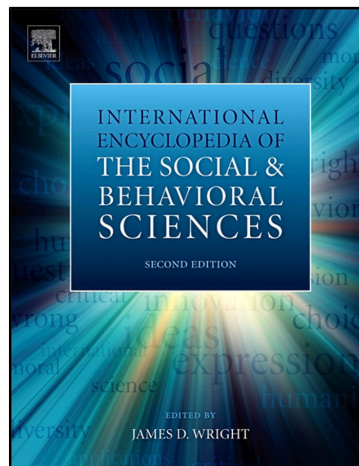


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## Cultural Participation, Trends in

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### Abstract

This article focuses on trends in cultural participation. How have the extent and the way in which people consume culture changed? Research shows that participation in highbrow culture remains relatively stable, whereas the consumption of popular, commercial culture has increased since the 1970s. A number of societal developments drive these evolutions in cultural participation. Sociodemographic changes, most notably educational expansion, as well as the rise of the entertainment industry and the Internet boom, greatly affect the field of artistic production, mediation, and consumption. These changes result in the shifting, or, as some argue, the erosion of esthetic boundaries, and the rise of the cultural omnivore – someone who participates in a variety of cultural activities – as provisional endpoints.

### Introduction

In this study of trends in cultural participation, we focus on how cultural practices have changed over the past few decades and on how the relationship between practices and position in the social hierarchy has evolved. Our research perspective owes a great deal to Pierre Bourdieu's research on cultural fields, cultural participation, distinction, cultural capital, and education. Bourdieu's work builds on Max Weber's idea of status cultures and on the distinction Durkheim makes between the sacred and the profane. Cultural participation ranges from high to low, from arts participation and consumption of highbrow cultural products (e.g., visiting museums, attending the opera, and reading books) to consumption of lowbrow products (e.g., listening to rock music or going to the movies). Since the publication of Bourdieu's *La Distinction* (1979), research on cultural participation has thrived, and empirical studies have shown recurring patterns across nations and times. Results consistently show that arts participation – defined here as the consumption of highbrow symbolic, artistic goods in the public and/or private sphere – is predominantly situated among the highly educated and the upper and middle classes. In the Bourdieusian paradigm, cultural participation is regarded as a manifestation of cultural capital, as a means of maximizing life chances and opportunities by accumulating and monopolizing scarce economic, social, and cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1986).

Since the 1960s – both in the United States and Europe – a number of evolutions have challenged the monopoly that arts participation has held as a means of ensuring and proclaiming a dominant social position. These include changes in the field of cultural production with the entertainment industry's rise, the advent of television, and the Internet's boom. Now, individuals have unprecedented access to a huge and varied supply of cultural experiences. Changes in cultural supply are paralleled by changes in the field of consumption. Large sociodemographic changes, such as educational expansion/democratization, the increase in women's labor force participation, and the aging of the population have placed additional strain on the monopoly and legitimacy of the prestigious highbrow arts as an essential part of an individual's *Bildung* – the idea that familiarity with the *beaux arts* is essential

to a person's upbringing. The deinstitutionalization of high culture (DiMaggio, 1987, 1991), in addition to the waning of cultural hierarchies, may have reinforced these trends. Studying trends in cultural participation is relevant for two reasons. It makes it possible (1) to document how the constitution of cultural capital may have changed, and (2) to probe the implications of this change for the dynamics of social reproduction and inequality.

### Trends in Participation: Facts and Figures

How has the frequency of cultural participation evolved over time and can changes be detected in audience composition? Rather unfortunately, one characteristic of research on trends in cultural participation is the scarcity of available data. Notable exceptions to this are found in the Netherlands, where the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) has conducted the Aanvullend Voorzieningsgebruik Onderzoek ("Amenities and Services Utilization Survey") every 4 years since 1979; in Denmark (Danish National Centre for Social Research 1975, 1987, 1993, 1998, 2004), and in the United States (Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) 1982, 1992, 2002, 2008; and the General Social Survey (GSS) 1993, 2002, 2010). Moreover, the activities recorded in most of these surveys are biased toward legitimate, highbrow genres, especially in the first waves. Additionally, it is unclear to what extent the categories used in questionnaires vary over time and across geographic boundaries (Marsden and Swingle, 1994; Peterson, 2005).

We present trends for four forms of cultural participation: attending classical concerts, visiting museums, reading books, and going to the movies. For Europe we use data on the Netherlands (Table 1). Data for the United States are shown in Table 2. The figures cannot accurately portray the complexities and specificities of all developments in the different genres. For a more and detailed discussion, we refer to Van Eijck and Knulst (2005) and to DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004).

The Dutch data reveal three parallel evolutions (Knulst and Kraaykamp, 1998; Van Eijck et al., 2002; Van Eijck and Knulst, 2005). First, the data show that, in general, participation in highbrow cultural activities has not decreased dramatically and that evolutions in participation depend on the particular

**Table 1** Trends in arts participation in the Netherlands: relative frequencies for attending classical concerts, reading books, attending museums, and going to the movies

	1979	1983	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007
<b>Attended classical concert during the past 12 months.<sup>a</sup></b>								
–45 years	9.7	10.6	10.8	12.0	10.0	8.3	7.9	7.9
+45 years	15.7	17.5	15.6	17.6	19.0	19.9	16.4	19.6
Total	11.6	13.0	12.5	14.0	13.4	12.9	11.7	12.9
<b>Read at least one book during the past month.</b>								
–45 years	71.8	72.7	68.7	67.6	64.1	63.0	57.5	57.8
+45 years	50.4	54.6	53.5	54.9	50.6	53.6	49.3	52.8
Total	65.0	66.4	63.4	63.0	59.1	59.3	53.9	55.6
<b>Visited a museum during the past 12 months.</b>								
–45 years	29.2	39.4	42.8	43.4	35.4	35.4	36.9	40.9
+45 years	21.1	27.9	32.5	36.7	33.4	39.8	39.4	42.4
Total	26.0	35.4	39.1	41.0	34.7	37.7	38.0	41.6
<b>Went to the movies during the past 12 months.</b>								
–45 years	62.3	62.5	58.1	61.2	64.7	69.7	73.5	72.9
+45 years	18.2	18.0	17.8	17.4	20.3	27.2	30.8	33.0
Total	48.1	47.0	43.8	45.1	48.0	53.0	55.6	55.7

<sup>a</sup>In the 1979 and 1983 rounds, this question includes both opera and classical music.  
SCP AVO (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, Aanvullend Voorzieningengebruik Onderzoek) 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007.

**Table 2** Trends in arts participation in the United States: Relative frequencies for attending classical concerts, reading books, and visiting art museums or galleries

	1982	1985	1992	2002	2008
<b>Attended a classical concert during the past 12 months.</b>					
–45 years	13.4	12.8	11.0	9.4	7.7
+45 years	12.5	12.5	14.4	13.9	10.9
Total	13.0	12.7	12.5	11.6	9.3
<b>Read at least one book during the past 12 months.<sup>a</sup></b>					
–45 years	–	–	63.8	57.2	54.0
+45 years	–	–	57.0	56.0	54.5
Total	–	–	60.9	56.6	54.3
<b>Visited an art museum or gallery during the past 12 months.</b>					
–45 years	25.6	24.8	29.4	26.3	24.5
+45 years	17.4	18.0	23.1	26.7	21.1
Total	22.1	21.9	26.7	26.5	22.7

<sup>a</sup>Not available in the 1982 and 1985 waves.  
Survey of Public Participation in the Arts 1982, 1985, 1992, 2002, 2008.

cultural genre or domain. Attending classical concerts and going to the opera (not shown), for example, remain stable at around 12 and 5%, respectively, whereas reading books has decreased over the last few decades. Since the 1970s, visiting rates for museums have risen from 26% in 1979 to 41% in 2007. Second, evolutions differ between generations: younger generations, aged 45 or younger, show a decreased participation in these forms of highbrow culture. In particular, reading books declines steeply, although it remains stable in older generations. And third, in addition to these trends in arts participation, participation in the popular, commercial culture in the Netherlands has increased over time, both for younger and older generations. The proportion of those going to the movies has been rising since the 1990s, from 45% in 1991 to 56% in 2007. This trend is corroborated by data from Denmark

where participation in popular, lowbrow public culture – such as attending pop concerts and going to the movies – has increased since 1975 (Jæger and Katz-Gerro, 2010; Katz-Gerro and Jæger, 2011).

In the United States, DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004), using SPPA data (1982, 1992, 2002), show similar evolutions. Participation in highbrow culture has declined since 1982 (see Table 2). This general decline is more substantial among younger cohorts and among highly educated groups in society. Table 2 shows that in 1982, 13% of the US population younger than 45 attended a classical concert the past year, compared with 8% in 2008. Comparable numbers for US citizens aged 45 or older are 13% in 1982 versus 11% in 2008. Two types of cultural participation – visiting art museums and attending jazz concerts – deviate from this general pattern as attendance of

these public practices has either remained stable or increased since 1982. The observation that museum attendance follows a distinct trend compared with other forms of cultural participation parallels findings in Europe, where Knulst has observed increased museum attendance since the 1950s in the Netherlands (Knulst, 1993; see also Table 1). DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004) consider the increased popularity of art museums and jazz to be an indication of the rise of the omnivore, a type of cultural consumer that has eclectic, inclusive tastes and shows interest in a broad variety of cultural practices, mixing lowbrow and highbrow cultural genres.

In the 1990s, Richard Peterson and his colleagues published a series of papers in which they show a marked shift in the cultural preferences of younger generations (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992). Between 1982 and 1992 the preference for folk and pop music increased for people who also enjoy classical music genres. This change is most evident in the younger cohorts. Peterson's thesis on omnivorousness has spurred researchers all over the world to empirically test this supposed shift from snob to omnivore, and that research has met with great success – omnivores are present in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia (e.g., Bryson, 1996, 1997; Coulangeon, 2005; Emmison, 2003; Erickson, 1996; Van Eijck, 1999). The cultural omnivore is generally young, highly educated, and from the middle and/or upper middle classes.

## Interpretations of Trends in Cultural Participation

To explain these trends, some scholars highlight the importance of changes in the field of cultural production and mediation, the degree of institutionalization of the arts in the educational system and state-subsidized cultural organizations. Other researchers focus on socioeconomic and cultural factors affecting the behavior of cultural participants. Given the macrosociological nature of most of these trends, many of these studies lack decisive or conclusive empirical evidence for most of their hypotheses. The insights presented in the overview therefore remain tentative and explorative.

### Changes Affecting the Field of Cultural Production and Mediation

#### *The Rise of the Entertainment Industry*

The first and most obvious evolution in the field of cultural production since the 1960s is the spectacular growth of commercial popular culture and the entertainment industry (Turow, 1992). Commercial cultural offerings have become so widespread and pervasive that they challenge the relative share of the arts in people's leisure activity patterns. The fine arts and their nonprofit institutions must compete with offerings from a wide array of commercial music, films, and books produced by a booming industry, and many find it difficult to maintain their cultural centrality and the position as institutionalized cultural products that had been taken for granted in the past (Warde et al., 1999). The competition between the arts and commercial symbolic goods has become acute as the penetration rates of television rise. For example, television

programs offer easily accessible at-home entertainment that – given a certain time budget – are able to successfully compete with the entertainment literature for audiences (Knulst, 1991; Van Eijck and Van Rees, 2000; Weibull, 1992). This competition has intensified with the rise of the Internet, which enables producers to constantly offer products in people's homes on demand. This creates a context of cultural abundance both for the general public and niche market audiences (Wright, 2011). Television and the new media also enable previously local cultural products to reach audiences scattered around the globe. Studies of local scenes (e.g., Cohen, 1991; Shank, 1994) show that music-making activities in a small region may spill across regional boundaries and become a translocal or even a global phenomenon (Bennett and Peterson, 2004).

#### *Changing Cultural Hierarchies*

A second trend that is inherently related to the first is the deinstitutionalization of highbrow culture (DiMaggio, 1987, 1991). Deinstitutionalization refers to the process whereby social practices formerly taken for granted and formalized in organizations are contested. In this case, the hegemonic position of the fine arts in the cultural hierarchy is being successfully challenged, paradoxically, by artists and by highly educated people themselves. Since the 1960s, the exclusive focus on highbrow arts in school curricula has dwindled; state support for culture is no longer restricted to consecrated genres or organizations staging classical music, opera, or theater. Boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow, between serious art and popular culture, are being challenged and the apparent prestige formerly attached to highbrow culture is now being questioned. The fine arts are further desacralized in post-modern artistic practices that often combine serious art with popular elements, downplaying the artistic aura that institutionalized works of art often have (Schaeffer, 1992). The attention for poetry in mass media has declined whereas the space allocated to pop music in the popular press has increased to the level of classical music. These findings are symptomatic of the change in the institutionalization of the arts and of a redefinition of cultural hierarchies (see, e.g., Janssen, 1999: pp. 337–339). In addition, culture that used to be characterized as commercial or lowbrow is now being taught at colleges and universities and/or being staged in state-subsidized art houses. This institutionalization of nonhighbrow arts further undermines the presence of a strong, universal cultural hierarchy that champions highbrow cultural participation.

### Evolutions Affecting the Field of Cultural Consumption

#### *Democratization of Education*

A number of social and societal trends related to the field of cultural consumption have also shaped the evolution of cultural participation over the years. The first trend is remarkably paradoxical. Numerous empirical studies have shown a close relationship between an individual's educational level and his arts participation (e.g., DiMaggio, 1996). And yet, despite the significant increase in the overall schooling level – as well as the average level of economic prosperity – of West European and North American populations over the past

decades, levels of arts participation have not increased accordingly. The younger cohorts, especially, benefited from the democratization of education, but their higher educational levels did not lead to higher participation levels. On the contrary, in the 1960s and 1970s, the people who participated most in highbrow arts were in their 30s, whereas in the 1990s the most ardent participants in the arts were between 45 and 54 years of age. By 2000, participation peaked for people aged 55 to 64 (Van Eijck and Knulst, 2005: p. 514). This paradox can be partly explained by the change in the content of school curricula, and hence, by the type of educational regime that no longer champions the supremacy of white, Western elite highbrow culture. Instead, other forms of cultural expression – such as low- and middlebrow cultural products – also find their way into educational practices that increasingly focus on the life-worlds of adolescents, offering pupil-oriented, ‘out-of-school’ literacies that fall outside of traditionally canonized authors and texts (Vacca, 2002). For example, in literary education, more popular literary genres like thrillers or crime fiction are being incorporated into courses and school curricula. Therefore, educational expansion – the growing number of people with a college or university degree and the inclusion of middle- and lowbrow culture in the curriculum – erodes the rigidity of the cultural stratification system (cf Verboord and Van Rees, 2008).

#### **Increased Rates of Mobility**

A parallel evolution that is partly a consequence of educational expansion is the steady increase in rates of social mobility. Upward social mobility, especially, has a profound effect on arts participation and, more importantly, on the symbolic value attached to the arts. When the higher social strata are infused with lowbrow tastes, there are consequences to upward social mobility on both the individual and the aggregate level. On the individual level, upwardly mobile individuals are confronted with the tension between the practices and tastes of their newly acquired social position and the cultural preferences they grew up with. Whereas mobile individuals adapt their cultural behavior to their new social environment, they do not completely dismiss the activities they grew up with (e.g., Daenekindt and Roose, 2013, 2014). On the aggregate level, social mobility causes an influx of individuals originating from different social backgrounds, each with their own characteristic cultural practices. Because of the disproportionately high rates of upward social mobility – compared with downward mobility – this mingling of cultural and artistic tastes is especially tangible among the upper middle classes. The same patterns can be seen in geographical mobility, which mixes individuals from different cultural backgrounds and brings them into contact with a wide variety of formerly local symbolic goods. In that way, the consequences of globalization are tangible in both the field of cultural consumption and the field of cultural production.

#### **The Rise of the Cultural Omnivore**

As the rigidity of both the cultural and social stratification system erodes, cosmopolitan values such as being tolerant of diversity and openness are gaining ground (Inglehart, 1990). It is in this context that the cultural omnivore is introduced as

a new type of cultural consumer who – in contrast to the snob typical of Bourdieu’s Paris in the 1960s – crosses the boundaries between different cultural schemes (Peterson and Kern, 1996). The idea of omnivorousness suggests that cultural capital – and the prestige associated with it – relates to practices from both sides of the symbolic boundary between highbrow and lowbrow practices. The historic shift from snobbishness to omnivorousness, or the rise of the omnivore, is considered to have taken place in the 1970s and 1980s (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996).

The concept of omnivorousness – and the lack of clarity surrounding the concept, especially – has generated many questions about what it actually means and how it should be measured (Peterson, 2005). This has motivated researchers to make distinctions between different forms of omnivorousness. The best known is the distinction between omnivorousness in composition – which centers on whether or not boundaries between different cultural schemes are crossed – and omnivorousness in volume – which refers simply to the breadth of taste and not the crossing of boundaries per se (Warde et al., 2008). Another question is whether omnivorousness should be studied in a single cultural sector – for example, by focusing on the variety of preferred musical genres – or whether omnivorousness should be considered across different cultural sectors, including preferences in music, films, books, clothing style, food preferences, and so forth (Van Rees et al., 1999).

These theoretical questions pertaining to the conceptual core of omnivorousness obviously have implications for its measurement in empirical research. There is also considerable debate at the methodological level about the ways omnivorousness should be measured. For example, omnivorousness has often been operationalized as a count variable by simply summing the different preferences of respondents (Peterson, 2005). This is especially problematic considering the bias toward highbrow cultural genres in most standardized surveys. If, compared with less legitimate forms, more legitimate forms of cultural participation are characterized by a greater differentiation, it is hardly surprising that individuals from higher social strata are more omnivorous than individuals from a lower social strata. Indeed, the idea that omnivorousness is exclusively situated in the upper middle classes is being contested. Most cultural sociological studies situate omnivorousness among the highly educated, upper middle classes. However, some authors – most notably Bernard Lahire (2004) – argue that omnivorousness is present in every social stratum. His argument draws on the ideas of Berger and colleagues who argue that individuals in contemporary society are subjected to heterogeneity of socializing experiences (Berger et al., 1974; Lahire, 2011 [2001]). Because of the highly differentiated character of contemporary societies, different life-worlds of individuals are now less unified than in the past. This allows individuals to be influenced by different socializing forces. This pluralization of social life-worlds is further reinforced by the eroding rigidity of the social stratification system. Thus, the individual experience of social mobility, parental/partner heterogamy, and so forth also presents the

individual with new forms of cultural activities and preferences.

Moreover, even the depiction of the rise of the omnivore as a recent historic shift has not remained unchallenged. Trends in cultural participation reveal that the presence of the cultural omnivore is actually not that recent. Cultural omnivores were already present in the Netherlands in the mid-1950s. They increased in number until 1983, but have not increased since then (Van Eijck et al., 2002: p. 156). Also, data from Denmark reveal the existence of omnivores in the 1970s (Jæger and Katz-Gerro, 2010; Katz-Gerro and Jæger, 2011). The idea of omnivorousness as a recent phenomenon is further challenged by Lahire (2004), who argues that cultural omnivorousness – or cultural dissonance, as he calls it – is already present in Bourdieu's sample of Parisians in the 1960s. Lahire thus argues that the depiction of the rise of the omnivore as a recent historic shift “confuses a change in the model of reality (the scientific point of view on the world) with a historic change of reality itself” (Lahire, 2008: p. 182).

### Implications: Current and Emerging Trends in Theory and Research

What are the implications for sociological thinking of the decreasing centrality of highbrow cultural participation and the rising importance of popular cultural goods in young people's leisure time activity patterns? Certainly, from a practical point of view, if there is a decline in arts participation in younger generations, arts organizations will have to invest in marketing-the-arts strategies to replace existing audiences. Otherwise, the audience for certain performing arts, such as classical concerts, may shrink or even disappear within a couple of decades (Kolb, 2001). Further research is needed to assess why some of the arts are holding firm despite serious competition from commercial cultural goods and why others are losing ground as a form of cultural capital among the younger generations. Is it because some forms of cultural participation – for instance, visiting art museums – appeal to the more cosmopolitan dispositions of open-minded individuals seeking intellectual stimulation more than other forms, such as classical music? Does increased competition with more home-bound, web-related activities keep youth away from ballet and classical concerts? Or are other outdoor activities such as sports and attending pop/rock concerts responsible for this shift? One thing is clear – the arts have to compete with an unprecedentedly large array of other cultural goods and leisure activities; this obviously has implications for the position of arts in society and for the symbolic value or prestige associated with them.

### The Remaking of Cultural Capital

The trends outlined above do not, however, indicate that class distinctions in cultural participation are waning, and that we are entering a time of individualism in which the social hierarchy no longer structures cultural practices. Empirical research on cultural participation shows repeatedly that cultural practices are still very much socially structured, and

that Bourdieu's original empirical conception of the social space needs to be updated in view of recent societal developments. Bourdieu's stress on the importance of *beaux arts* and participation in highbrow culture as essential to cultural capital may have been overstated and was limited to France in the 1960s. Recently observed patterns and trends suggest that the composition of cultural capital is being remade (Bennet et al., 2009; Hanquinet et al., 2014), and that the distinctive social force of cultural capital is increasingly made up of a passing knowledge of many cultural domains – from film to literature to sports – and of cultural schemes that range from highbrow to lowbrow. *Multicultural capital* is perhaps a more accurate term, as it signals the change from the rather one-sided dependence on the highbrow arts to a broader, more inclusive approach (Bryson, 1997). Perhaps, to differing degrees and within and across different cultural sectors, everybody is becoming omnivorous. This does not falsify Bourdieu's analytic framework as presented in *La Distinction*, as Chan and Goldthorpe (2007), for example, have suggested. Instead, this perspective downplays the role of more snobbish, exclusive forms of cultural participation as socially distinctive and meaningful resources and favors a more open, inclusive, and multicultural attitude toward cultural goods. Some studies are now finding that it is precisely the variety of tastes – instead of an exclusive interest in the arts – and the heterogeneous networks associated with that variety that are related to different life chances, such as the chance of finding a job (Lizardo, 2013). Another related issue that needs further inquiry pertains to the significance of omnivorousness. Does omnivorous taste among highly educated youth indicate a more open and cosmopolitan attitude, as some researchers have suggested (Bryson, 1997; Bryson and DiMaggio, 2000)? Or is omnivorousness only one of the many manifestations – for the young and highly educated – of the underlying trait, openness – manifestations that otherwise vary according to the period one is socialized in (see Roose et al., 2012)?

### Symbolic Boundaries and Social Inequality

Future empirical research may focus on whether cultural hierarchies are actually shared between different social groups, as most empirical studies implicitly assume. However, it should also consider whether there are variations. For example, how are competing hierarchies mobilized by various groups in social conflicts and under what conditions are they being institutionalized in the educational system, for example? It is in such institutional contexts especially that symbolic violence is exerted and translated into the perpetuation of social inequality: students whose cultural participation coincides with practices from the top of the cultural hierarchy have a greater chance of educational success (see, e.g., DiMaggio, 1982). If symbolic boundaries between different forms of cultural participation are indeed waning, and if this process is reflected in institutions such as the educational system, the relationship between cultural participation and status boundaries may change. Thus, research on trends in cultural participation sheds a light on the cultural dimension of social stratification.

**See also:** Aesthetic Education; Art and Socialisation; Art and Socialisation; Cultural Capital and Education; Cultural Capital and Education; Culture, Production of: Prospects for the Twenty-First Century; Globalization and World Culture; Leisure and Cultural Consumption: US Perspective; Social Inequality and Schooling; Social Inequality in Cultural Consumption Patterns; Social Stratification; Symbolic Boundaries.

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