



Disentangling Effacement, Omnivore, and Distinction Effects on the Consumption of Cultural Activities: An Illustration *

MORRIS B. HOLBROOK **

Graduate School of Business, Columbia University, New York, NY 10024

MICHAEL J. WEISS

Geodemographer and Author, North Potomac, MD 20878

JOHN HABICH

Minneapolis Star Tribune, Minneapolis, MN 55405

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Abstract

Recent studies of cultural activities in America have stressed the importance of three sorts of phenomena: (1) a *boundary-effacement effect* in which members of different classes are to some degree homogeneous in their preferences (colloquially, “some things are liked or disliked by everybody”); (2) an *omnivore effect* in which upscale people tend more than their more downscale counterparts to engage in or appreciate a broad variety of cultural activities (“some people like everything”); and (3) a *distinction effect* in which more upscale consumers use certain cultural habits as a way of marking their status-related differences from more downscale people (“different people from different backgrounds like different things to different degrees”). However, in arguing for one or another of these three phenomena and often favoring just one perspective over the others, various authors have tended to lose sight of how the three effects may operate simultaneously. We address the resulting confusion by proposing a simple conceptual schema that embraces all three phenomena in a manner not heretofore recognized and by providing an illustration of how we might disentangle these three effects in an empirical analysis of cultural activities.

Keywords: cultural preferences, boundary effacement, omnivores, distinction, status markers, class differences

1. Introduction

Questions concerning the nature of cultural preferences in general and their relation to social class in particular have concerned a large number of critical commentators and social

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** Please address correspondence to Morris B. Holbrook, Apartment 5H, 140 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10024, e-mail: mbh3@columbia.edu.

scientists (for comprehensive reviews, see Brantlinger 1983; Gans 1974; Holbrook 1999; Ross 1989; Strinati 1995; Washburn and Thornton 1996; Zolberg 1990). As reflective of the current scene in America today, we believe that the following three principal arguments have competed for attention and acceptance.

1.1. The Boundary-Effacement Phenomenon

First, in tune with the influence of postmodernism on the effacement of boundaries between high and popular culture (Featherstone 1991), some researchers have suggested that relatively more upscale and downscale consumers have come increasingly to resemble one another in their cultural likes and dislikes. For example, a study by Blau (1989) has indicated that, with rising levels of education and urbanization, Americans have moved toward a “universal culture” that has eroded many class- or status-based differences in tastes. Along similar lines, Halle (1993) has cast doubt on the old stereotypes concerning class-based “cultural domination” or “symbolic mastery” by showing that various comparatively “lowbrow” cultural preferences are common across all classes (e.g., landscape paintings and family photographs), whereas other more “highbrow” pursuits are favored by only a small minority of upscale consumers (e.g., abstract art). Further, in comparing French and American upper-middle-class consumers, Lamont (1992) has shown that the former (latter) attach greater importance to culture-based (income-based) status distinctions—perhaps reflecting an American tendency toward cultural egalitarianism, materialism, or even anti-intellectualism. The upshot of such findings and their setting within the context of post-modernity in the USA is a belief in the homogeneity of cultural preferences across class boundaries or, more colloquially, a faith in the proposition that “some things are liked or disliked by everybody.”

1.2. The Omnivore Argument

Second, other researchers have suggested that more upscale consumers tend omnivorously to appreciate a broader array of cultural objects or to engage in a wider range of cultural activities than their more downscale counterparts. For example, Peterson (Peterson 1992; Peterson and Simkus 1992) has found that Americans higher in occupational status (“omnivores”) differ from those lower in status (“univores”) by engaging more frequently in activities associated with *both* high culture (e.g., classical concerts, opera) *and* popular culture (e.g., mood music, big bands). Also, Peterson and Kern (1996) have demonstrated that this tendency for those appreciating highbrow culture (classical music and opera) to show “omnivorousness” in their musical preferences (also liking country, easy listening, and big bands) appears to have increased from 1982 to 1992. In a similar vein, Erickson (1996) has found that, in a work setting where the need for coordination eclipses the impetus toward domination, an advantage attaches to the pursuit of “cultural variety” (e.g., knowing about sports) in order to interact comfortably with a broad range of colleagues (e.g., maintaining effective teamwork). And Bryson (1996) has shown that the exclusiveness of musical tastes (i.e., disliking some genres) declines for better-educated Americans

(producing an association between class status and breadth of acceptance). These results in support of the omnivore argument, connecting more upscale consumers with a broader range of cultural preferences, might be paraphrased colloquially as suggesting that “some people like everything.”

1.3. Class-Based Distinctions

Third, social scientists and other commentators have long pointed to a potential connection of such class-related factors as income and education with preferences toward the higher end of the cultural hierarchy (DiMaggio 1986, 1992; Gans 1974; Levine 1988; Lynes 1955; Zolberg 1990). For example, empirical studies have shown repeatedly that U.S. audiences for the theater, concerts, and museums tend to be relatively upscale in socioeconomic status (DiMaggio 1987; DiMaggio et al. 1978; Zolberg 1992). Similar research conducted in France by Bourdieu (1984) has viewed taste as a status-marking pattern of preferences that reflect differences in “economic capital” (money, income, wealth) and “cultural capital” (family background, education, training) so as to signal class-based distinctions: “To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts . . . corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers [that] predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’” (pp. 1–2). Bourdieu’s empirical results have indicated that members of various classes—characterized by differing levels of economic capital (e.g., income) and cultural capital (e.g., education)—display corresponding (i.e., homologous) contrasts in cultural preferences (e.g., an upscale liking for “The Well-Tempered Clavier” by J. S. Bach versus a downscale liking for the “Blue Danube Waltz” by Johann Strauss). Similar findings in America—albeit on a smaller scale—have appeared in the work by Lindauer (1990, 1991a, 1991b) and Winston (1995) on contrasts between ordinary consumers and connoisseurs; in a quantitative survey by Holbrook (1995) of how highbrow (lowbrow) tastes appear to reflect a higher (lower) level of formal education; and in a qualitative ethnography by Holt (1997, 1998) on the relevance of cultural capital to meaning-related “embodied tastes” in such areas as clothing, housing, décor, travel, music, television, movies, reading, hobbies, and food. In short, this Bourdieu-influenced focus on cultural taste(s) as the marker(s) or concomitant(s) of class distinction(s) might be summarized by the motto “different people from different backgrounds like different things to different degrees.”

1.4. Preview

Advocates of the three perspectives just described have often given the impression that one of these three viewpoints dominates the others—in the sense that it most merits attention, that it best captures the empirical reality, or that it most deserves to be adopted for some other reason. Thus, certain researchers tend primarily to focus on boundary-effacement phenomena (Blau, Halle, etc.), the omnivore argument (Peterson, Bryson, etc.), or class-based distinctions (Bourdieu, DiMaggio, etc.), respectively. Never, to our knowledge, has anyone suggested that all three effects might operate concurrently—in other words, that we might simultaneously find (1) boundary effacement (“some things are liked or disliked

by everybody”), (2) omnivorousness (“some people like everything”), and (3) distinction (“different people from different backgrounds like different things to different degrees”). Yet it appears to us that, conceptually, these three positions are mutually consistent rather than inconsistent. It follows that we must take some pains to show how this simultaneity can occur and how it can be assessed in a manner not heretofore recognized. We shall therefore begin by presenting a conceptual schematic representation of the effacement, omnivore, and distinction effects. Then we shall demonstrate how, using appropriate methods, the three phenomena can be disentangled empirically. It is important to emphasize at the outset that we intend our presentation as an illustration of a method for examining the relevant conceptualization rather than as a comprehensive survey of this broad and complex research area.

2. Conceptual Schema

One way of conceptualizing the effacement, omnivore, and distinction effects in a mutually consistent manner would proceed as follows. Let us imagine a simple society that consists of just two market segments (upscale and downscale) who pursue just two cultural activities (highbrow and lowbrow) to varying degrees. Here, obviously, we abstract from reality by assuming that there are only two social strata of interest (up/downscale) and that activities can be clearly distinguished as making different demands on customers’ endowments of cultural and economic capital (high/lowbrow). Given this simplified conceptualization, a schematic representation of the effacement, omnivore, and distinction effects—where these phenomena occur simultaneously in a manner that satisfies their earlier definitions—appears in Figure 1A.

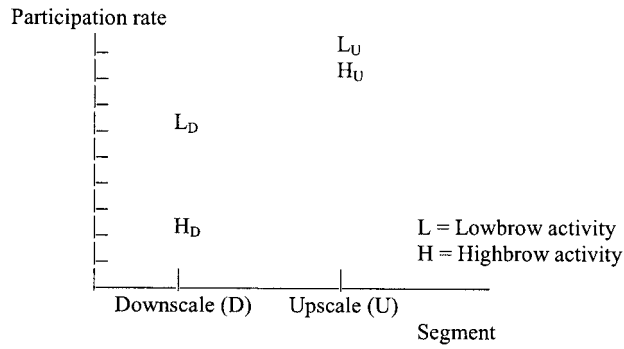
First, as introduced earlier and as now portrayed diagrammatically in Figure 1A, the *effacement* effect occurs insofar as the lowbrow activity (L) is preferred to the highbrow activity (H) by both the downscale segment (D) and the upscale segment (U): in short, $L_D > H_D$ and $L_U > H_U$. To repeat, colloquially, “some things are liked or disliked by everybody.”

Second, as described previously and as now shown in Figure 1A, the *omnivore* effect occurs insofar as the upscale segment (U) participates in both the highbrow and lowbrow activities (H and L) to a greater extent than does the downscale segment (D): that is, $H_U > H_D$ and $L_U > L_D$. Again, to paraphrase, “Some people like everything.”

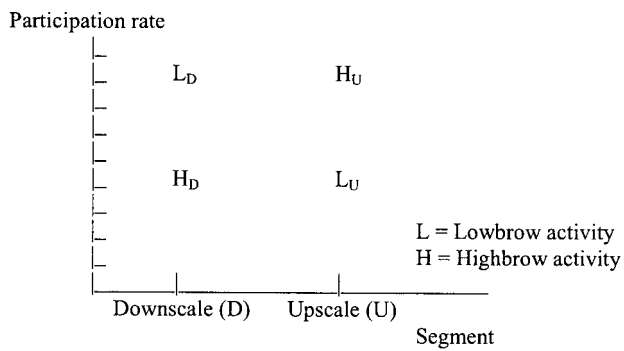
Third, as already explained and as further indicated by Figure 1A, the *distinction* effect appears insofar as an *interaction* ($HL \times UD$) occurs between the highbrow-lowbrow contrast (HL) and the upscale-downscale split (UD) such that the difference in participation between the upscale and downscale segments (U versus D) is greater for the highbrow activity (H) than for the lowbrow activity (L): thus, $(H_U - H_D) > (L_U - L_D)$. Briefly, in everyday language, “different people from different backgrounds like different things to different degrees.”

Notice that the effacement, omnivore, and discrimination effects are in some sense *competing* explanations of variance in cultural preferences. Under different scenarios, they could make relative contributions different from those just described. For example, as

A. ALL THREE EFFECTS OCCURRING SIMULTANEOUSLY



B. DISAPPEARANCE OF THE EFFACEMENT AND OMNIVORE EFFECTS DUE TO AN EXTREMELY STRONG DISTINCTION EFFECT



C. DISAPPEARANCE OF THE DISTINCTION EFFECT DUE TO EXTREMELY STRONG EFFACEMENT AND OMNIVORE EFFECTS

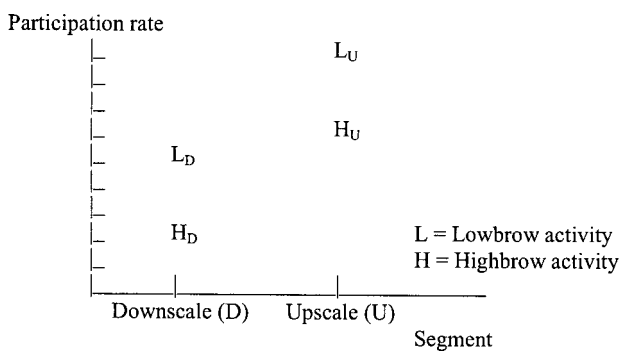


Figure 1.

shown in Figure 1B, the effacement and omnivore effects could disappear in the context of an extremely strong distinction effect—e.g., where $(H_U - H_D) > 0$ and $(L_U - L_D) < 0$. By contrast, as shown in Figure 1C, the distinction effect could disappear in the context of extremely strong effacement and omnivore effects—e.g., where $L_D > H_D$, $L_U > H_U$, $L_U > L_D$, $H_U > H_D$, $(L_U - H_U) = (L_D - H_D)$, and $(L_U - L_D) = (H_U - H_D)$. Hence, the extent of the relative contributions due to variance explained by the effacement, omnivore, and distinction phenomena becomes an empirical question to be determined by an appropriate method for disentangling the three effects statistically.

Specifically, in the present simplified conceptualization, the *effacement* phenomenon is represented by the *main effect* of the highbrow-lowbrow activity type (HL): $[(L_D + L_U)/2] - [(H_D + H_U)/2]$ (that is, the difference in participation rates between lowbrow and highbrow activities). The *omnivore* phenomenon is represented by the *main effect* of status-based segments defined by the upscale-downscale split (UD): $[(L_U + H_U)/2] - [(L_D + H_D)/2]$ (that is, the difference in participation rates between upscale and downscale segments). And the *distinction* phenomenon is captured via the activity-by-status *interaction effect* (HL \times UD): $[(H_U - H_D) - (L_U - L_D)]$ (that is, the difference in the extents to which upscale/downscale segments favor highbrow/lowbrow activities). Based on the schema in Figure 1, these latter observations suggest the approach that we shall follow in illustrating how the three phenomena may occur simultaneously (Figure 1A) or not (Figures 1B and 1C) and may be estimated in data pertaining to the distribution of cultural preferences. Here, to repeat, our purpose is to illustrate an approach for examining a conceptual schema rather than to provide fully representative coverage of (say) cultural tastes in America.

3. Illustration

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Data. Data for the present study came from Claritas, Inc. (Arlington, VA). As described by Claritas (1995), this research firm has drawn on information provided by the U.S. Census to build a clustering of geographic areas—census blocks (typically 25–50 households) and block groups (typically 250–550 households)—based on their demographic and socioeconomic profiles. The company's PRIZM system then relates these census-based geodemographic clusters to additional market data collected at the zip-code and zip-plus-four-code levels (the latter averaging 12 households in size) to examine consumption-based lifestyle differences among the various census-based geodemographic clusters—as revealed, for example, through market responses gathered by Nielsen, Simmons, Polk, Mediamark, NFO, and others. The census-based geodemographic clusters have evolved in number from 40 in 1973 to 62 at present (Claritas 1995) and have served as the basis for numerous studies aimed at the prediction, explanation, or interpretation of variations in consumption patterns among the clusters (see, for example, Weiss 1994, 2000; for a review, see Holbrook 2001). In short, the procedure behind the Claritas census-based geodemographic clustering and its application to the analysis of zip-code-

based consumption-related PRIZM data (Claritas 1995), appears in the following quote by a company representative:

PRIZM's foundation is U.S. Census data. Factor analysis of census data revealed several dozen demographic and lifestyle variables in six categories that explain most of the statistical variance between neighborhood types: social rank, household composition, mobility, ethnicity, urbanization, and housing. Cluster analysis of these factors produced the basic neighborhood types. These basic clusters were tested . . . and calibrated with actual consumer purchase data . . . We TEST the census-based data using consumption data (Kessler 2001).

3.1.2. Sample of 35 Selected Cultural Activities. Drawing on these Claritas/PRIZM data and consistent with the illustrative purposes of the present paper (with no claim to full representation across a comprehensive array of cultural consumption), we selected a subset of 35 leisure- and buying-related cultural activities comprising two sub-categories from a larger multiple-category list of 100 activities (involving several additional cultural categories) previously employed for different purposes in another study (Weiss et al. 2001). For this illustrative convenience sample of 35 leisure and buying activities (with engagement levels specified by Claritas), we compiled new data (not previously examined) for participation rates across the 62 census-based geodemographic clusters. The relevant subset of 35 cultural activities—listed alphabetically by abbreviations (with the overall participation rates specified by Claritas shown parenthetically)—is as follows:

Adult-Ed—Take Adult-Education Courses (7.8); Aerobics—Do Aerobics (10.1); Auto-Racing—Go to Auto Races (5.8); Billiards—Played Billiards/Pool (11.1); Bingo—Play Bingo (5.9); Bowling—Go Bowling (11.5); Buy-Class'l—Buy Classical Music (6.9); Buy-Country—Buy Country Music (12.2); Buy-Dance—Buy Dance Music (5.3); Buy-Jazz—Buy Jazz Music (4.9); Buy-Rap—Buy Rap Music (4.4); Buy-Soft-Rock—Buy Soft Rock Music (6.7); Buy-Xian—Buy Christian/Faith Music (4.4); Casino—Go to Gambling Casinos (20.9); Coll-Ball—Go to College Football Games (6.9); Computer-Book—Bought Computer Books (10.6); Dine-Out—Dine Out (16.2); Exercise—Exercise at a Club (8.4); Fishing—Go Fresh Water Fishing (14.8); Go-Dancing—Go Dancing (12.5); Golfing—Go Golfing (10.8); Go-Movie—Attend Movies Weekly (3.0); Go-Perf—Attend Music/Dance Performances (23.1); Hockey—Go to Ice Hockey Games (5.1); Hunting—Go Hunting with a Gun (5.9); Museum—Visited Museum (14.1); On-Line—Use an On-Line Computer Service (8.1); Pro-Football—Go to Pro Football Games (2.6); Rent-Vid—Rent Videotapes Weekly (8.5); Romance-Book—Bought a Romance (8.1); Sci-Fi-Book—Bought Science Fiction (4.9); Skiing—Go Downhill Skiing (3.8); Theater—Go to Live Theater (14.1); Theme-Park—Visit Theme Park (26.1); Zoo—Zoo Attendance (13.4)

3.1.3. Upscale–Downscale Split. To define an illustrative status-based distinction among relatively more upscale-vs.-downscale geodemographic clusters differing in income and education, we split the 62 clusters into two approximately equal-sized groups—*downscale* (below the means on both income and education, $N = 30$) and *upscale* (above the mean on income and/or education, $N = 32$).

3.1.4. Analysis. The multivariate analysis needed to estimate the relative contributions of the effacement, omnivore, and distinction effects to explaining variations in participation rates across the 35 cultural activities and among the 62 geodemographic clusters applied MANOVA (between status levels defined by the upscale-downscale split) to the repeated-measures design (across activities within clusters). This analysis allowed for assessing the main effect of effacement (differences in participation rates among activities), the main effect of omnivorousness (differences in participation rates between upscale and downscale clusters), and the interaction effect of distinction (the activity \times status interaction). After establishing the comparative strength and significance of these main and interaction effects in repeated-measures MANOVA, we examined the specific participation rates and individual univariate significance tests related to the main and interaction effects across the 35 activities and between the two status levels.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Effacement Effect. As shown in Table 1, the effacement effect proved to be both strong in terms of explained variance ($\eta^2 = 0.815$) and statistically significant ($F_{34,2040} = 264.692$, $p \ll 0.0001$). The first column of Table 2 indicates that, in line with the effacement phenomenon, some activities have high overall participation rates: Visit Theme Park (26.2), Go to Music/Dance Performances (23.2), Go to Gambling Casinos (21.0), Dine Out (16.0), Go Fishing (14.3), and so forth. Others attain only comparatively low rates of participation: Go to Pro Football Games (2.6), Attend Movies Weekly (3.2), Skiing (3.9), Buy Rap Music (4.5), Buy Christian/Faith Music (4.3), and so forth. In sum, this spectrum of

Table 1. Condensed MANOVA Results for Effects of the Upscale–Downscale Split on Repeated Measures of Participation Rates in 35 Cultural Activities

| | Significance Tests | | | Effect Size: Eta-Squared (η^2) |
|--|--------------------|----------|---------------|--|
| | F-Value | df | p-Level | |
| Effacement effect (within clusters across activities) ^a | 264.692 | 34, 2040 | < 0.000000001 | 0.815 |
| Omnivore effect (between status levels) ^b | 3.998 | 35, 26 | 0.0002 | 0.843 |
| Distinction effect (activity \times status interaction) ^c | 19.181 | 34, 2040 | < 0.000000001 | 0.242 |

^a The test reported here assumes “sphericity”—i.e., that the error covariance matrix of the orthonormalized transformed dependent variables is proportional to an identity matrix. Actually, the data do not pass Mauchly’s test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 1860.317$, $df = 594$, $p \ll 0.001$). However, the corrected Greenhouse–Geisser (GG) and Huynh–Feldt (HF) tests produce results similar to those shown in the main body of the table—namely, $F_{GG} = 264.692$, $df_{GG} = 6.937, 416.243$, $p_{GG} \ll 0.0001$; $F_{HF} = 264.692$, $df_{HF} = 8.068, 484.089$, $p_{HF} \ll 0.0001$.

^b Because this is a two-group comparison, all four multivariate test statistics (Pillai’s Trace, Wilks’ Lambda, Hotelling’s Trace, and Roy’s Largest Root) produce identical F-values with the same degrees of freedom.

^c Corrected tests again produce results similar to those shown in the table—namely, $F_{GG} = 19.181$, $df_{GG} = 6.937, 416.243$, $p < 0.0001$; $F_{HF} = 19.181$, $df_{HF} = 8.068, 484.089$, $p_{HF} < 0.0001$.

Table 2. Univariate Tests for Effects of the Upscale–Downscale Split on Combined Activity Level and on Participation Rates for Each of the 35 Separate Activities (Listed in Order of Effect Size)

| Activity | Participation Rates | | | | Effect Size | | Significance | |
|---------------|---------------------|-------|---------|-----------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | Overall | SE | Upscale | Downscale | Difference in SEs | Eta-Squared (η^2) | F-value (df = 1,60) | p-Level |
| Combined | 9.661 | 0.155 | 11.226 | 8.095 | 20.20 | 0.630 | 102.278 | < 0.00000001 |
| Hunting | 5.6840 | 0.402 | 4.5209 | 6.9246 | -5.98 | 0.130 | 8.959 | 0.004 |
| Bingo | 5.9495 | 0.248 | 5.4280 | 6.5057 | -4.35 | 0.073 | 4.722 | 0.03 |
| Fishing | 14.3345 | 0.599 | 13.4865 | 15.2391 | -2.93 | 0.034 | 2.141 | 0.15 |
| Auto-racing | 5.6419 | 0.193 | 5.4611 | 5.8348 | -1.94 | 0.015 | 0.936 | 0.34 |
| Buy-rap | 4.5171 | 0.267 | 4.6406 | 4.3853 | 0.96 | 0.004 | 0.228 | 0.63 |
| Romance-book | 7.9720 | 0.217 | 8.0924 | 7.8435 | 1.15 | 0.005 | 0.328 | 0.57 |
| Buy-country | 11.8458 | 0.503 | 12.2114 | 11.4558 | 1.50 | 0.009 | 0.565 | 0.46 |
| Pro-football | 2.6382 | 0.137 | 2.8178 | 2.4466 | 2.71 | 0.029 | 1.822 | 0.18 |
| Buy-Xian | 4.3276 | 0.177 | 4.5870 | 4.0509 | 3.03 | 0.037 | 2.297 | 0.13 |
| Go-movie | 3.1902 | 0.197 | 3.5419 | 2.8150 | 3.69 | 0.054 | 3.401 | 0.07 |
| Bowling | 11.5352 | 0.417 | 12.5422 | 10.4612 | 4.99 | 0.094 | 6.240 | 0.02 |
| Sci-fi-book | 4.9261 | 0.165 | 5.3318 | 4.4933 | 5.08 | 0.097 | 6.458 | 0.01 |
| Coll-ball | 7.0057 | 0.320 | 8.1485 | 5.7868 | 7.38 | 0.185 | 13.579 | 0.0005 |
| Billiards | 11.3542 | 0.443 | 12.9593 | 9.6422 | 7.49 | 0.190 | 14.032 | 0.0004 |
| Dine-out | 15.9988 | 0.487 | 18.1693 | 13.6836 | 9.21 | 0.261 | 21.202 | 0.00002 |
| Zoo | 13.4562 | 0.414 | 15.3388 | 11.4481 | 9.40 | 0.269 | 22.044 | 0.00002 |
| Go-dancing | 12.6552 | 0.361 | 14.3242 | 10.8750 | 9.55 | 0.276 | 22.873 | 0.00001 |
| Buy-dance | 5.5129 | 0.242 | 6.7178 | 4.2276 | 10.29 | 0.306 | 26.426 | 0.000003 |
| Adult-ed | 7.8340 | 0.250 | 9.0797 | 6.5052 | 10.30 | 0.306 | 26.408 | 0.000003 |
| Buy-jazz | 5.0636 | 0.246 | 6.3149 | 3.7289 | 10.51 | 0.314 | 27.514 | 0.000002 |
| Casino | 21.0416 | 0.503 | 23.5974 | 18.3154 | 10.50 | 0.315 | 27.618 | 0.000002 |
| Rent-vid | 8.4712 | 0.259 | 9.8414 | 7.0097 | 10.93 | 0.332 | 29.812 | 0.000001 |
| Buy-soft-rock | 6.6622 | 0.254 | 8.0358 | 5.1970 | 11.18 | 0.343 | 31.303 | 0.0000006 |
| Skiing | 3.8785 | 0.209 | 5.0873 | 2.5891 | 11.95 | 0.373 | 35.693 | 0.0000001 |
| Hockey | 5.0704 | 0.239 | 6.4611 | 3.5870 | 12.03 | 0.376 | 36.194 | 0.0000001 |
| Theme-park | 26.2095 | 0.617 | 29.8682 | 22.3068 | 12.26 | 0.385 | 37.554 | 0.00000007 |
| Aerobics | 10.1977 | 0.315 | 12.1705 | 8.0935 | 12.94 | 0.411 | 41.916 | 0.00000002 |
| Golfing | 10.5945 | 0.410 | 13.3110 | 7.6968 | 13.69 | 0.439 | 46.908 | 0.000000005 |
| Buy-class'l | 7.0013 | 0.317 | 9.2309 | 4.6230 | 14.54 | 0.468 | 52.882 | < 0.000000001 |
| Exercise | 8.6818 | 0.370 | 11.3662 | 5.8184 | 14.99 | 0.484 | 56.347 | < 0.000000001 |
| Museum | 14.4093 | 0.559 | 18.6913 | 9.8418 | 15.83 | 0.511 | 62.612 | < 0.000000001 |
| Theater | 14.1591 | 0.497 | 17.9951 | 10.0674 | 15.95 | 0.514 | 63.486 | < 0.000000001 |
| Computer-book | 10.5880 | 0.399 | 13.8628 | 7.0949 | 16.96 | 0.545 | 71.895 | < 0.000000001 |
| On-line | 8.2568 | 0.408 | 11.7349 | 4.5468 | 17.62 | 0.563 | 77.444 | < 0.000000001 |
| Go-perf | 23.2230 | 0.529 | 27.9438 | 18.1874 | 18.44 | 0.587 | 85.131 | < 0.000000001 |

participation rates creates a pattern of variation across activities consistent with a boundary-effacement phenomenon in which “some things are liked or disliked by everybody.”

3.2.2. Omnivore Effect. Table 1 also shows that—subject to considerations involving the direction of the overall relationship—the omnivore effect is also potentially strong

($\eta^2 = 0.843$) and significant ($F_{35,26} = 3.998, p = 0.0002$). Indeed, a strong tendency for upscale (downscale) clusters to show higher (lower) participation rates across activities ($\eta^2 = 0.630$) appears in the univariate test of the difference between combined activity levels (11.2 versus 8.1) shown by the first row of Table 2 ($F_{1,60} = 102.278, p \ll 0.0001$). Clearly, in the sense intended by the omnivore phenomenon, it turns out that “some people like everything” (where “everything” refers to the effect of the upscale-downscale split on combined participation rates).

3.2.3. Distinction Effect. The distinction effect appears in the moderately strong ($\eta^2 = 0.242$) but significant ($F_{34,2040} = 19.181, p \ll 0.0001$) overall activity x status interaction shown in Table 1. Examining this overall interactive pattern in Table 2 (where activities are listed in increasing order of upscale-downscale differences), we find that only two activities are pursued significantly more (less) frequently by downscale (upscale) clusters—namely, Hunting ($\eta^2 = 0.130, F_{1,60} = 8.959, p = 0.004$) and Bingo ($\eta^2 = 0.073, F_{1,60} = 4.722, p = 0.03$). By contrast, a large number of activities show significantly higher (lower) participation rates for more upscale (downscale) clusters. Focusing only on the seven strongest and most significant of these differences, these activities would include: Attending Music/Dance Performances ($\eta^2 = 0.587, F_{1,60} = 85.131$), Using an On-Line Computer Service ($\eta^2 = 0.563, F_{1,60} = 77.444$), Buying Computer Books ($\eta^2 = 0.545, F_{1,60} = 71.895$), Going to Live Theater ($\eta^2 = 0.514, F_{1,60} = 63.486$), Visiting Museums ($\eta^2 = 0.511, F_{1,60} = 62.612$), Exercising at a Club ($\eta^2 = 0.484, F_{1,60} = 56.347$), and Buying Classical Music ($\eta^2 = 0.468, F_{1,60} = 52.882$). Meanwhile, in between these two extremes, several activities may be deemed neither upscale nor downscale insofar as clusters on opposite sides of the upscale-downscale split do not pursue them to significantly differing degrees: for example, Going to Auto Races ($\eta^2 = 0.015, F_{1,60} = 0.936, n.s.$), Buying Rap Music ($\eta^2 = 0.004, F_{1,60} = 0.228, n.s.$), Buying a Romance ($\eta^2 = 0.005, F_{1,60} = 0.328, n.s.$), Buying Country Music ($\eta^2 = 0.009, F_{1,60} = 0.565, n.s.$), or Going to Professional Football Games ($\eta^2 = 0.029, F_{1,60} = 1.822, n.s.$). Taken together, this pattern of findings supports the distinction phenomenon in the sense that “different people from different backgrounds like different things to different degrees.”

4. Discussion

4.1. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As in virtually any investigation, especially one like the present that is intended primarily for purposes of illustration, the findings just reported are subject to various limitations in ways that suggest the need for further exploration in future research.

First, for the illustrative purposes noted earlier, we have simplified by splitting market clusters into just two levels of socioeconomic status, downscale and upscale, based on differences in income and education. It would, of course, be possible to consider a fuller multi-tiered representation of class structure (lower, working, lower-middle, upper-middle, upper, etc.). Also, the effects of other sociological determinants might be included—for

example, those of ethnicity, age, marital status, or population density. Further, using covariance analysis or some similar procedure, one could examine the impact of one variable (e.g., education) while controlling for the effects of others (e.g., income, etc.). Though beyond the scope of the present illustrative study, these possibilities all offer potentially worthwhile topics for future research.

Second, the 35 leisure- and buying-related activities included in our study for purposes of illustration cover only a tiny subset from the full spectrum of offerings and events relevant to a comprehensive understanding of cultural preferences. Future research should explore both more broadly and more narrowly defined sets of cultural activities. The former might include such culturally relevant pursuits as hobbies, collections, travel, social clubs, home furnishings, musical instruments, or animal companions. The latter might include such multifarious areas of cultural participation as television programs, motion pictures, magazines, radio broadcasts, musical compositions, or literature.

Third, we currently lack concepts or measures to track the objective features, observable attributes, or significant meanings of cultural offerings that explain why some activities are differentially pursued by those higher (lower) in economic and cultural capital (e.g., income and education). For example, what are the activity-specific characteristics or associations that make museums and the theater relatively preferred by more upscale geodemographic clusters, while hunting and bingo are relatively more favored by more downscale clusters? What measurable features or definable meanings make a cultural activity more “highbrow” or “lowbrow”? Identification and measurement of the relevant cultural features, characteristics, or meanings remain important tasks for future research.

Fourth, the data used in the present study portray the participation rates across 35 cultural activities among 62 census-based geodemographic clusters, as represented by information compiled at the aggregate cluster-based level of analysis. These aggregated data allow us to make statements to the effect that clusters higher in (say) income and/or education tend to participate relatively more frequently in such activities as (say) going to music and dance performances or using an on-line computer service. However, the cluster-level data do not permit comparable statements regarding the cultural activities of individuals or households at a more microscopic level of analysis. Future research should extend the approach illustrated here to this more disaggregated level of inquiry so as to gain further insights into how the effacement, omnivore, and distinction phenomena operate in the lives of individual cultural consumers.

4.2. Marketing Applications and Further Directions for Future Research

The most important application of the present focus in the area of marketing management concerns the issues of whether, when, and how to pursue the strategy of market segmentation. Clearly, products or brands associated with cultural activities for which we find strong degrees of omnivore or distinction effects are potential candidates for an approach based on selective or differentiated segmentation. By contrast, those subject to boundary effacement might lend themselves to mass marketing. With respect to the set of activities examined here, for example, offerings associated with hunting/computers might be

targeted at downscale/upscale segments, respectively, whereas (say) country music might have a more universal mass-marketable appeal. We hasten to add, however, that such substantive conclusions should *not* be drawn from the present study. Rather, our intent here has been illustrative in nature—as opposed to addressing specific managerial problems or making claims to general applicability. More refined marketing implications or those examining more representative sets of activities await the results of future research.

4.3. Conclusion

Subject to the aforementioned limitations and pending the results of future research, we conclude that the present illustration has supported our conceptualization of the possibility that the effacement, omnivore, and distinction phenomena may well operate simultaneously to extents whose relative degrees of strength and significance can be disentangled by means of the approach demonstrated here. Specifically, using Claritas data for 35 cultural activities pursued to varying degrees by 62 census-based geodemographic clusters, we find evidence in an illustrative repeated-measures MANOVA analysis for the strong and significant operation of effacement, omnivore, and distinction effects. This leads us to suggest that researchers might be well-advised to cease promoting any one of these phenomena at the expense of the others and to focus instead on hitherto neglected ways of investigating how they might operate simultaneously—thereby dictating a need, as explored here, for disentangling effacement, omnivore, and distinction effects on the consumption of cultural activities.

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