; Mohr and DiMaggio 1995; van Eijck 1997). They also have a significant statistical effect on educational outcomes. According to DiMaggio (1982) and Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997), typically high status cultural practices and tastes are positively related to educational attainment, corresponding with better grades and a greater likelihood of attending and completing college. The major drawback of this literature, however, is that it relies largely on statistical correlations (Kingston 2001). Therefore, we cannot be sure that class-based cultural practices and tastes are socially consequential in and of themselves, as

their relationship to status attainment may be spurious. Furthermore, it is up for debate whether their effects extend to hiring attitudes.

In her study of private security firms in Toronto, Erickson (1996) contends that class-based cultural knowledge is not the major source of distinction or exclusion in workplace interactions. Meanwhile, at elite professional firms, Rivera (2011; 2012) finds that employers often engage in a process of “cultural matching” that likely biases their hiring decisions in favor of upper-middle class job applicants. Additionally, qualitative studies of racial discrimination in the U.S. note that employers take cultural signals of class, including speech and dress, into account when assessing job applicants (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991). Employers report that an applicant’s cultural traits convey the economic resources to which he or she has access and employers infer levels of competence and trustworthiness based on that information (Moss and Tilly 2001).

2.2. The Class Mobility Model

While past research suggests that Americans tend to favor those with the cultural markers of a privileged class background, scholars also find that it is common in U.S. popular discourse to celebrate those with a disadvantaged parental economic background who achieve in spite of it. The United States has a long and unique history of attributing exceptional value and virtue to the class-mobile, or “self-made,” man (Wuthnow 2006). According to McNamee and Miller (2004), it is commonly believed that “You may not be held responsible for where you start out in life, but you are responsible for where you end up. If you are truly meritorious, you will overcome any obstacle and succeed.” As evidenced by the popularity of Horatio Alger’s “rags to riches” narratives, stories of self-made men have always had great appeal in the United States

(McNamee and Miller 2004). Often, these narratives attribute greater ability and merit to the upwardly mobile and suggest that Americans will do the same when evaluating upwardly mobile job seekers. Psychological research indicates that, to the extent that upward mobility raises the status of a job seeker, it should raise their perceived competence (Fiske et al 2002).

Alternatively, Sadin (2012) finds that U.S. voters are more likely to favor a presidential candidate who signals working class roots over a candidate with a more privileged class origin not because they find the candidate to be more competent but because they perceive him as more likable and trustworthy. Signals of a disadvantaged family background positively affect presidential votes because Americans attribute more warmth and empathy to candidates they perceive to be upwardly mobile.

Whether perceptions of upward mobility will in turn positively influence perceptions of a person's employability is the question. Theorists of class reproduction point out that signals of a lower class origin could make an applicant seem less appealing and more risky to hiring decision-makers. According to Bourdieu (1984), the upwardly mobile tend to be penalized for "posing" as middle or upper class and some studies suggest that "status incongruity" can foster confusion and discontent in social interaction (Putten, 2001; Sennett and Cobb 1972).

2.3. Psychological Mechanisms

From the literature outlined above emerge two models of how signals of class origin may influence the evaluation of U.S. job applicants: a class reproduction model and a class mobility model. I propose that *competence* and *warmth* best characterize the psychological mechanisms that distinguish these two models. Whereas theorists of class reproduction posit that applicants with the cultural markers of class privilege will be favored because they are attributed greater

intellect and merit—traits related to the concept of competence—the literature on class mobility posits that applicants who signal a disadvantaged parental economic background will be favored because they are attributed greater likability and moral virtue—traits related to the concept of warmth.

As previously outlined in Chapter Two, *competence* refers to a series of traits (including intelligence, efficiency, organization, and skillfulness) that reflect one's ability to carry out intended goals (Fiske et al. 2002). Biased evaluations of competence are often a key mechanism through which employment discrimination occurs (Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy et al. 2008; Moss and Tilly 2001). It can be difficult to evaluate unobservable traits like competence based solely on a person's employment and educational history, so employers will often rely on heuristics, such as race- and class-based stereotypes, to discern such traits among job applicants.

Warmth refers to a series of traits (including sincerity, approachability, and trustworthiness) that reflect one's likability and intentions (Fiske et al. 2002). Ethnographic research suggests that some employers seek out workers they connect with personally and perceive to be likable, workers whose personalities they see as trustworthy and well suited for their firm (Rivera 2011; 2012). Often, notions of likability are intertwined with notions of class and culture. At elite firms, the job candidates perceived as more likable are often the candidates with elite cultural traits and backgrounds (Rivera 2012).

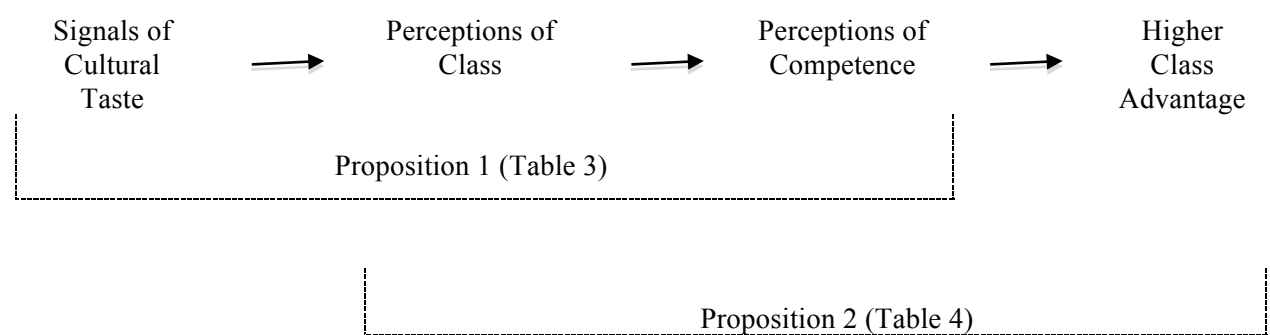
2.4. Two Theoretical Models

The models of class reproduction and class mobility I test in this chapter are formalized in Figure 1. These models are distinguished by (1) the class signals they theorize as socially meaningful, (2) the psychological mechanisms they propose and (3) the outcomes they predict.

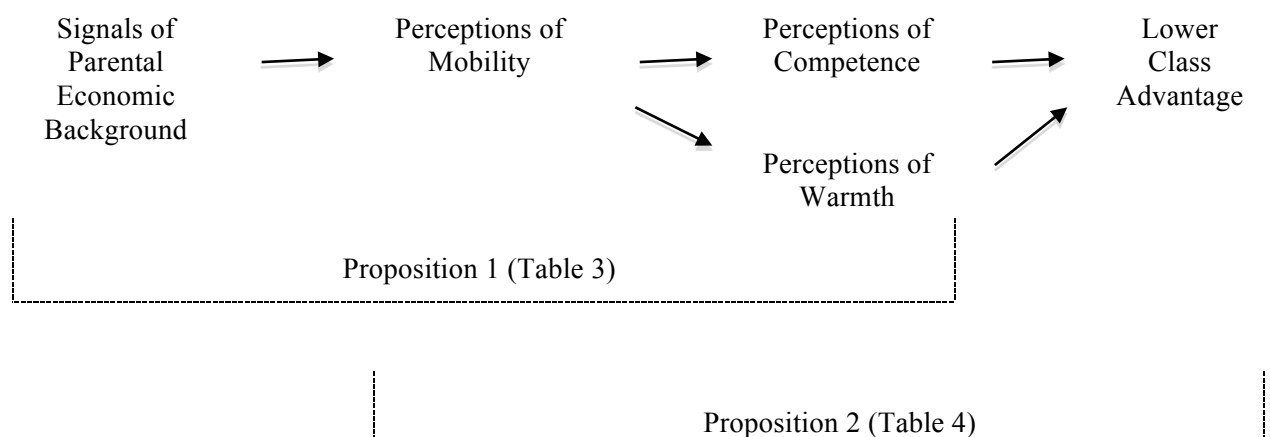
In the “Class Reproduction” model, it is hypothesized that signals of cultural taste affect hiring evaluations because Americans attribute greater competence to those they perceive to be higher class, advantaging those with privileged class origins. In the “Class Mobility” model, it is hypothesized that signals of parental economic background affect hiring evaluations via two

Figure 1: Theoretical Models

Class Reproduction Hypothesis



Class Mobility Hypothesis



potential pathways: (1) because Americans attribute greater competence to those they perceive to be upwardly mobile, advantaging those with lower class origins, or (2) because Americans attribute greater warmth to those they perceive to be upwardly mobile, advantaging those with

lower class origins. In Figure 1, I break these models down into two propositions, each of which I will test in this chapter. An analysis of the first proposition will be presented in Table 3 and an analysis of the second proposition will be presented in Table 4.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Data

The data for this study were drawn from an online experimental survey distributed to an internally-randomized internet sample of U.S. residents registered as “workers” on Amazon.com’s crowdsourcing website, Mechanical Turk. I employ an experimental survey design in this study in order to isolate the effect of class signals on hiring evaluations.

The survey was fielded in July 2012 and 635 responses were collected. Nine respondents were excluded from analysis for having participated in a previous on-line pre-test of the survey and 34 respondents were excluded for poor response quality¹. This analysis draws on the resulting internally randomized sample of 592 respondents. Respondents in this sample are generally young and well educated. Over 80% of respondents have had at least some college education, approximately 50% are women, and their average age is 27. Approximately 35% identify as students and 30% identify as technical or professional workers. The rest of the respondents belong to occupations that are mainly in service or administrative support. The mean demographic characteristics of respondents assigned to each type of treatment are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Values for Respondent Demographics and Hiring Evaluation Measures

	Culture Treatment (N=201)	Economic Treatment (N=190)	Combined Treatment (N=201)	Total (N=592)
<u>Age</u>				
18-35	0.84	0.84	0.84	0.84
36+	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	0.50	0.51	0.51	0.51
Female	0.50	0.49	0.49	0.49
<u>Race</u>				
White	0.81	0.75	0.79	0.78
Non-White	0.20	0.25	0.21	0.22
<u>Education</u>				
Less than HS	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.09
HS	0.15	0.08	0.12	0.11
Some College	0.41	0.45	0.50	0.45
B.A.	0.32	0.35	0.29	0.32
M.A./Doctorate	0.12	0.12	0.10	0.11
<u>Occupation</u>				
Professional or Technical	0.29	0.31	0.28	0.29
Sales or Clerical	0.17	0.17	0.21	0.18
Student	0.36	0.33	0.37	0.35
Other	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.10
None	0.12	0.14	0.11	0.08
<u>Hiring Evaluation Measures (SD)</u>				
Hire	2.35 (0.88)	2.28 (0.84)	2.35 (0.84)	2.33 (0.85)
Interview	2.83 (0.92)	2.83 (0.95)	2.76 (0.90)	2.80 (0.92)
Qualified	2.48 (0.91)	2.43 (0.84)	2.51 (0.81)	2.47 (0.86)
Certain	2.40 (0.95)	2.37 (0.90)	2.49 (0.87)	2.42 (0.91)
Promotion	2.17 (0.91)	2.18 (0.86)	2.20 (0.82)	2.18 (0.87)

3.2. Experimental Design

In this experiment, respondents were asked to participate in a hypothetical hiring situation in which a friend needed their help evaluating a job applicant for the position of Assistant Front Desk Manager at the Marriott Hotel in Columbus, Ohio. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions in which the class origin of the applicant was manipulated. Each experimental condition included the same set of instructions: “Please imagine that your friend is the Front Desk Manager at the Marriott Hotel in Columbus, Ohio, and he is in the process of hiring someone for an Assistant Front Desk Manager position. He has asked you to help with the hiring process by reviewing one of the résumés he received for this position.”

I chose the above hiring context for this experiment because it is a context in which we would expect signals of class origin to matter most. Many scholars have theorized the importance of class-based norms and styles to customer-facing occupations and service-oriented industries (Collins 1971; Collins 1974; Moss and Tilly 2001; Sherman 2007; Williams and Connell 2010). If considerations of class shape the evaluation of U.S. workers at all, they are likely to shape the evaluation of workers entering a front desk position at a hotel (Sherman 2007). Thus, while the generalizability of this context is limited, it is a good starting point for establishing whether signals of class origin are at all consequential for hiring evaluations and worthy of further study.

The Marriott is a mid-price hotel and the position of Assistant Front Desk Manager is middle-income and entry-level, with opportunities for advancement. It is a position that could conceivably attract both working class and middle class job applicants. The experimental design is a between-subjects design. Each respondent was assigned to only one experimental condition

so that respondents would be less likely to detect the experimental manipulation. Each experimental condition included both a cover letter and résumé in which the educational and occupational histories were held constant and only the signals of class origin varied

3.3. Signaling Class Origin

In this study, I draw on two signals of class origin—parental economic background and cultural taste—to construct résumés and cover letters for three different pairs of lower and higher class applicants, six experimental conditions altogether. I refer to an applicant with high status cultural practices and/or an advantaged parental economic background as “higher class.” I refer to an applicant with low status cultural practices and/or a disadvantaged parental economic background as “lower class.” These three pairs of applicants fall under three “treatment types,” illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Signals of Class Origin

	Culture Treatment		Economic Treatment		Combined Treatment	
	Lower Class	Higher Class	Lower Class	Higher Class	Lower Class	Higher Class
Cultural Taste	Clubs: bowling, country music Hobbies: bowling, playing pool, country music, rock music, barbecuing, Adam Sandler movies	Clubs: tennis, classical music Hobbies: tennis, horseback riding, classical music, jazz music, fusion food, Woody Allen movies	Control	Control	Clubs: bowling, country music Hobbies: bowling, pool, country music, rock music, barbecue, Adam Sandler movies	Clubs: tennis, classical music Hobbies: tennis, horseback riding, classical music, jazz music, fusion food, Woody Allen movies
Parental Economic Background	Control	Control	“I grew up in a family with limited resources”	“I grew up in a family with considerable resources”	“I grew up in a family with limited resources”	“I grew up in a family with considerable resources”

Under the “Culture Treatment,” indicators of cultural taste vary across lower and higher class applicants but indicators of parental economic background do not. Under the “Economic Treatment,” indicators of parental economic background vary across lower and higher class applicants but indicators of cultural taste do not. Under the “Combined Treatment,” both indicators of cultural taste and parental economic background vary across the lower and higher class applicants.

Parental Economic Background: In this experiment, parental economic background was signaled through a reference to “limited” or “considerable” family resources in the second paragraph of each applicant’s cover letter. The sentence read: “While I grew up in a family with limited/considerable resources, it was a career fair in high school that exposed me to opportunities in hospitality and led me to study business.” In cases where parental economic background needed to be “controlled” for, or held constant across lower and higher class conditions, the sentence in both the applicants’ cover letters omitted any reference to family resources and simply read: “It was a career fair in high school that exposed me to opportunities in hospitality and led me to study business.”

Cultural Taste: Culture taste was signaled through the clubs and activities/interests listed on each applicant’s cover letter and résumé. I signal high status cultural taste through participation in traditionally high status sports activities—tennis and horseback riding—and traditionally high status music—classical and jazz. I signal low status cultural taste through participation in traditionally low status sports activities—bowling and billiards—and traditionally lower status music—country music and rock.

More specifically, I had the higher class applicants list participation in the Tennis Club of Ohio State and the Classical Music Club on their résumés. These clubs were listed as “Other

Experience” in the upper class cover letters and résumés. Higher class applicants also listed a series of traditionally high status “Hobbies/Interests” at the bottom of their résumés: tennis, horseback riding, classical music, jazz music, fusion/ethnic food, and Woody Allen movies. I had lower class applicants list participation in the Bowling Club of Ohio State and the Country Music Club on their résumés. These clubs were listed as “Other Experience” in the lower class cover letters and résumés. Lower class applicants also listed a series of traditionally low status “Hobbies/Interests” at the bottom of their résumés: bowling, playing pool, country music, rock music, barbecuing, and Adam Sandler movies.

In cases where cultural taste needed to be controlled for, or held constant across both lower and higher class applicants, the applicants both simply listed “Sports Club of Ohio State” and “Campus Music Club”—clubs without explicit status culture markers—in their cover letters and résumés and included no mention of hobbies/interests.

Other variables: Apart from the manipulations mentioned above, cover letters and résumés were identical. While club names varied across cover letters and résumés according to the treatment type and applicant class, the club positions and descriptions were always held constant. For the sports club, applicants listed a former position as Secretary. For the music club, applicants listed a former position as Website Administrator. The gender and race of the applicants were also held constant. Each cover letter and résumé provided the same stereotypically white, male name: “Matthew Ryan” (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). The cover letter and résumé were formatted in the same way and provided the same contact information (address, phone number, and email). All applicants were also presented as having the same educational and occupational history. All attended Ohio State University and graduated in 2008 with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration and a 3.21 GPA. As work

experience, all applicants listed positions as cashier and supervisor at the Ohio State Campus Store and a position as front desk clerk at The Blackwell Inn.

3.4. Survey Design

The outcome variables of interest in this analysis were constructed based on responses to a survey distributed through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk website. After reviewing a randomly assigned cover letter and résumé, survey participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about the applicant.

Hiring evaluation measures: Five measures were used in this study to gauge how respondents perceived the employability of their assigned applicant. First, respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert-type scale (0=not at all, 4=extremely), their likelihood of recommending the applicant for an interview, their likelihood of recommending the applicant for hire, and how likely they felt it was that the applicant would be promoted within the next year. Correll et al. (2007) and Cuddy et al. (2004) have used similar measures to study hiring evaluations. I also constructed two additional evaluation measures to gauge levels of perceived qualification and respondent certainty, as hiring outcomes may be impacted not simply by whom employers choose to interview but by the level of certainty they feel about different applicants' suitability and qualifications. Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert-type scale (0=not at all, 4=extremely), how qualified they felt the applicant to be and how certain they were that the applicant was appropriate for the job. Mean values and standard deviations for these measures in each treatment type can be found in Table 1.

Competence measure: To measure respondents' perceptions of applicant "merit," I included a competence scale used in studies by Fiske et al. (2002) and Correll et al. (2007).

Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert-type scale (0=not at all, 4=a great deal), to what extent they felt the following traits were characteristic of the applicant: capable, efficient, intelligent, self-confident, organized, independent, skilled. Mean competence ratings were developed based on this competence scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.87$).

Warmth measure: To measure respondents' perceptions of applicant morality and likability, or warmth, I include a warmth scale used in studies by Fiske et al. (2002) and Correll et al. (2007). Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert-type scale (0=not at all, 4=a great deal), to what extent they felt the following traits were characteristic of the applicant: warm, tolerant, friendly, sincere, and approachable. Mean warmth ratings were developed based on this warmth scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.89$).

Additional measures²: Altogether, the variables specified above constitute my main dependent variables of interest in this chapter. A series of questions were also included to confirm that respondents had knowingly received the manipulations. Respondents were asked to classify the applicant's race/ethnicity, gender, social class (poor, working class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class, upper class), father's education, parents' income, parents' social class, and social mobility. Two questions about the applicant's social mobility were included. The first asked, "Do you think this applicant will achieve, in his lifetime, a social class that is lower than, the same as, or higher than the social class of his parents?" The second asked, "How economically successful do you think this applicant will be in his lifetime compared to his parents?"

In subsequent analyses, I found that perceptions of class mobility and economic mobility were highly correlated so I only include an upward mobility dummy (where 0=same status as parents or downwardly mobile, 1=upwardly mobile) based on perceptions of economic mobility

in the models presented in this chapter. However, models were also run using an upward mobility dummy based on perceptions of class mobility and the findings did not change. In addition, given the strong correlation between applicants' perceived social class, parental education, parental income, and parental class, I include only a variable for perceived social class in my analysis. While a factor analysis shows that these variables are all measuring the same underlying construct, I find that perceived social class has the most consistent explanatory power across outcome variables.

At the end of the survey, respondents were also asked a series of questions about their own demographics characteristics, including their age, race/ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, occupation, income, class identification, marital status, place of residence, and political affiliation.

3.5. Covariate Balance

To confirm that the experimental conditions were successfully randomized, logistic regression models were run for each treatment type predicting selection into a lower or higher class condition. Respondents' demographic characteristics were included as predictors. They were the following: age (continuous), race (nonwhite=0, white=1), gender (male=0, female=1), and education (an ordinal variable: less than high school=0, high school diploma/GED=1, some college, no degree=2, associate's degree=3, bachelor's degree=4, master's/professional/doctoral degree=5). In the case of the culture treatment and the family background treatment, I find that $p > .10$ for all of the demographic variables. I conclude that respondent demographics are balanced for each pair of conditions. In the case of the culture/family treatment, I find that $p > .10$ for all demographic variables except age. In models not presented in this chapter, I control for

age and I do not find that it makes a difference in my findings. I conclude that any differences observed between experimental conditions may be attributed to the manipulations themselves and not to the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

4. Main Results

The following analyses address the central inquiry of this chapter, which is how signals of class origin influence hiring evaluations in the U.S. After running manipulation checks (shown in Figures 3 and 4), I draw on multivariate analyses (shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4) to examine the effect of an applicant's class origin on hiring evaluations and to analyze the factors that mediate their effect.

4.1. Manipulation Checks

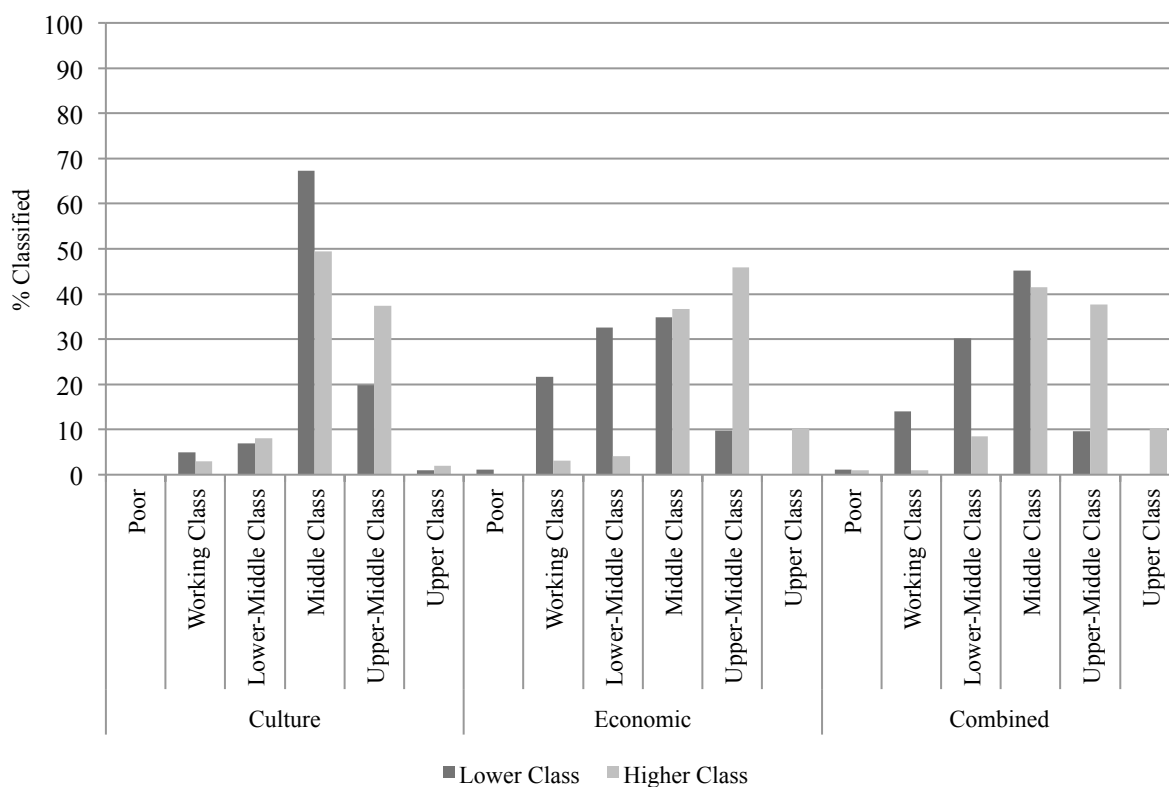
To confirm that a class difference was observed between higher and lower class conditions in the experiment, respondents assigned to each condition were asked to classify their applicant on a number of class and mobility indicators. I then conducted manipulation checks to evaluate whether the experimental manipulations were properly received and processed by respondents. T-tests were run to examine differences in respondents' ratings for lower and higher class applicants across the three treatment types.

Across all treatment types, I find that lower class applicants received statistically significantly lower mean ratings for social class, father's education, parents' income (except in the case of the culture treatment, where no significant differences were found), and parents' social class. All of these class indicators were highly correlated. It should be noted that the class

differences perceived between the lower and higher class conditions were much larger in the case of the economic and combined treatments than they were in the case of the culture treatment.

In Figure 3, one can see how respondents classified the lower and higher class conditions in each treatment type. Interestingly, respondents, on average, perceived both applicants as belonging to the middle class, likely because both applicants possess a college degree. However,

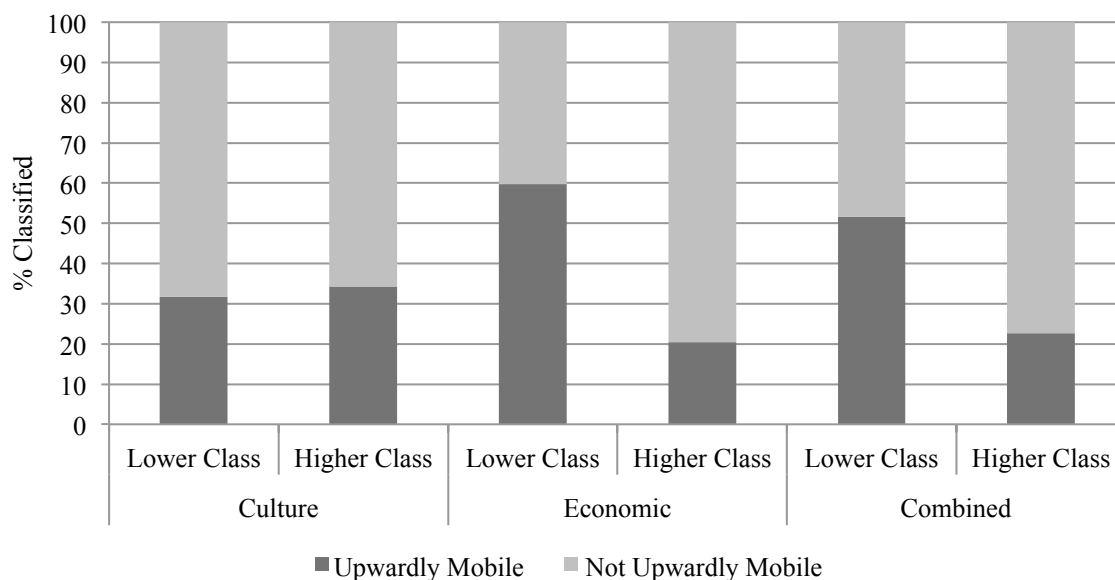
Figure 3: Respondents' Class Categorization of Lower and Higher Class Applicants, by Treatment Type



depending on their signals of class origin, respondents assigned the applicants to differing positions within the middle class. On average, the applicant with a higher class origin was rated as upper-middle class; the applicant with a lower class origin was rated as lower-middle class.

Where the three treatment types in Figure 4 most diverge is around ratings of class mobility. As I expected of the culture treatment, I find no statistically significant differences between the upward mobility ratings of lower and higher class applicants. However, in the economic and combined treatments, I find that lower class applicants received significantly higher mobility ratings than higher class applicants. In Figure 4, one can see how respondents

Figure 4: Respondents' Mobility Categorization of Lower and Upper Class Applicants, by Treatment Type



classified the upward mobility of lower and higher class applicants in the different treatment types. Over 60% of these higher class applicants were perceived as comparable to their parents in economic success and class position. 14-20% were rated as “downwardly mobile.”

These differential mobility ratings reflect a key difference between the two signals of class origin I apply in this study. While information about a person’s parental economic background makes explicit their class trajectory, and therefore the extent to which the lower class applicant is upwardly mobile, information about a person’s cultural taste does not. The

lower class applicant in the culture treatment is still perceived by respondents as lower class but not as upwardly mobile. This difference in the perceived mobility of applicants will have important implications for the class effects I observe.

4.2. Multivariate Analyses

4.2.1. Hiring Evaluations

Odds ratios estimating the effect of the three treatment types on all five hiring evaluation measures—likelihood of hire, likelihood of interview, ratings of qualifications, respondent certainty, and likelihood of promotion—are shown in Table 2. In each model, I include a dummy variable for the class condition (0=lower class, 1=higher class). Individual analyses were performed for each treatment type.

According to Table 2, signals of class origin do have an effect on hiring evaluations but only when class is signaled through cultural taste. In the culture treatment, the relative odds of a respondent hiring, promoting, and feeling certain about a job applicant are statistically significantly higher if the job applicant is higher class. When class is signaled through culture, respondents favor the higher class job candidate.

This finding does not hold in the economic or combined treatments, however. When class is signaled through parental economic background alone, no differences in the evaluations of job applicants are observed, and when signals of parental economic background are combined with signals of cultural taste, the higher class advantage previously observed when class was signaled solely through cultural taste disappears.

Table 2: Estimated Regression Coefficients (Odds Ratios) for the Effect of the Higher Class Condition on Hiring Evaluations, by Treatment Type

VARIABLES	Hire (1)	Interview (2)	Qualified (3)	Certain (4)	Promotion (5)
<u>Culture Treatment</u>					
Higher Class Culture Condition	1.69** (0.45)	1.07 (0.28)	1.13 (0.30)	2.30*** (0.61)	1.75** (0.46)
Constant	17.79*** (5.63)	3.66*** (0.79)	8.20*** (2.12)	13.80*** (3.91)	19.62*** (6.38)
Observations	200	200	200	200	200
<u>Economic Treatment</u>					
Higher Class Economic Condition	1.18 (0.32)	1.14 (0.30)	1.01 (0.27)	0.96 (0.26)	1.30 (0.36)
Constant	24.89*** (9.71)	3.26*** (0.72)	13.69*** (4.41)	13.35*** (4.26)	18.77*** (6.52)
Observations	190	190	190	190	190
<u>Combined Treatment</u>					
Higher Class Combined Condition	1.12 (0.30)	1.10 (0.29)	1.39 (0.37)	1.22 (0.32)	0.76 (0.20)
Constant	13.11*** (3.99)	4.34*** (0.98)	11.44*** (3.29)	12.73*** (3.80)	16.51*** (5.77)
Observations	200	200	199	199	199

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.2.2. Proposition One

How do we account for these experimental effects and non-effects? Proposition 1 of the class reproduction model posits that higher class job applicants receive more positive hiring evaluations because people attribute greater levels of competence to those they perceive to be

higher class. If this is the case, I should find that the higher class condition in the culture treatment has a positive effect on perceptions of competence and that this effect is mediated largely by perceptions of class.

I test this proposition in Table 3 by using linear probability models to estimate the effect of the culture treatment on perceptions of both competence and warmth. As hypothesized, I find in models 1 and 4 that the higher class culture condition has a statistically significant positive effect on perceptions of competence but no significant effect on perceptions of warmth. Additionally, once I include a measure of perceived class in models 2 and 5, the coefficient for the higher class culture condition in model 2 becomes non-significant. I conclude that respondents attribute greater levels of competence to those they perceive to be higher class—evidence in support of the class reproduction model.

I test Proposition 1 of the class mobility model by running the same statistical models detailed above for the economic and combined treatments. Consistent with findings from Table 2, models 1 and 4 reveal that the economic and combined class conditions have no significant effect on perceptions of competence or warmth—further evidence that, contrary to the expectations of the class mobility model, the signal of parental economic background I explore in this study does not influence perceptions of employability. And yet, if perceptions of class are positively related to perceptions of competence when class is signaled through culture, why do we observe these null effects when class is signaled through parental economic background?

The class mobility model points to one plausible explanation: perceptions of mobility. While higher and lower class applicants in the economic and combined treatment types differ in their perceived class, they also differ in their perceived mobility, and the class mobility model posits that perceptions of upward mobility should have a positive effect on social perceptions

Table 3: OLS Regression Coefficients Estimating the Effect of the Higher Class Condition, Mediated by Perceptions of Class and Mobility, on Perceptions of Competence and Warmth (by Treatment Type)

VARIABLES	Competence			Warmth		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<u>Culture Treatment</u>						
Higher Class Culture Condition	0.18** (0.09)	0.14 (0.09)	0.13 (0.08)	0.09 (0.09)	0.10 (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)
Perceived Class		0.17*** (0.06)	0.17*** (0.06)		-0.01 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)
Perceived Upward Mobility			0.28*** (0.09)			0.29*** (0.09)
Constant	3.76*** (0.06)	3.06*** (0.24)	2.98*** (0.24)	3.76*** (0.06)	3.79*** (0.26)	3.71*** (0.25)
Observations	200	200	200	200	200	200
R-squared	0.02	0.06	0.11	0.01	0.01	0.05
<u>Economic Treatment</u>						
Higher Class Economic Condition	-0.02 (0.09)	-0.12 (0.11)	-0.00 (0.11)	-0.12 (0.11)	-0.08 (0.13)	0.05 (0.13)
Perceived Class		0.07 (0.05)	0.11** (0.05)		-0.04 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)
Perceived Upward Mobility			0.42** (0.10)			0.47*** (0.12)
Constant	3.73*** (0.07)	3.49*** (0.18)	3.10*** (0.20)	3.71*** (0.08)	3.84*** (0.21)	3.40*** (0.23)
Observations	190	190	190	190	190	190
R-squared	0.00	0.01	0.10	0.01	0.01	0.09
<u>Combined Treatment</u>						
Higher Class Combined Condition	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.13 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.11)	-0.04 (0.12)	0.04 (0.12)
Perceived Class		0.07 (0.05)	0.12** (0.05)		-0.01 (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)
Perceived Upward Mobility			0.42*** (0.10)			0.44*** (0.11)
Constant	3.78*** (0.07)	3.54*** (0.20)	3.16*** (0.21)	3.67*** (0.08)	3.70*** (0.22)	3.30*** (0.24)
Observations	199	199	199	199	199	199
R-squared	0.00	0.01	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.07

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0

(particularly, perceptions of warmth). If this is the case, the positive effects of the upward mobility attributed to lower class applicants in the economic and combined treatments may be suppressing the negative effects of their perceived class.

To test this explanation, I first include measures of perceived class in models 2 and 5 of the economic and combined treatments. As expected, I find that when class is signaled through parental economic background alone or in combination with culture, perceptions of class have no significant statistical effect on perceptions of competence or warmth. I then include measures of perceived upward mobility in models 3 and 6 for the economic and combined treatments. In model 3, I find that, controlling for perceptions of class, perceptions of upward mobility are, in fact, positively related to ratings of competence. I also find in model 6 that perceptions of upward mobility are positively related to ratings of warmth, as predicted by the class mobility model.

Additionally, once differences in the perceived mobility of applicants in the economic and combined treatments are controlled for, coefficients for the statistical effect of perceptions of class on perceptions of competence become significant. I conclude that, when signals of parental economic background are made available to respondents, the differences in mobility they convey compete with and suppress the effect of any differences in perceived class. Might the value respondents attach to both class mobility and class status help to explain why class origin has a significant effect on hiring evaluations when signaled through culture (and no differences in mobility are perceived between applicants) but a null effect on hiring evaluations when class origin is signaled through parental economic background alone or in combination with culture (and significant differences in mobility are perceived)? To address this question, I examine the effect perceptions of class and mobility have on hiring evaluations.

4.2.3. Proposition Two

The second set of propositions put forth in the class reproduction and class mobility models are: (1) that perceptions of class have a positive effect on hiring evaluations, mediated largely by perceptions of competence and (2) that perceptions of upward mobility have a positive effect on hiring evaluations, mediated largely by perceptions of competence and/or warmth. To test these competing claims, I include measures of perceived class and perceived mobility as predictors in models 1, 4, 7, 10, and 13 of Table 4. The outcome variables are the five hiring evaluations measures and I report marginal effects rather than ordinal logistic regression coefficients so that I may compare coefficients across models (Allison 1999; Mood 2010). If I find that the inclusion of perceived competence and warmth as predictors in subsequent models leads the coefficients for perceived class and mobility to diminish and/or become non-significant, I may conclude that perceptions of competence and warmth mediate at least a part of the statistical effect of perceptions of class and mobility on hiring evaluations.

To provide a baseline with which to compare subsequent models, I first estimate the marginal effect of perceptions of class and mobility on the five hiring evaluation. In models 1, 4, 7, 10, and 13, I find that perceptions of class and perceptions of mobility both have positively and statistically significant marginal effect on likelihood of hire, likelihood of interview, perceived qualification, respondent certainty, and likelihood of promotion. These findings lend support to Proposition 2 of both the class reproduction and class mobility models. I find that respondents do tend to favor those they perceive to be higher class but also tend to favor those they perceive to be upwardly mobile.

I also find that ratings of competence mediate a large part of the positive relationship between perceptions of class and mobility and hiring evaluations—evidence in support of

Table 4: Average Marginal Effects of Perceptions of Class and Mobility, Mediated by Perceptions of Competence and Warmth, on Hiring Evaluations Across Treatment Types

VARIABLES	Hire			Interview			Qualified		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Perceived Class	0.018*** (0.005)	0.005* (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)	0.058*** (0.014)	0.029** (0.012)	0.029** (0.012)	0.025*** (0.007)	0.009* (0.005)	0.009* (0.005)
Perceived Upward Mobility	0.036*** (0.010)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	0.123*** (0.028)	0.024 (0.024)	0.024 (0.024)	0.059*** (0.014)	0.008 (0.010)	0.007 (0.010)
Competence		0.066*** (0.011)	0.067*** (0.012)		0.264*** (0.024)	0.263*** (0.029)		0.101*** (0.014)	0.095*** (0.015)
Warmth			-0.002 (0.005)			0.001 (0.022)			0.008 (0.009)
Obs	589	589	589	589	589	589	589	589	589
	Certain			Promotion					
	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)			
Perceived Class	0.012* (0.006)	0.001 (0.004)	0.000 (0.004)	0.010** (0.005)	0.002 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)			
Perceived Upward Mobility	0.057*** (0.014)	0.009 (0.008)	0.010 (0.008)	0.041*** (0.010)	0.013* (0.007)	0.011* (0.007)			
Competence		0.092*** (0.013)	0.094*** (0.014)		0.056*** (0.010)	0.048*** (0.010)			
Warmth			-0.004 (0.007)			0.011* (0.006)			
Obs	589	589	589	589	589	589			

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Proposition 2 of the class reproduction model. Once I include a measure of perceived competence in models 2, 5, 8, 11, and 14, coefficients for both perceived class and perceived mobility become non-significant and/or diminish substantially. In models 3, 6, 9, 12, and 5, however, ratings of warmth appear to have little to no effect. Only in model 15 do ratings of warmth have a statistically significant effect, yet the size of the warmth coefficient is much smaller than the size of the coefficient for competence. It is not perceived warmth but perceived

competence that accounts for at least a part of the statistical effect of perceived upward mobility on hiring evaluations.

Based on these findings, I conclude that perceptions of an applicant's class origin and trajectory may intervene in and bias the evaluation of job seekers in the U.S., as Americans grapple with a set of competing biases that assign greater competence to both the upper class and the upwardly mobile. This produces a higher class advantage in hiring assessments when class origin is signaled through cultural taste—evidence in support of the class reproduction model. However, it leads to a null effect in hiring evaluations when class background is signaled through parental economic background. Contrary to the expectations of the class mobility model, indicators of upward mobility never lead respondents to favor lower class applicants. However, the value respondents place on upward mobility does level the playing field between higher and lower class applicants, neutralizing the effect of class origin so that no differential treatment is observed.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

While the content and consequences of class bias in hiring have received little empirical attention in the U.S., this study offers a careful examination of the mechanisms that may generate class discriminatory decisions at the point of hire. Its use of an experimental method also offers a novel test of two causal hypotheses found in the sociological literature: a class reproduction hypothesis and a class mobility hypothesis. Findings from a survey experimental study of 592 U.S. residents reveal that signals of class origin do influence how job applicants are socially perceived and evaluated. When class origin is signaled through cultural taste, it has a significant and systematic effect on hiring evaluations, advantaging job applicants perceived to be higher

class. It is not just the skills and experiences applicants acquire through their cultural participation but the class differences their taste in activities betrays that colors evaluations of their employability. This is largely because Americans attribute greater competence to those they perceive to be higher class. Yet, when class is signaled through parental economic background alone or in combination with cultural taste, no differential treatment emerges. This is due largely to respondents' competing preference for those they perceive to be upwardly mobile. Differences in mobility signal differences in competence that suppress the effect of differences in perceived class.

Together, these findings make two important contributions to the literature on social stratification. First, they suggest that exclusion on the basis of culture may be a mechanism through which class discrimination most commonly occurs in hiring. While the inclusion of one's hobbies or tastes in a résumé is not ubiquitous, it is still fairly common, sometimes recommended by job search advisors, and may be solicited by hiring managers (Rivera 2012). In many cases, the inclusion of one's cultural capital or lack thereof may be unavoidable, as our cultural backgrounds are often embedded in our work histories. Consequently, culture may be critical to our understanding of how class exclusion most commonly occurs at the hiring interface.

It is important to note, however, that the cultural advantages of higher class applicants are not insuperable, as they fade when the inherited economic advantages of higher class applicants are made explicit—the second empirical and theoretical contribution of this chapter. Though they are null, the effects of parental economic background on hiring evaluations tell an important story, too. They reveal the limits of American class bias and the conditions under which it may or may not be realized. When overtly ascribed economic advantages or disadvantages such as

parental resources are made explicit, Americans suppress their preference for the higher class. They react by displaying a more socially desirable behavior: class egalitarianism.

There are some limitations to these findings that should be noted. For one, the explicit signals of parental economic background I employ in this study are not necessarily common. Their overt nature is, in certain respects, an advantage of the study because they expose the limits of American class bias. I find that participants respond differently to explicit, economically-based forms of class information compared to implicit, culturally-based forms. This, however, comes at the cost of realism, as it is unlikely that a job applicant would provide explicit information about his or her family history and trajectory in a cover letter. A recent study shows that upwardly mobile individuals may be more inclined to hide rather than to display the markers of their class disadvantage (Daenekindt and Roos, 2013).

Additionally, when a privileged person make his or her privilege explicit, this could be interpreted not just as a sign of class background but as a sign of arrogance or egotism, eliciting a reaction from respondents more negative than other, more implicit signals might otherwise have elicited. As a result, the positive effects of upward mobility I observe may be overestimated due to the explicit signals of parental economic background I employ. Still, the effect of these signals on evaluations of higher class applicants does not appear to be overly adverse, as perceptions of class, when signaled through parental economic background, remain positively correlated with perceptions of competence and employability.

Overall, this study provides important evidence that people in the U.S. grapple with competing attitudes around class and mobility that significantly influence their perception and evaluation of job applicants.

END NOTES

1. “Poor quality response” refers to respondents whose time spent reviewing their assigned cover letter and résumé was 42.43 seconds or less. This time falls in the bottom fifth percentile of the time it took all respondents to review the cover letters and résumés. The mean time for all respondents was 185.87 seconds. Mason and Suri (2012) contend that timing is one efficient way to identify and filter out low quality responses.
2. Aside from the outcome variables of interest specified above, respondents were also asked a series of questions about the applicants’ starting salary, level of commitment to the job, recommended job placement, and about the standards the respondent would apply to the applicant (length of probationary period and how many days the applicant could arrive late or leave early).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Hidden Value of Highbrow Taste: How Cultural Signals of Class Shape U.S. Labor Market Outcomes

1. Introduction

Chapter Four offers preliminary evidence that perceptions of class and mobility significantly influence the ways in which Americans evaluate job applicants. In particular, it highlights the power of cultural signals of class to shape hiring evaluations. Often in the status attainment literature, culture is excluded from operationalizations of social class. Yet, culture is critical to our understanding of how class intervenes in social interactions (DiMaggio 2012) and Chapter Four suggests that it may be critical to our understanding of how class inequalities are reproduced at the point-of-hire.

The question I consider next is to what extent and under what conditions cultural signals of class shape real labor market outcomes. Broadly, I hypothesize that recent college graduates who have equivalent educational and occupational histories but who signal differences in class through status-based differences in the cultural tastes—namely, extracurricular music and sports interests—they signal in their résumés are evaluated differently by employers, resulting in differential labor market outcomes (Bourdieu 1973; Williams and Connell 2010). Regarding the nature and magnitude of this effect, I offer a series of hypotheses rooted in theories of cultural matching (Collins 1971; Collins 1974; Rivera 2012) and gender and cultural capital (Christin 2012; Collins 1988).

To test these hypotheses and measure the causal effect of cultural signals of class on real labor market outcomes, I conducted an audit study of employment discrimination in four major U.S. cities: New York, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles. For five months, I performed a series

of correspondence tests to measure the effect that signals of cultural taste have on employer callback rates among men and women applying to customer-facing and non-customer-facing jobs. To apply for these positions, I submitted two résumés, in randomized order, a day apart: one for an applicant with high status cultural tastes and one for an applicant with low status cultural tastes. I then tracked employers' responses to each résumé. Results reveal that applicants with high status cultural tastes receive a significantly higher rate of callback from employers if they are (1) women and (2) applying to customer-facing jobs. Meanwhile, cultural signals of class have no significant effect on the callback rates of male and/or non-customer-facing job applicants.

This study makes two important contributions to the sociological literature. First, it uncovers an important form of class bias faced by women in the U.S. labor market, prior to the interview stage: employment discrimination on the basis of cultural signals of class. Second, it develops a model of how cultural signals of class influence hiring evaluations and labor market outcomes, identifying key social factors that moderate their effect. In so doing, it both supports, but also specifies narrower scope conditions for, the application of theories of cultural hierarchy to the labor market.

2. Theories and Hypotheses

The basic premise of this investigation—that a hierarchical cultural system exists wherein individuals' cultural traits directly influence their structural position—was popularized, in France, by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and, in the U.S. by Paul DiMaggio (1982a). As detailed in Chapters Three and Four, Bourdieu (1973; 1984; 1986) posits that in any given social field, there are certain institutionalized forms of cultural knowledge, taste, speech, and bodily comportment that

are widely understood to be legitimate and high status. Furthermore, individuals and institutions tend to privilege the highbrow cultural tastes of elites over the lowbrow cultural tastes of non-elites because they are perceived as signs of greater merit. Through these judgments of taste, hierarchies of cultural preference serve to legitimize and naturalize hierarchies of social class, making judgments of taste a key factor in the reproduction of social class (Swartz 1977).

While this model of cultural hierarchy was based on research conducted in late 1960s Paris, evidence of a similar hierarchy has been found in the U.S. These studies conclude that high status culture constitutes a form of “capital” in the U.S. (DiMaggio 1982a; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Lizardo 2006a).¹ Applied to the context of hiring, they suggest that U.S. employers will value high status cultural traits and systematically reward job applicants who display them.

Yet, studies of cultural capital are limited in three important respects. First, they are based on statistical correlations. Thus, we cannot be sure that high status cultural tastes are socially consequential in and of themselves, as they may only be related to status attainment insofar as they are associated with other unobserved skills (Kingston 2001). Lamont and Lareau (1988), in fact, challenge the notion of a widely shared, class-based cultural hierarchy in the U.S. As Erickson (1996: 221) writes, “correlation *with* class is not the same as usefulness *in* class relations.”

Second, these studies do not empirically identify the mechanisms through which differing cultural tastes result in differing social outcomes. Though theories abound, the sociological literature lacks systematic evidence of the class biases that lead some cultural practices and tastes to be systematically rewarded over others (Kingston 2001).

Third, it is still up for debate whether the effects of these cultural traits extend beyond the walls of the classroom and into the U.S. labor market (Erickson 1996). In an audit study

conducted in the U.K. labor market, Jackson (2009) finds that job applicants with certain combinations of typically “upper class” traits, including high status cultural activities, do receive higher rates of callback from employers, though the callbacks are not systematically more positive. While a study of this kind has not yet been conducted in the U.S., the sociological literature also offers a series of hypotheses regarding the effect cultural signals of class—measured here as status-based differences in cultural taste—are likely to have on U.S. labor market outcomes.

2.1. Cultural Matching

In her study of elite professional service firms, Rivera (2012) asserts that hiring in the U.S. is largely a process of “cultural matching,” where evaluations of competence, merit, and “fit” are contingent on the cultural similarity between applicants, employers, and firms. According to Rivera, similarities in socio-cultural background are identified based on the extracurricular activities, leisure pursuits, and style of self-presentation that applicants display in their résumés and/or interviews. The particular content of the cultural traits assigned greatest value depends largely on their similarity to the traits of the employer and the traits of the people working in his or her firm. In general, Rivera finds that employers in elite firms perceive white, upper-middle class cultural traits—defined by Rivera as investment in leisure—as qualification for working in elite firms. In high status firms, these high status applicants tend to be rated as more culturally similar to other employees and thus more likable, presentable, and qualified for the position.

Based on Rivera’s study of cultural matching, I derive the hypothesis that high status firms are more likely to favor applicants with high status cultural traits while low status firms are more likely to favor applicants with low status cultural traits.

H1a (Cultural Matching Hypothesis): Across jobs, employers in high status organizations are more likely to favor job applicants with high status cultural tastes and employers in low status organizations are more likely to favor job applicants with low status cultural tastes.

On the other hand, Collins (1971; 1974) has long theorized that in elite organizations, employers hire job applicants with elite cultural traits not because those are the traits deemed appropriate for interacting with other employees but because those are the traits desired for interacting with clients. These cultural traits are, consequently, of value primarily in service-oriented jobs. Collins (1971; 1974) asserts that in service-oriented jobs—jobs that require heavy interaction with customers—employers are particularly concerned with establishing normative control over employees and, as a result, seek out workers with socio-cultural backgrounds similar to those of their customers.

For customer-facing jobs, studies show that employers often desire workers who are socially and culturally similar to their clients. Employers' socio-cultural standards, however, tend to be more lax for workers entering non-customer-facing jobs (Pager et al. 2009; Williams and Connell 2010). As Williams and Connell (2010) write, when “looking good” and “sounding right” for customers are a source of company revenue, employers seek out workers with “appropriate” cultural styles and social backgrounds. This concern for “soft skills” and style of self-presentation is one of the reasons Pager et al. (2009) and Moss and Tilly (2001) propose that employers channel some black job applicants away from customer-facing positions. Similarly, for this reason, we may find that employers channel lower class job applicants away from customer-facing positions.

In sum, while the above studies predict culturally based matching in hiring, they suggest that cultural signals of class will largely affect hiring for customer-oriented jobs.

H1b (Customer Matching Hypothesis): For entry into customer-facing jobs, employers in high status organizations are more likely to favor job applicants with high status cultural tastes and employers in low status organizations are more likely to favor job applicants with low status cultural tastes.

2.2. Applicant Gender

Today, cultural tastes carry not only class associations but also gendered expectations, reflected in men's and women's divergent patterns of high status cultural participation (Christin 2012; Collins 1992; Lizardo 2006b). Women are much more likely than men to participate in high status cultural activities like reading fiction (Douglas 1977; Tepper 2000) and attending concerts, arts museums, plays, and the opera (DiMaggio 1982a; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Dumais 2002). Moreover, Lizardo (2006b) finds that this gender gap in cultural participation is largely characteristic of those in the labor force and is greatest among men and women working in market-oriented occupations, where high status culture appears to be devalued by men.

How do we account for this gender gap? According to Christin (2012), it is due largely to gender differences in early arts socialization. U.S. parents are significantly more likely to enroll their daughters in music and art history lessons than their sons, a decision that, Christin argues, reflects "broad cultural scripts about appropriate gender roles." The consumption and circulation of high status culture has historically been viewed as the "separate sphere" or "labor" of women and has played an important role in the cultural reproduction of social class in middle class households (Christin 2012). In their seminal study of the social class structure in Kansas

City, Coleman and Neugarten (1971) find that a strong predictor of a man's social class is the status-cultural participation of his wife. Similarly, according to Upright (2004), one of the most reliable predictors of a man's attendance at arts events is the arts participation of his wife.

Moreover, DiMaggio (1982a) finds that, in high school, the correlation between cultural capital and family background, as well as the intercorrelations among cultural capital measures, is much stronger for females than for males. These findings suggest that the cultural interests and activities of women are more coherent and socially prescribed than those of men.

Furthermore, according to DiMaggio (1982a), displays of cultural capital play a more important role in the reproduction of class advantage among women than men. Based on his findings, DiMaggio posits that women with advantaged class backgrounds are not only more likely to be prescribed high status cultural preferences but they will experience greater returns to their cultural capital than women with less advantaged class backgrounds.

These studies offer evidence in support of the model of cultural hierarchy described earlier with the caveat that standards of high status cultural participation may be higher for women than men. Thus, we should expect cultural signals of class to have a greater effect on the hiring evaluations and labor market outcomes of women than of men.

H2a (Unconditional Gender Role Hypothesis): Across jobs and organizations, employers are more likely to favor job applicants with high status cultural tastes if the applicants are female rather than male.

On the other hand, Collins (1992) contends that the cultural standards applied to female versus male applicants may vary according to the customer orientation of the hiring position. For entry into customer-facing positions more so than non-customer-facing positions, employers

seek out workers who they perceive to have socially acceptable cultural values and legitimate styles of self-presentation (Williams and Connell 2010). Consequently, the high status cultural displays of women, more so than those of men, are likely to be rewarded by employers in customer-facing contexts, more so than those in non-customer-facing contexts.

H2b (Conditional Gender Role Hypothesis): For entry into customer-facing jobs, employers are more likely to favor job applicants with high status cultural tastes if the applicants are female rather than male.

In Table 1 below, I provide a brief summary of each of the four hypotheses explored in this chapter.

Table 1: Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Organizational Status	Applicant Gender	Job Type
Cultural Matching (H1a)	HS orgs favor HC LS orgs favor LC		
Customer Matching (H1b)	HS orgs favor HC LS orgs favor LC		For customer- facing jobs
Unconditional Gender Role (H2a)	All orgs favor HC	When evaluating women	
Conditional Gender Role (H2b)	All orgs favor HC	When evaluating women	For customer- facing jobs

Note: “HS” is an abbreviation for High Status, “LS” is an abbreviation for Low Status, “HC” is an abbreviation for High Culture, and “LC” is an abbreviation for Low Culture.

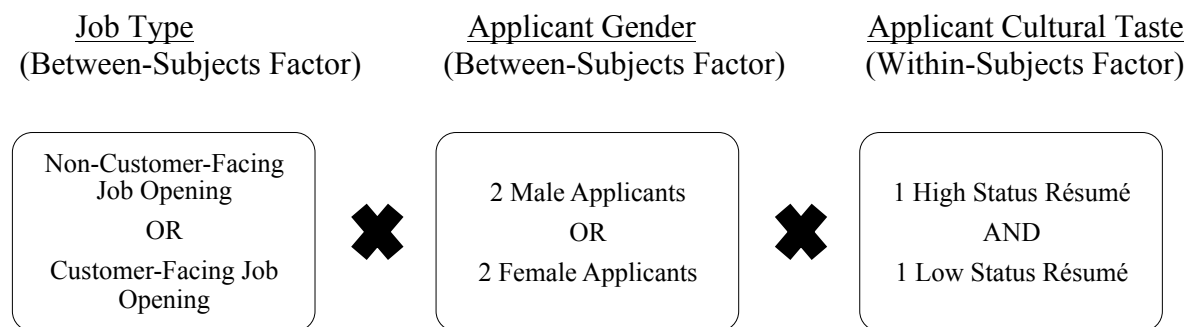
3. Data and Methods

To test Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b, I conducted a five-month audit study of callback discrimination in four large U.S. cities: New York, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Between May 2014 and September 2014, I performed a series of computerized correspondence tests, sending fictitious résumés to apply for job openings posted on one of the largest employment websites in the U.S. The goal of this study was to measure quantitatively the effect of cultural signals of class on hiring outcomes in a real labor market setting.

Sample: In total, I submitted 2,096 résumés and cover letters in response to 1,048 job openings. All résumés included an active Gmail account and Google voice account so that I could track employers' responses to the résumés and measure rates of callback. For all résumés submitted, the average rate of callback was 11.5%.

Experimental Design: The audit study consisted of a 2 X 2 X 2 mixed factorial design, with two between-subjects factors and one within-subjects factor. The between-subjects factors were job type and applicant gender. The within-subjects factor was applicant cultural taste. These factors are described in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: 2 X 2 X 2 Mixed Factorial Design of Audit Study



The design of the audit study was as follows. I first identified job openings for customer-facing and non-customer-facing jobs on one of the largest employment websites in the U.S. Once the list of all eligible job openings had been finalized, I randomly assigned a male or female applicant gender to each job opening. I also randomly assigned a résumé format to the high and low status résumés and I randomly assigned the order in which the two résumés would be sent. Résumés were submitted a day apart. Approximately 24 hours after submitting the first résumé, I submitted the second résumé for the same opening.

The order in which these résumés were submitted and the résumé formats used were randomized and counterbalanced. For example, if, on the first day, I submitted a low status résumé that had been randomly assigned a female applicant gender, the “vertical” format, and the name “Hannah Ryan,” on the second day I submitted a high status résumé with a female applicant gender, the “horizontal” format, and the name “Sarah Miller.” I also included a short cover letter with each résumé, indicating each applicant’s interest in the position and a summary of the occupational and educational histories already listed on the résumé.

Between May 2014 and September 2014, I conducted this experiment, which included three complete waves. In total, I submitted 2,096 résumés and cover letters in response to 1,048 job openings. A breakdown of the number of job openings applied to for men and women, customer-facing and non-customer jobs, in each city is presented in Table 2 below. The average rate of callback across all four cities was 11.5%. The average rate of callback was 15% in Boston, 12.8% in Chicago, 7.6% in Los Angeles, and 10.1% in New York.

Job Context Measure: To manipulate the customer orientation of the job and identify openings for customer-facing versus non-customer-facing jobs, I used a web crawler that collected information for all jobs posted over a 15- to 30-day period. To search for customer-

Table 2: Sampled Job Openings, by Job, City, and Applicant Gender

	Administrative	Clerical	Customer Service	Sales	Total in City
<u>Male Applicants</u>					
Boston, MA	24	10	42	55	131
Chicago, IL	30	17	28	66	141
Los Angeles, CA	39	21	23	36	119
New York, NY	35	20	35	52	142
<u>Female Applicants</u>					
Boston, MA	33	10	39	57	139
Chicago, IL	23	12	30	47	112
Los Angeles, CA	37	20	27	40	124
New York, NY	43	21	42	34	140
Total in Job	264	131	266	387	1,048

facing positions, I used the following key words: “customer service” and “sales.” To search non-customer-facing positions, I used the following key words: “administrative assistant” and “clerk.” According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, customer service, sales, administrative, and clerical jobs are four of the most common occupations in the U.S. I then reviewed each job opening and eliminated those openings for which my fictitious applicants did not have the appropriate educational credentials or years of work experience. I also eliminated any jobs based solely on commission as well as most retail jobs, for which the applicants were highly overqualified.

Between-Industry Organizational Status Measure: After completing the experiment, I compiled data on the status of the industry of each of the organizations to which I applied so that I could test the cultural matching and customer matching hypotheses outlined earlier. Measuring organizational status within the context of a field experiment is challenging because the organizations in my sample belong to a variety of industries and there is very little data on the social value, or esteem, people assign to most organizations. However, Sharkey (2014) provides compelling evidence that organizations derive social esteem, in part, from the industry categories

to which they belong. She develops a between-industry measure of organizational status based on the social esteem MBA students attribute to industry categories. I draw on this measure in the analysis below to approximate the moderating effect of organizational status on odds of employer callback. Using Sharkey's industry classification system, I coded most job descriptions (those that provided the name of the hiring firm) for their industry category. I collected industry data for 877 of the 1,048 organizations in my sample.

The organizations I could not code are missing at random—they do not vary significantly in their likelihood of calling back the low or high status applicant. I then assigned each industry a “status score” using the Bonacich centrality-based status measures (Bonacich 1987) calculated by Sharkey. This status measure takes into account not only how often an industry outranked others but which industries it outranked. Outranking a more prestigious industry was given more weight than outranking a less prestigious industry. Based on these scores, I developed a dichotomous measure of organizational status, where “high status organization” refers to organizations with a Bonacich score above the mean (0.951) and “low status organization” refers to organizations with a Bonacich score below the mean (see Table 3 for descriptives)

Résumés: Applicants' cultural tastes were signaled through the college clubs and extracurricular interests listed in each résumé. College clubs were listed towards the end of the résumé under the heading of “Leadership Experience” or “Community Involvement” and extracurricular interests were listed at the bottom of the résumé under the heading of “Interests” or “Hobbies.” While career advisors debate whether or not to include extracurricular interests in a résumé—some contend such details are valuable and informative while others deem them irrelevant or inappropriate—the risk of the cultural signals being perceived as irrelevant or inappropriate was distributed equally across both résumés.

Table 3: Between-Industry Organizational Status Measure

Industry	Bonacich Score	% of Sample
Biotechnology	2.2	0.19
Investment services	1.89	1.61
Banking	1.81	0.85
Computers - software	1.8	3.88
Aerospace defense	1.77	0.19
Diversified financial services	1.74	7.77
Movies & home entertainment	1.6	1.33
Pharmaceuticals	1.53	1.14
Semiconductors	1.51	0.09
Advertising & marketing	1.44	7.67
Broadcasting	1.38	0.05
Computers - commercial services	1.35	3.22
Computers - hardware	1.33	0.19
Telecommunications	1.33	1.42
Healthcare - medical products	1.27	2.56
Electronics & electrical equipment	1.22	1.14
Jewelry novelties & gifts	1.2	1.04
Oil & gas	1.13	0.47
Leisure time products	1.08	0.28
Healthcare - hospital management	1.05	0.76
Publishing	1.02	1.33
Gaming	1.01	0.09
Lodging	1	0.09
Photography & imaging	0.98	0.38
Commercial & consumer services	0.97	14.87
Alcoholic beverages	0.96	0.05
Restaurants	0.94	0.28
Cosmetics, household & personal care	0.92	0.95
Healthcare - long-term care	0.89	2.75
Textiles, apparel & footwear	0.85	1.33
Engineering & construction	0.84	4.55
Food & non-alcoholic beverages	0.79	1.7
Airlines	0.74	1.04
Natural gas distributors	0.64	0.09
Retail	0.62	4.73
Chemicals	0.61	0.66
Savings & loan companies	0.6	0.19
Insurance	0.57	1.61
Insurance brokers	0.52	0.76
Homebuilding	0.46	0.09
Housewares & household durables	0.46	1.04
Manufacturing	0.45	5.21
Metals & mining	0.42	0.57
Automobiles & auto parts	0.4	0.85
Electric utilities	0.38	0.57
Industrial machinery	0.35	0.85
Supermarkets & drugstores	0.35	0.05
Employment services	0.34	5.59
Commercial transportation	0.33	3.6
Agricultural products	0.29	0.09
Hardware & tools	0.26	0.28
Heavy construction materials	0.25	0.76
Distribution	0.24	2.56
Printing	0.24	1.04
Water utilities	0.24	0.05
Office equipment & supplies	0.21	1.52
Trucks & heavy equipment	0.2	0.57
Containers	0.17	0.09
Waste management	0.17	0.38
Paper & packaging	0.16	0.95

To signal *high status* cultural taste in a résumé, I listed participation in two college clubs: a classical music club and tennis league. I also listed the following extracurricular interests at the bottom of the résumé: playing tennis, jazz festivals, and gourmet cooking. To signal *low status* cultural taste in a résumé, I listed participation in two college clubs: a country music club and bowling league. I also listed the following extracurricular interests at the bottom of the résumé: bluegrass concerts, barbecuing, going bowling. These signals were developed according to the findings presented in Chapter Two and are outlined below in Table 4. According to the exploratory surveys I conducted on Mechanical Turk, these cultural tastes are perceived as predominantly “white” and fairly gender neutral. I hold the racial and gender connotations of these signals constant in order to isolate the effects of their class connotations.

The leadership positions listed for the two clubs were either Bookkeeper and Secretary or Treasurer and Registrar. Applicants provided near-identical descriptions of their participation in these music and sports clubs.

Table 4: Cultural Signals of Class

	Low Status Taste	High Status Taste
Leadership Experience/ Community Involvement	Bowling League, Country Music Club	Tennis League, Classical Music Club
Interests / Hobbies	Bluegrass concerts, barbecuing, going bowling	Playing tennis, jazz festivals, gourmet cooking

Applicant gender was signaled through stereotypically male and female names listed at the top of the résumés. To signal a male gender, applicants were assigned the names “Scott Ryan” or “Jack Miller.” To signal a female gender, applicants were assigned the names “Hannah

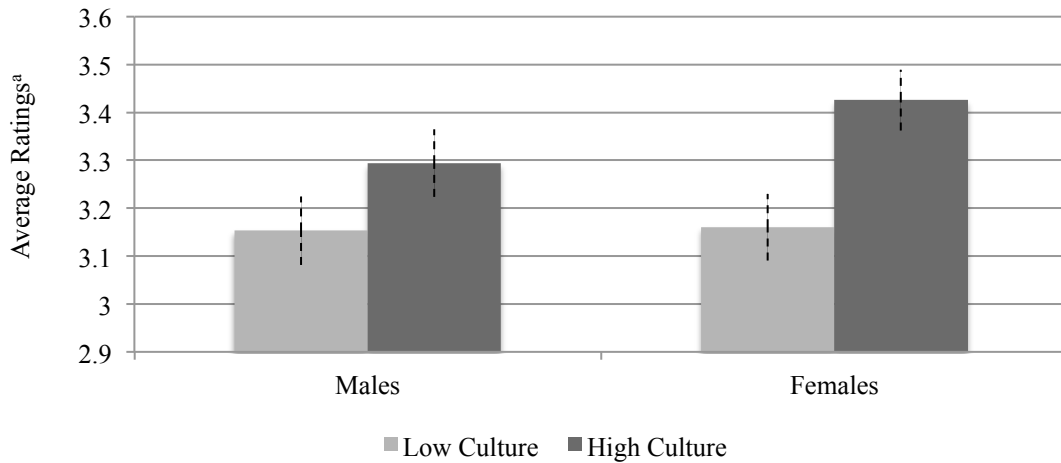
Ryan” or “Sarah Miller.” According to a survey of 100 U.S. residents conducted on Mechanical Turk, the names Scott, Jack, Hannah, and Sarah are all perceived, on average, as middle class. The last names I used were based on the last names identified as stereotypically white in Bertrand and Mullainathan’s (2004) study of racial discrimination in hiring.

Survey data confirm that playing tennis and listening to classical music and jazz are significantly more prevalent among high-SES Americans than among low-SES Americans while going bowling and listening to country music and bluegrass are significantly more prevalent among low-SES Americans than high-SES Americans.² Additionally, a preference for classical music frequently co-occurs with a preference for jazz and a preference for country music frequently co-occurs with a preference for bluegrass.³ To verify that these combinations of high versus low status cultural taste are also perceived as signals of differing class positions, I surveyed 401 U.S. residents on Mechanical Turk. Each respondent was provided a résumé with a male or female applicant gender and signals of high or low status cultural taste. Average ratings of social class are presented in Figure 2.

Analyses of variance confirm that, for both the male and female applicants, signals of cultural taste have a statistically significant effect on perceptions of social class. Both applicants are perceived as middle class, but, at significant levels ($F=8.73$, $p<0.01$), respondents perceive applicants with high status cultural tastes as closer to upper-middle class than applicants with low status cultural tastes, who are generally perceived as lower-middle class. Though the positive effect of high status taste on perceptions of social class does appear to be greater for women than men, the interaction of cultural taste and gender is not statistically significant.

Apart from these manipulations, the résumés listed near-identical occupational histories and educational backgrounds. Both applicants had Bachelor of Arts degrees from small and

Figure 2: Average Perceptions of Class



Note: Dashed lines represent standard errors.

^aThe ratings reported above are based on a scale where 1=Poor, 2=Working Class, 3=Lower-Middle Class, 4=Upper-Middle Class, and 5=Upper Class

similarly ranked liberal arts colleges with high acceptance rates in Michigan or Ohio. They also listed approximately two years of employment experience as an administrative or office assistant at a catering company or ticket agency. Lastly, they listed a series of computer skills, including proficiency in MS Word, Adobe, Quickbooks, and Mac OSX. To ensure that respondents did not detect the experimental manipulation, the résumés varied moderately in their wording and formatting. Two résumé formats were used.

The résumés also included near identical contact information. Each résumé listed a home address. These addresses were within a few blocks of one another in the same zip code. I chose zip codes that were relatively affordable for the city and were centrally located within the city, since a short commute time was listed as qualification for some jobs.

Google email accounts and Google Voice accounts were created for each applicant in each city so that employers could contact the applicant via phone or email and I could track

employers' responses to the résumés. Each email address included the applicant's name followed by three random numbers. In each city, all phone numbers included the same area code. For each phone number, I set up a voicemail account with an outgoing message. I developed four short scripts and hired male and female U.S. residents on Mechanical Turk to provide a recording of himself or herself reading one of these scripts. I then set up active voicemail accounts using the highest quality male recordings for "Brad Miller" and "Scott Ryan" and the highest quality female recordings for "Sarah Miller" and "Hannah Ryan." All voice actors had American English, non-Southern accents.

The assignment of résumé format, educational background, occupational experience, applicant gender, and cultural taste was randomized and counterbalanced. I conducted pilot studies on Mechanical Turk to confirm that, apart from the cultural tastes they listed, applicants were equivalent in their perceived levels of competence and demeanor. I also interviewed seven senior-level managers about the résumés to ensure that they were comparable, realistic, and conventional in their presentation.

4. Results

To adjust for dependency in observations for each employer, the results of this experiment were analyzed using a logistic regression model with standard errors clustered by the employer's ID. The dependent variable across models is binary—it is the presence or absence of a "positive callback," which refers to voicemail or email responses that included a formal request for an interview or a more informal request to discuss the hiring position in greater depth. Each model includes the same four predictors/controls—cultural taste, organizational status, job type,

and applicant gender—along with differing interaction terms to test Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a, or 2b. The output of these regression models can be found in Appendix A.

In Model 1, I test the Cultural Matching Hypothesis (H1a) by estimating the two-way interaction effect of cultural taste and organizational status. In Model 2, I test the Customer Matching Hypothesis (H1b) by estimating the three-way interaction effect of cultural taste, organizational status, and job type. In Model 3, I test the Unconditional Gender Role Hypothesis (H2a) by estimating the two-way interaction effect of cultural taste and applicant gender. In Model 4, I test the Conditional Gender Role Hypothesis (H2b) by estimating the three-way interaction effect of cultural taste, applicant gender, and job type.

According to an extensive literature, the statistical significance of interaction effects in non-linear models is best interpreted in terms of average marginal effects and cross-partial derivatives (Ai and Norton 2003; Norton et al. 2004). So, to interpret interaction effects, I report, in Table 5, the average marginal effect of the culture treatment across the factors with which it was interacted in each logistic regression model. As I note in Table 5, the Cultural Matching Hypothesis predicts that the culture treatment will have a positive marginal effect on likelihood of callback in high status organizations and a negative effect in low status organizations. The results of Model 1, however, are not statistically significant, so there is no statistical support for the hypothesis that organizational status moderates the effect of cultural taste.

According to the Customer Matching Hypothesis, this may be because organizational status only moderates the effect of cultural taste for entry into customer-facing jobs. In Model 2, I estimate the effects of cultural taste by organizational status and job type. As predicted, I find that, in high status organizations, the culture treatment's average marginal effect on probability of entry into customer-facing jobs (hiring condition 4) is positive and appears to be greater than

Table 5: Average Marginal Effect of Culture Treatment, Interacted with Organizational Status, Job Type, and Applicant Gender, on Likelihood of Positive Callback

Hiring Conditions	Predicted Effects	Observed Effects
<u>Model 1 (Cultural Matching)</u>		
1 - Low Status Org	-	0.007 (0.014)
2 - High Status Org	+	0 (0.013)
<u>Model 2 (Customer Matching)</u>		
Low Status Org		
1 - Non-Customer-Facing Job		-0.007 (0.024)
2 - Customer-Facing Job	-	0.014 (0.018)
High Status Org		
3 - Non-Customer-Facing Job		-0.018 (0.020)
4 - Customer-Facing Job	+	0.010 (0.016)
<u>Model 3 (Unconditional Gender Role)</u>		
1 - Male Applicant		-0.011 (0.012)
2 - Female Applicant	+	0.019 (0.015)
<u>Model 4 (Conditional Gender Role)</u>		
Male Applicant		
1 - Non-Customer-Facing Job		-0.007 (0.017)
2 - Customer-Facing Job		-0.014 (0.016)
Female Applicant		
3 - Non-Customer-Facing Job		-0.019 (0.025)
4 - Customer-Facing Job	+	0.040* (0.019)

Standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by employer ID

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

its effect on entry into non-customer-facing jobs across high and low status organizations (hiring conditions 1 and 3). However, its effect on entry into customer-facing jobs in low-status organizations (hiring condition 2) is also positive, which suggests that high status cultural traits are valued to a greater degree in customer-facing jobs regardless of organizational status. Additionally, none of the effects reported in Model 2 are statistically significant, so the Customer Matching Hypotheses ultimately receives no statistical support.

In Model 3, I explore the effect of cultural taste by applicant gender. The Unconditional Gender Role Hypothesis predicts that the average marginal effect of the culture treatment will be positive among women and greater among women than men. As expected, I find that the average marginal effect of high cultural taste on likelihood of callback is positive among women and negative among men. These effects, however, are not statistically significant, so the hypothesis receives no statistical support.

The Conditional Gender Role Hypothesis suggests that this may be because the gendered effect of cultural taste only emerges in customer-facing contexts. I test this prediction in Model 4 by calculating the average marginal effect of cultural taste among men and women applying to customer-facing versus non-customer-facing jobs. As predicted, I find that the effect of the culture treatment on women applying to customer-facing jobs (hiring condition 4) is positive and statistically significant, lending statistical support to the Conditional Gender Role Hypothesis. Meanwhile, the effect of the culture treatment on women applying to non-customer-facing jobs (hiring condition 3) and men across job types (hiring conditions 1 and 2) diminishes to negative and non-significant numbers.

The question I consider next is whether the effect of the culture treatment in hiring condition 4 is statistically significantly *more positive* than its effect in hiring conditions 1-3. In

Table 6, I compute cross-partial derivatives to evaluate the significance of these difference-in-differences. According to Table 6, the average marginal effect of high status cultural taste among women applying to customer-facing jobs (hiring condition 4) is, at statistically significant levels, more positive than its effect among men applying to customer-facing jobs (hiring condition 2).

Table 6: Cross-Partial Derivatives for Model 4 in Table 5

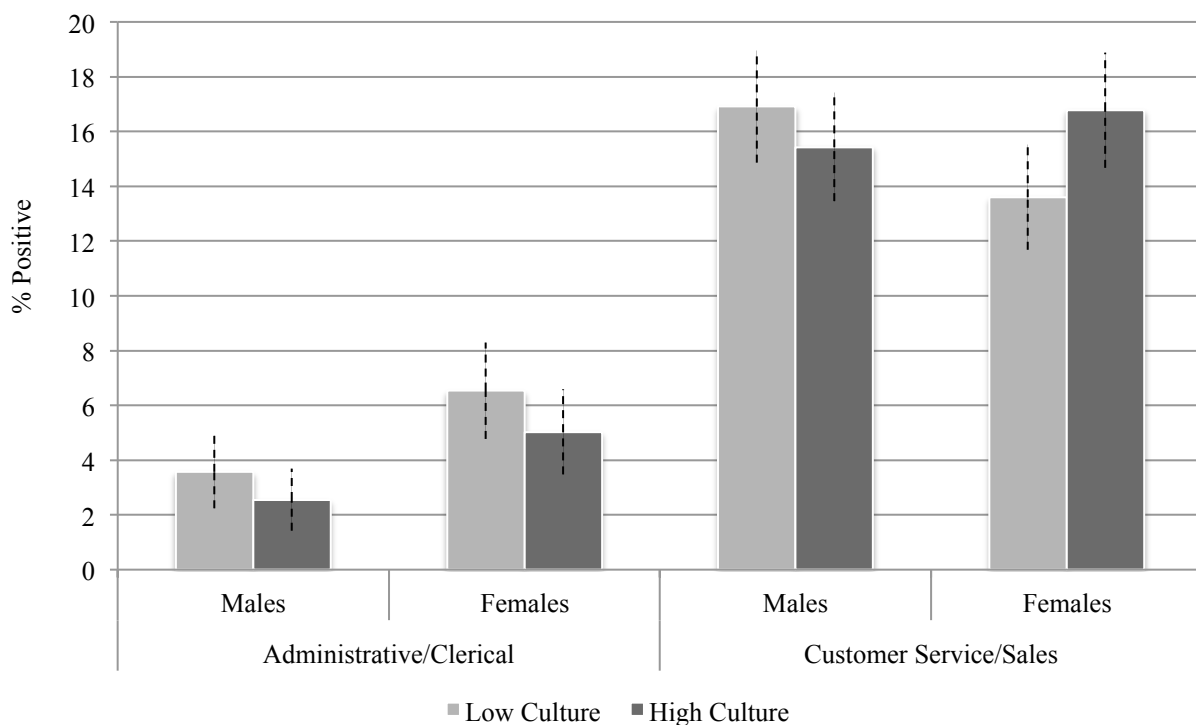
Hiring Conditions	Difference in Effect
4 vs. 1	0.046+ (0.026)
4 vs. 2	0.053* (0.025)
4 vs. 3	0.059+ (0.031)

Note: Hiring condition 4 = female applicant, customer-facing job
Hiring condition 3 = female applicant, non-customer-facing job
Hiring condition 2 = male applicant, customer-facing job
Hiring condition 1 = male applicant, non-customer-facing job
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, +p<0.10

I conclude that, for entry into customer-facing jobs, women are significantly more likely than men to be advantaged by high status cultural traits. I also observe a positive and marginally significant difference between hiring condition 4 and hiring conditions 1 and 3, which suggests that the effect of high status cultural taste among women applying to customer-facing jobs is systematically more positive than its effect among both men and women applying to non-customer jobs. Together, these findings provide evidence that applicants with high status cultural tastes are more likely to receive preferential treatment from employers if they are (1) women and (2) applying to customer-facing jobs.

How do these probabilities translate into actual rates of positive callback? Figure 3 presents the average rates of positive callback for men and women applying to customer- and non-customer-facing jobs across all four cities. Here, one can see that the results of Table 5, Model 4, translate into a high status cultural advantage among women applying to customer-facing jobs: Women with high status tastes receive a higher response rate (16.77 percent) than women with low status tastes (13.61 percent), a difference in callback rates of approximately 20 percent. In other words, a higher status woman applying to a customer-facing job would need to submit 6 résumés to receive a positive response from an employer while a similarly qualified by lower status woman applying to a customer-facing job would need to submit 8 résumés.

Figure 3: Effect of Culture Treatment on Rates of Positive Callback



Note: Dashed lines represent standard errors.

The magnitude of this difference is similar to the magnitude of the effect of college selectivity, another measure of class, on the callback rates of white job applicants (Gaddis 2014). This means that, for women applying to customer-facing jobs, the relative advantage of signaling high status cultural taste versus low status cultural taste is equivalent to the relative advantage of listing a degree from an Ivy League college versus a state college. It is also equivalent to the magnitude of the effect of race on the callback rates of applicants from elite universities (Gaddis 2014) and it is approximately half the magnitude of the effect of race on the callback rates of applicants from non-elite universities (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004).

In Figure 3, one can see that the moderating effects of applicant gender by job context generate no significant difference in the callback rates of non-customer-facing job applicants and male, customer-facing job applicants. For non-customer-facing job applicants, this is due to an increase in the number of employers who preferred low status applicants to high status applicants. 50% of the employers who responded to the non-customer-facing job applicants with a positive callback contacted only the applicant with low status tastes while 30% contacted only the applicant with high status tastes. Meanwhile, the absence of a significant cultural effect among men applying to customer-facing jobs appears to be driven by an increase in the number of employers open to *both* high and low status applicants. Among those who responded to their customer-facing applicant with a positive callback, 15-20% of employers called back only the low or high status applicant while 65% called back both applicants.

It is important to note that female applicants, across job contexts, do not appear to be at a significant disadvantage in hiring compared to men. In fact, females applying to administrative and clerical positions, especially females with low status tastes, experience a higher rate of callback than men, regardless of their tastes. Whether these gendered outcomes would hold in a

more male-dominated occupational context—for example, among workers applying to analyst or computer technician positions—is a question worth further study.

5. Conclusion

The audit study presented in this chapter makes two important contributions to the sociological literature on culture, gender, and social stratification. First, I quantitatively measure a key form of class bias in the U.S. labor market: employment discrimination on the basis of cultural taste. Second, I identify social factors that moderate and mediate the patterns of employment discrimination I observe. While the effects of organizational status are non-significant, applicant gender and job context play a significant role in moderating the effect of cultural signals of class on labor market outcomes. In the chapter to follow, I take a closer look at the mechanisms that drive employers in one hiring context but not others to favor job applicants with high status cultural taste.

END NOTES

1. It is a popular view in the sociology of culture that cultural omnivorousness has supplanted high status cultural taste as the pattern of taste that most commonly characterizes and distinguishes U.S. elites (Peterson and Kern 1996). However, there is no evidence, to my knowledge, that cultural omnivorousness directly affects status attainment and has supplanted high status culture as a form of “capital” rewarded in institutions. Moreover, a recent article published by Peterson and Rossman (2015) suggests that the rise of omnivorousness as a status marker may have been short-lived. Since its peak in the 1990s, the prevalence of omnivorous cultural consumption has declined substantially and returned to pre-90s levels. Additionally, I find that U.S. residents attribute a significantly higher class position to individuals with varying, exclusively highbrow tastes than to individuals with varying omnivorous tastes. In the eyes of many U.S. residents, highbrow tastes appear to be the strongest cultural signal of an upper-middle class position. For the reasons detailed above, I use highbrow cultural indicators to signal a higher class position rather than omnivorous cultural indicators.

2. Survey data confirms that the cultural tastes I use to signal a higher class position are more exclusive to the class-advantaged than the cultural tastes I use to signal a lower class position. According to the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts 2012, the difference between college-educated and non-college-educated respondents in taste for classical music and jazz is larger and more positive than the difference in taste for country music and bluegrass. There is limited fine-grained data on the relationship between social class and sports participation. However, according to the American Time Use Survey 2014, educational background is negatively correlated, at significant levels, with going bowling on a daily basis and positively correlated, at significant levels, with playing tennis. There is no fine-grained data, to my knowledge, on class differences in taste for barbecue and gourmet food.
3. According the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts 2012, the correlation between a preference for classical music and a preference for jazz music is 0.42. The correlation between a preference for country music and bluegrass music is 0.33.

Appendix A: Logistic Regression Output

Odds Ratios Measuring the Effect of High Status Cultural Taste on Odds of Positive Callback

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
High Cultural Taste	1.085 (0.185)	0.882 (0.368)	0.899 (0.104)	0.827 (0.416)
High Status Organization	1.907** (0.414)	0.804 (0.391)	1.831** (0.349)	1.817** (0.347)
Customer-Facing Job	1.089 (0.202)	1.105 (0.206)	0.947 (0.196)	2.008 (1.041)
Female Applicant	3.801*** (0.892)	1.715 (0.678)	3.803*** (0.893)	5.316*** (2.386)
High Cultural Taste X High Status Org	0.921 (0.181)	0.742 (0.467)		
High Cultural Taste X Customer-Facing Job		1.300 (0.591)		1.096 (0.565)
High Status Org X Customer-Facing Job		2.850 (1.547)		
High Taste X High Status Org X Cust-Facing Job		1.249 (0.827)		
High Cultural Taste X Female Applicant			1.317 (0.235)	0.886 (0.570)
Female Applicant X Cust-Facing Job				0.401 (0.227)
High Taste X Female Applicant X Cust-Facing Job				1.660 (1.108)
Constant	0.035*** (0.010)	0.067*** (0.024)	0.039*** (0.011)	0.029*** (0.013)
Observations	1,754	1,754	1,754	1,754
Number of employers	877	877	877	877

Note: “High Taste” is an abbreviation for “High Cultural Taste”; “Cust-Facing Job” is an abbreviation for “Customer-Facing Job”; “High Status Org” is an abbreviation for “High Status Organization”

Standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by employer ID

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

CHAPTER SIX

Mechanisms of Class Discrimination: A Survey Experiment

1. Introduction

The results of the audit study, detailed in Chapter Five, are twofold. On the one hand, I find that applicants with high status cultural tastes experience a significantly higher probability of positive callback if they are women applying to customer-facing jobs. On the other hand, I find that this probability becomes consistently negative and non-significant among male and/or non-customer-facing job applicants. I now consider the mechanisms that lead employers in one context but not others to favor applicants with high status cultural traits. The sociological and psychological literature point to three possible mechanisms: perceptions of competence, perceptions of demeanor, and perceptions of warmth

The preliminary survey-experimental results outlined in Chapter Four reveal that people in the U.S. generally favor job applicants with high status tastes because they perceive them as more competent than their lower status peers. Building on these findings, I distributed a more extensive survey experiment to a national sample of 1,428 U.S. hiring managers. In the experiment, respondents were asked to evaluate two job applicants seeking a (customer-facing or non-customer-facing) position at a (high or low status) hotel. Respondents were provided two résumés, the same résumés used in the audit study. On average, respondents reported a greater interest in interviewing applicants with high status cultural tastes, particularly those hiring for customer-facing positions. Furthermore, I find that this preference for high status applicants is driven primarily by perceptions of demeanor and, secondarily, by perceptions of competence. Hiring managers are more likely to interview applicants with high status tastes because they

expect them to be more articulate and sophisticated than their lower status peers. Yet, when differences in perceived demeanor are held constant across applicants, it is revealed that hiring managers actually prefer applicants with low status cultural tastes, largely because they perceive them as warmer and more likable.

I conclude that the differing effects of high status cultural signals on callback rates for women versus men, customer-facing versus non-customer-facing job applicants, may be explained by their differing effects on perceptions of demeanor versus warmth. I propose that hiring in the mid-skill labor market is characterized by class-based representations of cultural hierarchy, as employers attribute a more sophisticated demeanor to workers with high status cultural traits. However, this cultural hierarchy is only consequential in contexts where concern for demeanor is high: in the hiring of female, customer-facing workers, the social group for whom style of self-presentation constitutes a form of workplace competence traditionally desired by employers (Collins 1971; Collins 1992; Hochschild 1979; Williams and Connell 2010). Meanwhile, where concern for demeanor is low—for male and/or non-customer-facing workers—a greater number of employers display an openness to applicants they like personally and perceive as warm, and those applicants, at least in the mid-skill labor market, have lower status cultural traits.

2. Theories and Hypotheses

2.1. Evaluations of Competence

While studies suggest that individuals' cultural tastes affect their social outcomes, the mechanisms that drive their effect remain largely understudied. Bourdieu (1973; 1984) long theorized that cultural practices and tastes shape educational outcomes because they

systematically bias the levels of competence teachers and gatekeepers attribute to students. Students with high status cultural traits are favored in schools, Bourdieu posits, because their cultural traits are perceived as a form of social and technical competence. Likewise, evaluations of *competence*, defined here as one's ability to complete a task successfully (Fiske et al. 2002), are found to be important bases for employer decision-making at the hiring interface. Studies show that it is often on the basis of perceived competence or skill that employers report a general preference for those with high status characteristics, including workers who are white, male, and unmarried (Correll 2007; Moss and Tilly 2001).

H1 (Competence Hypothesis): Cultural signals of class affect hiring evaluations because they influence perceptions of competence.

2.2. Evaluations of Demeanor

More recently, studies of hiring have also begun to highlight the importance of *demeanor*, defined here as style of self-presentation, to hiring evaluations and labor market success (Kirschenmann and Neckerman 1991; Moss and Tilly 2001; Williams and Connell 2010). Often, employers seek out workers who are not simply able to complete tasks but who communicate and present themselves in a manner deemed appropriate and professional. In middle-class occupations, studies show that employers desire workers who are assertive, articulate, polished, and well-mannered—workers who have a style of speaking, acting, and looking that will help them fit into a white-collar workplace. In Bourdieusian theory, these dimensions of demeanor, or comportment, are conceptualized as key forms of cultural capital. Like cultural tastes, they are a means through which class advantages are expressed and made socially consequential in interactions and institutions (Bourdieu 1984; 1986).

According to Collins (1971), employers want to hire workers who they perceive to have socially acceptable cultural values and legitimate styles of self-presentation (Williams and Connell 2010). Such considerations of demeanor are also particularly important to employers hiring for customer-facing jobs and/or elite organizations (Collins 1971). Studies show that “emotion work,” which includes displays of politeness, friendliness, and deference in interaction, is often an unstated job requirement for work in such job and organizational settings (Hochschild 1979; Macdonald and Sirianni 1996). It is also a form of labor more commonly perceived as “natural” for female workers than male workers (Macdonald and Sirianni 1996). Employers, however, cannot observe an applicant’s demeanor by looking at his or her résumé. Therefore, it follows that they must rely on cultural cues in résumés to form expectations of demeanor.

H2 (Demeanor Hypothesis): Cultural signals of class affect hiring evaluations because they influence perceptions of demeanor.

2.3. Evaluations of Warmth

Lastly, cultural signals of class may affect labor market outcomes because they influence perceptions of *warmth*. In the social psychological literature, warmth refers to a series of traits (including sincerity and trustworthiness) that reflect one’s likability and intentions (Fiske et al. 2002). Rivera’s study of cultural matching in hiring suggests that employers seek out workers they connect with personally and perceive to be likable—workers whose personalities they believe are well-suited for their firm (Rivera 2011; 2012; 2015). Often, these perceptions of likability are intertwined with perceptions of class and culture. According to Rivera (2012; 2015), hiring managers in elite professional service firms tend to attribute greater likability to job candidates with similarly elite cultural traits and backgrounds. Whether these elite cultural traits

are perceived as signals of likability, or warmth, in less elite labor markets, however, is unclear. Employers in the mid-skill labor market may instead feel an affinity for job applicants with more mainstream, non-elite cultural traits and favor them at higher rates. Alternatively, the levels of warmth attributed to high and low status cultural traits in the mid-skill labor market may vary according to the status of the organizations to which employers belong.

H3 (Warmth Hypothesis): Cultural signals of class affect hiring evaluations because they influence perceptions of warmth.

3. Data and Methods

To test these above hypotheses and identify the social-psychological mechanisms through which cultural signals of class shape labor market outcomes, I distributed a web-based survey experiment to a nationwide sample of 1,428 hiring managers drawn from a pre-existing panel of HR/Personnel Services managers maintained by the research company ResearchNow.

Sample: Key demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. The sample is predominantly white, female, middle-aged, and highly educated—fairly close to the national average for hiring managers—but it is not a random sample, so it is possible that employers with certain kinds of industry backgrounds, hiring experiences, and/or personality traits are over or underrepresented in the survey. Still, with a sample of hiring managers, this survey improves significantly upon prior survey-experimental studies of hiring, which have typically drawn on samples of undergraduate or MBA student populations. In this study, respondents are hiring professionals—they make hiring decisions on a daily basis and bring a median job tenure of 13 years to their survey responses.

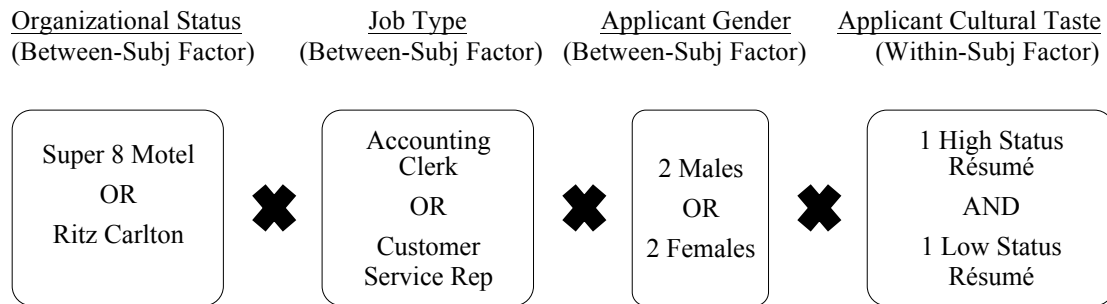
Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Experiment Sample

Individual Respondent Characteristics	N=1,428
Female (%)	64.05
White (%)	86.62
B.A. or more (%)	71.55
Self-identified class (median)	Upper-middle
<u>Age (%)</u>	
18-34	11.84
35-59	66.15
60+	22
Job tenure (median)	13 years
Respondent Firm Characteristics	
<u>Industry (%)</u>	
Accommodation, Food Services	1.54
Administrative, Support	2.87
Agriculture, Forestry, Food	0.63
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	2.66
Construction	1.75
Education	13.38
Finance, Insurance	5.96
Government, Public Administration	13.31
Healthcare, Social Assistance	8.2
Information	2.1
Management of companies	1.12
Manufacturing	8.97
Mining	0.14
Professional, Scientific, Technical Services	9.95
Real Estate, Rental, Leasing	0.91
Retail	6.45
Transportation, Warehousing	2.24
Utilities	1.26
Waste Management, Remediation	0.07
Wholesale	1.96
Other	14.5
<u>Type of Firm (%)</u>	
Private-for-profit	59.15
Private-non-profit	14.58
Local government	6.73
State government	12.89
Federal government	4.48
Self-employed, Family business	2.17
<u>Number of Employees (%)</u>	
1-99	31.6
100-999	29.86
1000 or more	38.54

Moreover, the internal validity of the study remains intact because respondents were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. Ultimately, the strength of this survey experiment is not its generalizability but its ability to isolate, through tightly controlled conditions, the effect of cultural signals of class on the evaluative processes, or mechanisms, that drive employer decision-making.

Experimental Design: The survey experiment consisted of a 2 X 2 X 2 X 2 mixed factorial design, with three between-subjects factors and one within-subjects factor. As in the audit study, the between-subjects factors were occupation type and applicant gender with the addition of organizational status (which was measured post-hoc in the audit study). The within-subjects factor was applicant cultural taste. These factors are outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: 2 X 2 X 2 X 2 Factorial Design of Survey Experiment



The survey experiment was web-based and distributed to a nationwide sample of 1,428 hiring managers drawn from a pre-existing panel of HR/Personnel Services managers maintained by the research company ResearchNow. ResearchNow panel members are recruited through web-based programs (e.g. web banners and corporate email campaigns) that offer a variety of

incentives in exchange for participation in a panel. Respondents were offered an honoraria of \$4.00 in e-Rewards currency upon completion of the survey

Respondents qualified for the survey if they identified as (1) full-time or part-time employees, (2) who make decisions regarding whether or not to interview or hire job applicants, (3) were using a desktop computer, laptop, netbook, or tablet computer to take the survey, and (4) provided informed consent.

I excluded mobile device users to reduce the risk of receiving incomplete or low quality responses. Long surveys with matrix-type or open-ended questions do not always display well on a mobile device and are more difficult to complete on a mobile device.

In partnership with ResearchNow, I distributed the survey experiment in June 2014. 39,541 ResearchNow panel members were contacted via email and 4,292 clicked on the link to begin the survey. Of those 4,292 respondents, 2,241 were excluded from the survey because they did not meet at least one of the screening criteria detailed above. Of the remaining 2,051 respondents, 623 dropped out and did not complete the survey. The remaining 1,428 respondents completed the survey.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate two applicants seeking an entry-level position at a hotel. Each respondent was randomly assigned to one of eight possible hiring conditions: (1) the hiring organization was high in status (Ritz Carlton) or low in status (Super 8 Motel)¹, (2) the hiring occupation was either high in customer contact or low in customer contact, and (3) the gender of the two applicants was either male or female. The number of respondents assigned to each of these conditions is presented in Table 2.

Employers were then provided two résumés and asked to rate each applicant on a series of characteristics related to competence, demeanor, and warmth and to respond to a series of

Table 2: Number of Respondents Assigned to Each Between-Subjects Factor

	Super 8 Motel		Ritz Carlton Hotel		Total
	Accounting Clerk	Customer Service Rep	Accounting Clerk	Customer Service Rep	
Male Applicants	174	180	169	182	705
Female Applicants	180	172	181	190	723
Total	354	352	350	372	1,428

questions about employability and recommended job placement. As in the audit study, the order in which these résumés were shown and the résumé formats that were used were randomized and counterbalanced.

Likelihood of Interview Measure: Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert-type scale (1=not at all, 5=extremely) their response to the following question: “How likely would you be to recommend this applicant for an interview?”

Competence Measure: Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 5=a great deal), to what extent they feel the following traits are characteristic of the applicant: capable, competent, efficient, intelligent, and organized (Fiske et al. 2002; Correll et al. 2007). Mean competence ratings were developed based on this competence scale (Mean: 3.43; SD: 0.62; Alpha: 0.93)

Demeanor Measure: Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 5=a great deal), to what extent they feel the following traits are characteristic of the applicant: articulate, polished, professional, sophisticated. Mean demeanor ratings were developed based on this scale (Mean: 3.21; SD: 0.68; Alpha: 0.89)

Warmth Measure: Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 5=a great deal), to what extent they feel the following traits are characteristic of the applicant: friendly, good-natured, tolerant, trustworthy, warm, sincere (Fiske et al. 2002; Correll

et al. 2007). Mean warmth ratings were developed based on this scale (Mean: 3.35; SD: 0.63; Alpha: 0.92)

4. Results

The following analyses explore how cultural signals of class influence employers' perception and evaluation of job applicants. I first examine the effect of the culture treatment on respondents' expressed likelihood of recommending each applicant for an interview. I then examine the effect of the culture treatment on ratings of competence, demeanor, and warmth. To measure these effects, I created difference scores for all four dependent variables specified above. I subtracted survey responses to the résumé signaling low status tastes from survey responses to the résumé signaling high status tastes. These difference scores capture the differential effect of the two résumés on each dependent variable.

In the analyses detailed below, I conduct paired t-tests to measure the statistical significance of these effects. I then conduct analyses of variance to analyze how these effects vary according to the three between-subjects factors: applicant gender, job type, and organizational status. First, I conduct a 2X2X2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to analyze the effect of the between-subjects factors on difference scores for the main outcome variable: likelihood of interview. Second, I conduct a 2X2X2 Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to analyze the effect of the between-subjects factors on difference scores for the three mechanisms altogether: perceptions of competence, demeanor, and warmth. The results of these analyses of variance are summarized below. For more detail on the ANOVA and MANOVA output, see Appendix A.

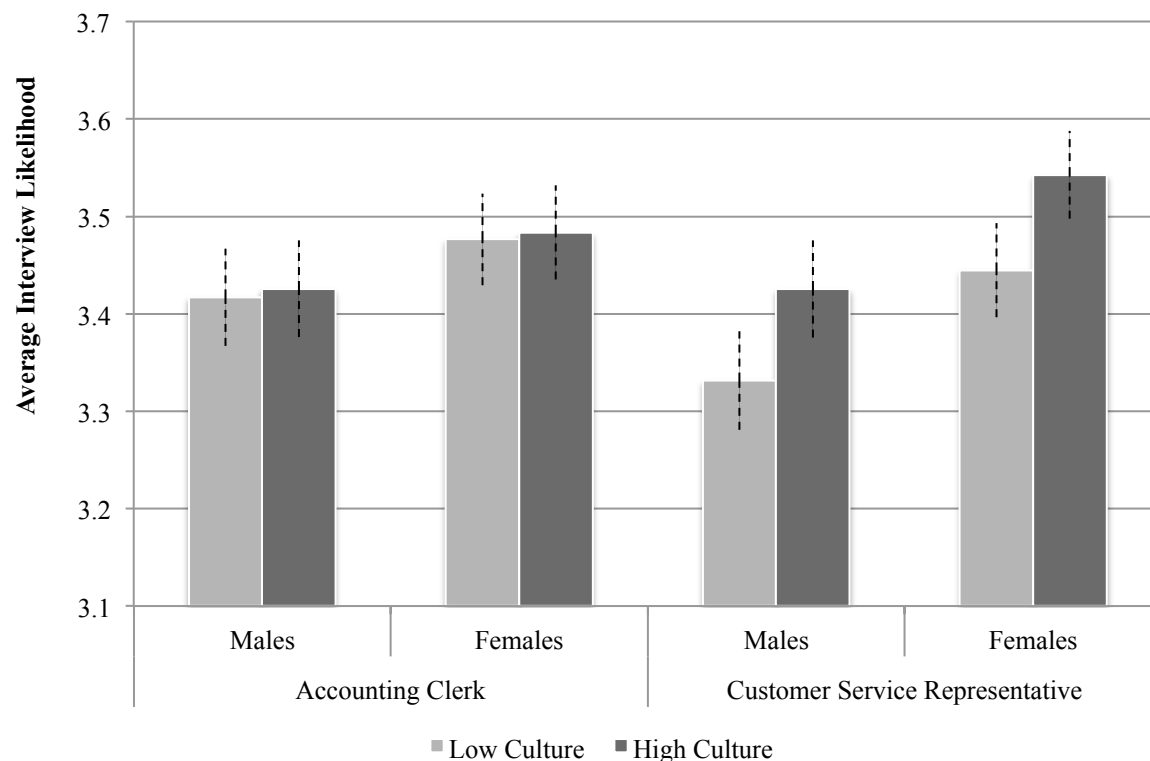
Finally, I examine the extent to which these ratings of competence, demeanor, and

warmth mediate the effect of the culture treatment on likelihood of interview. Difference scores are not used in this mediation analysis. Instead, I include the culture treatment as a predictor and I run linear random-effects models, using Hicks and Tingley's (2011) formal mediation analysis technique.

4.1. Main Analysis

A paired t-test confirms that, across hiring conditions, hiring managers in the survey experiment report a statistically significantly greater interest in interviewing applicants with high status cultural tastes. The average difference in likelihood of interview ratings for applicants with high versus low status cultural tastes is small but statistically significant ($\text{diff}=0.05$, $p=0.04$).

Figure 2: Effect of Culture Treatment on Likelihood of Interview



Note: Dashed lines represent standard errors.

As in the audit study, the effect of cultural taste appears to be driven by the survey responses of hiring managers assigned to the customer-facing hiring position. Figure 2 presents the mean values of “likelihood of interview” for male and female applicants with high and low status cultural tastes in the two job conditions: Customer Service Representative and Accounting Clerk. I find that applicants with high status cultural tastes are more likely to be favored if the hiring position is customer facing ($F=2.72$, $p=0.099$). This job effect is marginally significant and consistent with what I observe in the audit study. The effect of job type also appears to vary according to organizational status at marginally significant levels ($F=3.08$, $p=0.080$). For entry into the customer-facing position, respondents hiring for the Ritz Carlton were more likely to favor the applicant with high status cultural tastes than respondents hiring for the Super 8 Motel.

Signals of organizational status appeared to resonate with many hiring managers in the sample. For example, towards the end of the survey, one hiring manager remarked about a lower status female candidate: “More friendly, less snobbish, more fitting for working in a Super 8.” Another respondent, comparing the two applicants, offered the following comment about the female candidate with higher status tastes: “I think their prior experience is about the same. The first candidate may be more adept at communicating with the Ritz customers as her background has exposed her to more upper class related activities.” These quantitative and qualitative findings align with the hiring patterns predicted by the Customer Matching Hypothesis.

So, why do I observe no significant or positive moderating effect for organizational status in the audit study? It could be that other hiring considerations drown out the effects of organizational status on employer responses in a real labor market setting. From the survey experiment it is clear that employers are responsive to status signals and value cultural fit between customers and workers, particularly in high status firms. But when these employers are

hiring customer-facing workers for their own firms, they may opt to minimize uncertainty by relying on more traditional and hierarchical cultural criteria, regardless of firm status.

Alternatively, the absence of a moderating effect for organizational status in the audit study may be an artifact of the particular organizational status measure used. The within-industry signal of organizational status employed in the tightly controlled conditions of the survey experiment is, arguably, a stronger and more recognizable measure of status than the between-industry measure applied in the more heterogeneous context of the audit study. It is meaningful that, in the survey experiment, organizational status has a systematic effect on interview recommendations among hiring managers evaluating customer-facing workers. However, within- and between-industry measures of organizational status may work differently at the point of hire and only in an industry where the statuses of organizations are well documented and widely agreed-upon may an audit study be able to capture the effects of organizational status.

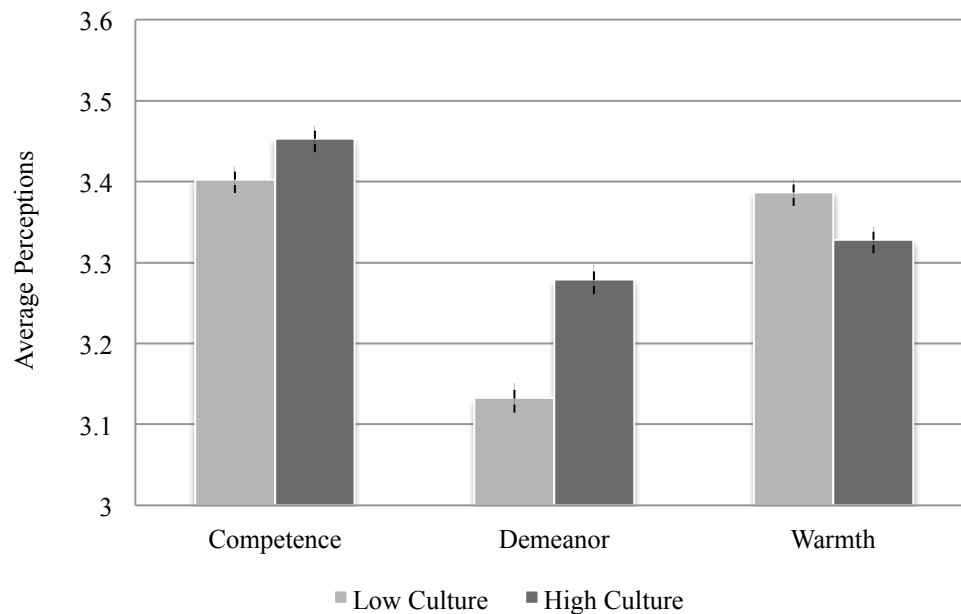
In the survey experiment, I do not find that the effect of the culture treatment varies in a meaningful way by applicant gender. In their evaluation of customer-facing women as well as customer-facing men, hiring managers report a greater likelihood of recommending applicants with higher status tastes for an interview. However, we know from the audit study that, at point of callback, the value employers place on high status traits only translates into greater selectivity in the hiring of women, not men. I conclude that employers' threshold for calling an applicant back is lower for male applicants than it is for female applicants. While, in the survey experiment, employers may express a preference for higher status men, at point of callback, they still give lower status men an opportunity to interview that is not significantly different from that of higher status men. Only in responding to female applicants for customer-facing jobs do

employers actively discriminate against those with lower status—evidence that, as the Conditional Gender Role Hypothesis predicted, the cultural standards applied to women are more stringent than those applied to men.

Depending on their threshold for positive callback, the hiring behaviors employers display in an audit study may not always reflect the applicant preferences they express in a survey experiment. Yet, what is notably consistent across both studies presented here is that, for customer-facing jobs, the culture treatment has a positive and statistically significant effect on the evaluation and selection of women. Employers are committed to interviewing higher status women for customer-facing positions. And why is this the case? I hypothesized that cultural signals of class would affect hiring evaluations largely because they bias perceptions of characteristics like competence, demeanor, and warmth. In Figure 3, I plot mean values for the perceived competence, demeanor, and warmth of male and female applicants across the hiring conditions. I test the significance of these differences in means using paired t-tests.

I find that signals of high status cultural taste have a significant and positive effect on perceptions of competence (diff=0.05, $p=0.001$) and perceptions of demeanor (diff=0.15, $p=0.000$). I also find that perceptions of competence and demeanor are highly correlated, with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.83. So, for both men and women, an applicant with low status traits is perceived not only as significantly less refined but as significantly less capable of performing routine work tasks than an applicant with high status traits (see Figure 3). Around ratings of warmth, however, signals of high status cultural taste do not maintain this positive effect. Hiring managers may expect high status workers to be more competent and refined than their lower status peers, but they do not expect them to be more likable. In fact, they perceive them as less likable, attributing statistically significantly lower levels of warmth to applicants

Figure 3: Effect of Culture Treatment on Perceptions of Competence, Demeanor, and Warmth



Note: Dashed lines represent standard errors.

with high status tastes than to those with low status tastes (diff=-.06, $p=0.000$). A 2X2X2 MANOVA confirms that the differential effect of the culture treatment on these perceptions of competence, demeanor, and warmth does not vary significantly by applicant gender, job context, or organizational status.

Ultimately, applicants with high status tastes may be the most respected of their peers but they are not the most liked—a phenomenon that has been well documented in the social psychological literature (Fiske et al. 2002; Judd et al. 2005). Studies show that a higher perceived status and greater perceived competence often come at the cost of one's perceived warmth (Judd et al. 2005). That said, hiring managers' affinity for applicants with lower status tastes also appears to be driven by their shared cultural background.

At the end of the survey, I asked respondents to rate, on a scale of 1 to 3 (where 1=dislike, 2=neither like nor dislike, and 3=like), their preference for the various cultural signals included

in the low and high status résumés. The low status cultural preferences I asked about were bowling, bluegrass music, and barbecuing. To develop a measure of their average taste for low status culture, I added their ratings for each low status signal and divided by 3. The high status cultural preferences I asked about were tennis, classical music, jazz, and gourmet cooking. To develop a measure of their average taste for high status culture, I added their ratings for each high status signal and divided by 4.

In Table 3, I estimate the extent to which respondents' own average taste for low or high culture moderates the effect of applicant cultural taste on perceptions of warmth, and I find that respondents' taste for lowbrow culture has a significant effect. Essentially, the more positive respondents' self-reported taste for low status culture, the less warmth they attribute to the applicant with high status tastes. This means that high status cultural taste has, on average, a negative effect on perceptions of warmth in Figure 3 because the majority of respondents feel favorably towards low status culture. In fact, the average rating of low status cultural activities by respondents is 2.35. Similarly, respondents' average rating of high status cultural activities is 2.33. So, the majority of respondents are omnivorous in their tastes, expressing either a tolerance or a preference for both high and low status cultural forms.

Only a small percentage of respondents—less than 2%—report a dislike for *all* low status cultural activities, and I find that these less culturally tolerant respondents attribute *greater* warmth to applicants with high status cultural tastes. Furthermore, among respondents with an average low status culture rating of “2”—a rating slightly below the mean—applicant cultural taste has no significant effect on perceptions of warmth. Both applicants are perceived as likable. This suggests that the warmth penalty applicants experience when they signal high status taste is probable but not inevitable, as it can vary according to the tastes of employers. It is probable,

Table 3: Effect of Applicant Cultural Taste on Perceptions of Warmth, Interacted with Respondent Cultural Taste

VARIABLES	Perceptions of Warmth (OLS)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Applicant High Cultural Taste	-0.059*** (0.015)	0.222* (0.092)	-0.138 (0.087)
Respondent Low Cultural Taste		0.158*** (0.040)	
App High Taste X Resp Low Taste		-0.120** (0.039)	
Respondent High Cultural Taste			0.070 (0.042)
App High Taste X Resp High Taste			0.034 (0.037)
Constant	3.387*** (0.017)	3.016*** (0.097)	3.224*** (0.099)
Observations	2,854	2,854	2,854
R-squared	0.002	0.008	0.006

Standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by respondent ID

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

especially in the mid-skill labor market, because low status cultural preferences are more prevalent in the U.S. and, with rise of omnivorousness, they are characteristic of both elites and non-elites. Yet, this penalty is not inevitable because, in the few hiring contexts where employers with exclusively highbrow tastes may predominate or in contexts where the majority of hiring managers feel ambivalent towards low status culture, I would expect applicants with high status tastes to be attributed equal if not greater levels of warmth than applicants with low status tastes.

4.2. Mediating Effects of Perceived Competence, Demeanor, and Warmth

To what extent can these ratings of competence, demeanor, and warmth help to explain the effect of the culture treatment on hiring managers' likelihood-of-interview ratings in customer-facing versus non-customer-facing contexts? Table 4 presents results from a formal

mediation analysis using an estimation technique developed by Hicks and Tingley (2011). Hicks and Tingley's method does not support the use of ordered logistic regression models for multilevel data, so I use a linear random-effects model in this analysis, with a random intercept included for the employer. Using this method, I average mediated and direct effects across respondents exposed to the low and high status culture conditions. If ratings of competence, demeanor, and/or warmth play a significant role in mediating the effect of the culture treatment on ratings of interview likelihood, I should find that they have a statistically significant average mediated effect and account for a statistically significant proportion of the total effect of the culture treatment presented in Table 4.

According to Model 1 in Table 4, the total effect of the culture treatment on interview ratings is statistically significant and positive, at a value of 0.054. Additionally, with a statistically significant coefficient of 0.046, perceptions of competence account for 81.9% of the culture treatment's effect. This model suggests that perceptions of competence are an important mediator of the effect of the culture treatment on likelihood of interview ratings. Hiring

Table 4: Average Marginal Effect of Culture Treatment on Likelihood of Interview, Mediated by Perceptions of Competence, Demeanor, and Warmth

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Mediator:	Perceived Competence	Perceived Demeanor	Perceived Warmth
Covariate:			Perceived Demeanor
Average Mediated Effect	0.046***	0.110***	-0.042***
Average Direct Effect	0.009	-0.056*	-0.017
Total Effect	0.054*	0.054*	-0.059*
Proportion Mediated	0.819*	2.011*	0.721*

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

managers express a greater interest in interviewing applicants with high status cultural tastes because they perceive them as more competent than applicants with low status cultural tastes.

Perceptions of demeanor, however, appear to be an even more powerful explanatory variable here. In Model 2, I find that the average mediated effect of perceptions of demeanor is a statistically significant value of 0.110—almost three times the effect of perceptions of competence—and accounts for 201% of the size of the culture treatment's total effect. When the mediating effect of perceived demeanor is adjusted for, the direct effect of the culture treatment not only diminishes but becomes statistically significantly negative, taking on a value -0.056. I conclude that hiring managers prefer applicants with high status cultural tastes largely because they expect them to have a more polished and refined demeanor. Yet, when perceptions of demeanor are adjusted for across applicants with high and low status tastes—essentially, when hiring managers are evaluating applicants who they perceive to have a similar demeanor—it is revealed that they have a greater interest in interviewing the applicant with lower status tastes.

And why might this be the case? Because hiring managers perceive lower status applicants as more likable. In Model 3, I find that, at statistically significant levels, the average mediating effect of perceptions of warmth accounts for 72.1% of the negative effect of the culture treatment on likelihood of interview when perceptions of demeanor are controlled for, reducing the direct effect of the culture treatment to a small and non-significant value. I conclude that the negative effect of high status tastes once perceptions of demeanor are controlled reflects respondent's positive valuation of warmth and their belief that people with higher social class backgrounds are less likely to be warm.

5. The Audit Study Revisited

How can these survey-experimental findings help us to understand the audit study findings presented earlier? Returning to the audit study findings presented in Chapter Five, I propose that the differing callback rates of women versus men, customer-facing versus non-customer-facing job applicants, reflect the social value of highbrow taste as a signal of a demeanor and competence pitted against its social cost as a signal of warmth. Furthermore, these findings illuminate the differing contexts in which signals of demeanor, competence, and warmth are more or less valued by employers.

Ultimately, high status cultural traits are valued the least where we theorized perceptions of demeanor to matter the least: in the hiring of male and/or non-customer-facing workers. In these contexts, the probability of a high status applicant receiving a positive callback is consistently negative and non-significant, as a greater number of employers favor the applicants they like personally and perceive as warm: applicants with lower status cultural tastes. Employers' openness to lower status applicants in this context suggests that, where standards of demeanor are more lax, a greater value is placed on the perceived warmth of lower status applicants—a value that competes with and sometimes surpasses the value placed on the perceived demeanor and competence of higher status applicants. When employers are minimally concerned with selecting workers with an upper-middle class demeanor (a key form of workplace competence in customer-facing contexts), more are inclined to hire workers with whom they expect to connect culturally and interpersonally—workers whose cultural traits connote greater affinity and likability—and in the mid-skill labor market these workers have popular, lower status cultural tastes.

Meanwhile, I find that signals of high status cultural taste are favored the most where we theorized perceptions of demeanor to matter the most—in the hiring of female workers (the social group for whom interactional labor is often an unstated form of workplace competence expected in service industries) for customer-facing jobs (where behavioral norms are often more tightly controlled in the workplace). For these workers, the positive effect of high status cultural taste on perceptions of demeanor, coupled with its consistently positive effect on perceptions of competence, appears to be so powerful and so prized that employers are suppressing any personal preference they might have for applicants with low status traits and favoring applicants with high status traits at higher rates.

This greater valuation of high status cultural traits among female, customer-facing job applicants lends support to the Conditional Gender Role Hypothesis. Additionally, the primary mechanism driving how cultural signals of class shape the labor market outcomes of U.S. workers appears to be concern for demeanor. In hiring contexts where concern for demeanor is theorized to be low, cultural affinity competes with cultural status, leveling the playing field between applicants and sometimes advantaging workers with lower status tastes. Meanwhile, in the hiring context where concern for demeanor is theorized to be high, cultural status trumps cultural affinity, to the systematic advantage of workers with higher status tastes.

6. Conclusion

Together, results from the audit study presented in Chapter Five and the survey experiment presented in this chapter reveal the hidden value of highbrow taste in the labor market and, simultaneously, its hidden cost. On the one hand, I find that applicants with high status cultural tastes experience a significantly higher probability of positive callback if they are

women applying to customer-facing jobs. On the other hand, I find that this probability becomes consistently negative and non-significant among male and/or non-customer-facing job applicants. Survey-experimental evidence suggests that these differing outcomes may be explained by the positive effect of high status cultural signals on perceptions of demeanor and competence and the negative effect of high status cultural signals on perceptions of warmth. Hiring managers may not like high status applicants as much as they like low status applicants, but when expectations of demeanor are high—as they traditionally have been for female, customer-facing workers—the positive effect of high status cultural taste on perceptions of demeanor, and the strong correlation between perceptions of demeanor and perceptions of competence, is so powerful that employers appear to suppress their relative dislike for high status applicants and favor them at higher rates.

In support of the Competence, Demeanor, and Warmth Hypotheses, I conclude perceptions of demeanor, competence, and warmth play a significant role in mediating the effect of cultural signals of class on interview recommendations. I propose that concern for demeanor fundamentally shapes whether and how employers use cultural signals of class to select job applicants. Where standards of demeanor are high, employers, faced with a diverse pool of applicants, are more likely to rely on rigid conceptions of cultural hierarchy to identify workers with an upper-middle class background and demeanor. Where standards of demeanor are low, a pattern more akin to cultural matching emerges, as employers across organizations opt for the workers who share their tastes and who we know them to like personally—workers with lower status cultural tastes.

END NOTES

1. Manipulation checks confirm that respondents perceived the Super 8 Motel as a hotel with low prestige and Ritz Carlton as a hotel with high prestige. On a prestige scale ranging from 1 to 3, the Super 8 received a score of 1.13 and the Ritz Carlton received a score of 2.85.

Appendix A: ANOVA & MANOVA Output

Table 1: ANOVA (Dependent Variable = Difference in Likelihood of Interview)

Source	Partial SS	df	MS	F	Prob>F
<u>Model</u>	6.428	5	1.286	1.31	0.256
High Status Org	0.596	1	0.596	0.61	0.435
Customer-Facing Job	2.667	1	2.667	2.72	0.099
Female Applicant	0.001	1	0.001	0	0.980
High Org X Cust Job	3.015	1	3.015	3.08	0.080
Female X Cust Job	0.001	1	0.001	0	0.980
Residual	1393.528	1,422	0.980		
Total	1399.955	1,427	0.981		

Table 2: MANOVA (Dependent Variables = Difference in Perceived Competence, Demeanor, Warmth)

Source	Statistic	df	F(df1,	df2) =	F	Prob>F
<u>Model</u>	0.990	5	15	3920.4	0.98	0.468
High Status Org	0.998	1	3	1420	0.83	0.479
Customer-Facing Job	0.998	1	3	1420	0.96	0.410
Female Applicant	0.997	1	3	1420	1.39	0.244
High Org X Cust Job	0.997	1	3	1420	1.25	0.291
Female X Cust Job	0.999	1	3	1420	0.49	0.691
Residual		1424				
Total		1427				

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

1. Summary of Findings

In this post-Recession era of limited mobility and increasing economic inequality, it is imperative that we consider the consequences of our class differences for how we are perceived and assigned value in social interactions and institutions. In the United States, signs of the judgments we make on the basis of social class are everywhere. They are implicit in our disdain for the “classless” and “crude” and our praise for the “classy” and “well-mannered.” They underlie our aversion to social policies that reward the “undeserving” poor. And yet, the notion that these class judgments could bias, even prejudice, how labor markets evaluate and distribute resources to individuals is fairly new to American sociology. Search the archives of the *American Sociological Review* for research on “class bias” or “class discrimination” in employment and one retrieves next to nothing. This dissertation aims address this gap in the sociological literature by examining how cultural signals of class influence the evaluation and selection of job applicants in the United States.

One of the challenges of studying class-based discrimination in a country where class is neither intellectually agreed-upon nor institutionally recognized is first defining what I mean by “social class.” To understand how beliefs about class organize and bias the hiring decisions of American employers, one must understand what Americans believe social class to be. In Chapter Two, I depart from objectivist approaches to class analysis by developing a measure of social class as it is socially constructed in everyday life. Based on sociological theory and original survey data, I propose that Americans systematically perceive individuals’ cultural tastes,

including their preferences for music, sports, and food, as indicators of social class.

I then provide evidence in Chapters Three and Four that these cultural signals of class systematically influence how Americans perceive and evaluate one another. Based on a survey-experimental study of the stereotypes associated with various music, sports, and food preferences, I find in Chapter Three that U.S. residents attribute a higher class position and, consequently, greater levels of competence to individuals with traditionally highbrow tastes, particularly highbrow univores. Meanwhile, I find that, in their evaluations of warmth, they express a high degree of tolerance and flexibility towards individuals with varying cultural tastes. Based on these findings, I propose that in a competitive, task-oriented context like the labor market, where perceptions of competence are likely to be weighed more heavily than perceptions of warmth, Americans will favor and reward individuals who signal exclusively highbrow tastes. I test this proposition in Chapter Four by measuring the effect of cultural, versus economic, signals of class on how U.S. residents evaluate job applicants. As predicted, I find that when differences in social class are conveyed through differences in cultural taste, respondents attribute greater employability to the applicant with higher status tastes, largely because they perceive him as higher class and more competent.

Having demonstrated that a class-based cultural bias exist in the U.S., Chapters Five and Six explore the extent to which this bias informs the hiring decisions of U.S. employers. Chapter Five's audit study of callback discrimination reveals that applicants with high status cultural tastes receive a significantly higher rate of callback from employers if they are (1) women and (2) applying to customer-facing jobs. Meanwhile, cultural signals of class have no significant effect on the callback rates of male and/or non-customer-facing job applicants. According to Chapter Six's survey-experimental study of hiring managers, these differing outcomes reflect the

differing contexts in which evaluations of demeanor, competence, and warmth are more or less valued by employers. Where standards of demeanor are high—in the hiring of female, customer-facing workers—employers, faced with a diverse pool of applicants, are more likely to rely on rigid conceptions of cultural hierarchy to identify workers with an upper-middle class background and demeanor. Where standards of demeanor are low—in the hiring of male and/or non-customer-facing workers—a pattern more akin to cultural matching emerges, as more employers across organizations opt for the workers they like personally and perceive as warm, workers with lower status cultural tastes.

2. Contributions and Further Questions

Overall, this dissertation makes four theoretical and empirical contributions to the sociological literature on class, culture, and labor market stratification. First, I establish cultural tastes as significant markers of social class in the U.S. While analytically distinct, I show that, in people's perceptions, status culture and social class are intimately intertwined. In doing so, I develop a theoretically grounded and empirically validated technique for signaling class in social experiments. While numerous experimental and qualitative studies have documented racial and gender biases in hiring, no comparable literature exists for social class. To build this literature, scholars need to devise empirically validated signals of class comparable to the signals of race and gender used in survey- and field-experimental studies of discrimination. The cultural signals of class I validate in this study are a starting point for future research. My findings also challenge class researchers to take the subjective understandings of individuals more seriously in their conceptualization of social class.

Second, I document the varying ways in which cultural signals of class influence social perceptions. I find that U.S. residents generally favor highbrow univores and disparage lowbrow univores in their appraisal of ability and intelligence. Yet, in their appraisal of whom to like and trust, they express a high degree of tolerance towards individuals with diverse cultural tastes, to the point of penalizing highbrow univores for their cultural exclusivity. While I draw on these findings in this dissertation to develop hypotheses regarding the effect of cultural signals of class on labor market outcomes, these findings have implications for social contexts beyond the labor market as well. Generally, they suggest that the social value of one's highbrow cultural preferences will vary according to the value placed on one's perceived competence versus one's perceived warmth.

Third, I quantitatively measure a key form of class bias in the U.S. labor market: employment discrimination on the basis of cultural taste. Before workers in the mid-skill labor market even make it to the interview stage, I find that they are evaluated on the basis of the cultural signals of their class background. Furthermore, it is not just investment in leisure but the *class-based content* of their leisure pursuits that matters to employers, and in ways that are gendered and job-specific. Investment in extracurricular activities perceived to be upper class bestows greater advantages for female, customer-facing job applicants than it does for male and/or non-customer-facing job applicants—evidence that U.S. employers acknowledge a shared hierarchy of taste and use it to make judgments about certain employees.

Fourth, I identify key factors that moderate and mediate the patterns of employment discrimination I observe. I find that, although there seems to be a broad consensus about status differences among tastes, they only matter to employers under certain conditions. Applicant gender and job context play a significant role in moderating the effect of cultural signals of class

on labor market outcomes. In customer-facing jobs, the cultural markers of class privilege are rewarded to a greater degree among female applicants than they are among male applicants. In other words, employers are more likely to discriminate against lower class women than lower class men, and in job contexts where women are more likely to seek work. This may help to explain why, in the U.S., patterns of social mobility are significantly lower for women than they are for men (Beller and Hout 2006; Urahn et al. 2012). In customer-oriented contexts like customer service and sales—two of the most common occupations for U.S. women, who are employed predominantly in the service industry (U.S. Department of Labor 2014)—the differing effects of cultural signals of class on men and women suggest that opportunities for mobility are more accessible to lower class men than they are to lower class women.

There are some limitations to this dissertation that warrant further consideration and research. First, the cultural model of class bias in hiring that I have proposed would benefit from more research on the effects of status culture on hiring evaluations and labor market outcomes. With experimental work, replication is crucial and it will be important to test the conclusions of this dissertation under differing experimental conditions. The effects I observe in Chapter Six's survey experiment, for instance, were generated under a particular set of hypothetical hiring conditions and their robustness to hiring scenarios outside of the hotel industry is presumed but unknown. Additionally, while there appears to be a systematic relationship between perceptions of status, class, and hirability, it remains a question whether alternative signals of high and low status cultural taste will produce similar effects.

Furthermore, status culture is more than just taste. While the taste-based signals I develop in this dissertation are meaningful and socially consequential, they are still fairly weak signals of social class. The absence of significant differences in the callbacks rates of female,

non-customer-facing job applicants and male applicants across job contexts may therefore mean one of two things: Either differences in perceived class never generate significant hiring inequalities for these workers or the signals I have developed are not capturing the ways in which significant hiring inequalities are reproduced.

At the point of application, there are a limited number of ways in which an applicant's class background may be expressed. Yet, interactional style, accent, speech cadence, style of dress, and bodily comportment are all cultural markers of class with differing gender norms that may be conveyed if not in a résumé then in a phone screen or job interview. Class may be an important lens through which employers in the U.S. evaluate job applicants but the labor market outcomes that result may vary according to the class information applicants provide and the class information employers seek. Additionally, it is important to note that the cultural effects I observe in this study reflect only a portion of the effects of social class origin on labor market outcomes. In non-experimental conditions, differences in cultural taste compound and perhaps interact with a number of other class-based differences among job applicants, including disparities in educational attainment, college selectivity, and work experience.

The hiring model I have developed in this dissertation also suggests further investigation of the effects of job context and organizational status. Customer contact is likely only one of the many dimensions of job context that moderate the effect of cultural signals of class on hiring evaluations. For example, in female-dominated job contexts, employers may draw more heavily on cultural criteria to distinguish between female applicants, but in male-dominated job contexts, where female applicants are fewer in number, employers may be less inclined to draw on such criteria. Additionally, while I do not find evidence in the audit study that the effects of cultural signals of class vary significantly according to my proxy for organizational status, this finding

may be an artifact of the between-industry measure I employ. The effect of the within-industry measure of organizational status employed in the survey experiment is only marginally significant but it is large and moves in the direction predicted by the Customer Matching Hypothesis, warranting further research. An audit study of how signals of class shape labor market outcomes in an industry where the statuses of organizations are well documented and widely agreed-upon would allow for a stronger, within-industry measure of organizational status akin to the one I develop in the survey experiment.

Lastly, the moderating effects of applicant gender and job context in this study raise questions about the relationship between cultural signals of class and other demographic and contextual factors, such as race and region. It is up for debate to what extent the cultural signals of class I develop in this chapter would be as consequential for black or Hispanic workers, for whom considerations of race or ethnicity may trump considerations of social class. A study of how cultural signals of class interact with signals of race/ethnicity in the labor market could help to address this. Future work could also examine how cultural signals of class shape labor market outcomes in regions where we might expect alternative conceptions of cultural hierarchy to predominate: for instance, in more rural communities, in Silicon Valley, or in the South.¹

These limitations aside, however, the survey and audit study findings presented in this dissertation offer unique insight into the cultural content of American class bias and the gendered nature of its labor market consequences. Bourdieu (1986) once referred to status culture as “no doubt the best hidden form” of the hereditary transmission of class advantage in institutions. Indeed, while some have questioned the value of status cultural markers to U.S. workers, I offer concrete experimental evidence that status differences in cultural taste are fairly agreed-upon

markers of social class difference and a significant basis for employment discrimination in U.S. hiring.

3. Ethical Implications

The cultural biases I observe in this dissertation pose significant barriers to labor market entry for lower class women applying to customer-facing jobs. Whether these biases may be considered unethical, however, is up for debate. For one, social class is neither an institutionally recognized nor legally protected status in the United States. In fact, some scholars have expressed discomfort with my use of the term “discrimination” to describe the hiring attitudes and behaviors I observe. Can class discrimination exist in a country where class was never protected to begin with?

Class-based conceptions of cultural hierarchy are also so ingrained in the U.S. that many would argue that cultural signals of class are a legitimate basis for hiring. A prominent stratification researcher once asked me what was problematic about favoring an applicant with high status cultural tastes. Isn't a person who consumes classical music more intelligent than a person who consumes country music? Isn't cultural capital simply a form of human capital?

To treat cultural signals of class as measures of human capital is, I would argue, to “misrecognize” cultural hierarchies that are fundamentally arbitrary as reflecting objective differences in the quality of cultural forms and the quality of the people who consume them (Bourdieu 1984). That said, many of the hiring managers surveyed in Chapter Six asserted that an applicant's cultural knowledge and taste could influence their job performance in customer-facing contexts. Approximately 54% of the hiring managers assigned to the customer-facing hiring position agreed with the statement that the kind of music, sports, and food a customer

service representative knows about and/or likes could affect how good they are at their job. Only 11% of hiring managers assigned to the non-customer-facing hiring position agreed with this statement.

One might conclude that hiring decisions made on the basis of cultural taste are therefore rational calculations of future productivity made on the basis of human capital. And yet, I observe no significant correlation between respondents' agreement with the above statement and their actual hiring evaluations. Employers evaluated workers on the basis of their cultural traits regardless of whether or not they felt those traits had any practical use. Additionally, in their comments at the end of the survey, many employers cited not cultural skill but class-based stereotypes related to competence and demeanor, as well a fundamental aversion to low status culture, to account for their hiring decisions. Examples of their comments include:

- "I admit I am sort of turned off by the country music reference and the economics degree."
- "Partial to classical music."
- "I can't get over the bowling."
- "Applicant one just seems to be a little more polished than applicant two. His interests are a little more sophisticated, which fits in better with what the Ritz Carlton is about."
- "I think her interest in bluegrass speaks to her character which is probably tolerant and trustworthy."
- "Her involvement with classical music is a plus. She comes across as sincere and hard-working."
- "This is a real reach without at least speaking over the phone first, but perhaps the musical interest in classical versus the other applicant's interest in bluegrass music may indicate a slightly higher level of sophistication."

The dilemma of exposing this cultural bias in employment is deciding what to do about it. One pragmatic response would be to invest in school or job training programs that improve

access to the kinds of cultural knowledge favored by employers in middle class occupational settings. And yet, to promote the assimilation of workers into an upper-middle class cultural ideal would be to legitimate the cultural hierarchy driving employers to discriminate in the first place.

A more transformative solution would be to promote greater tolerance for cultural differences related to class in the workplace. Whether it is our responsibility to protect and accommodate these differences is the question. When scholars conceive of diversity and equity in institutions, class is a category of cultural difference that is often overlooked (Appiah 1994; Appiah 2005; Kymlicka 1995; Taylor 1994). This is a problem, I contend, when the class differences we convey through our cultural practices and tastes systematically bias the value we assign and the resources we distribute to one another. At the very least, this dissertation compels us to take culture more seriously as a dimension of social class and a basis for social class discrimination in the United States.

END NOTES

1. Given the popularity of country music among residents of the South, one concern is that the low status cultural signals I develop in this study will have a different effect on labor market outcomes in the South. To test for regional variation in my survey experimental findings, I examined the effect of the culture treatment on likelihood of interview ratings for employers who report residing in a Southern state. The interaction of the culture treatment with living in the South is negative but not statistically significant. In other words, while the effect of high versus low status cultural taste on hiring evaluations remains positive, it is, in fact, weaker among hiring managers who live in the South. This finding supports my expectation that the degree to which cultural tastes shape hiring evaluations is informed by the degree to which those tastes are social class differentiators.

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