

Highbrow cultural consumption and class distinction in Italy, Israel, West Germany, Sweden, and the United States.

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Highbrow Cultural Consumption and Class Distinction in Italy, Israel, West Germany, Sweden, and the United States

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Abstract

Although some sociologists still connect cultural preferences with social class, others argue that postindustrial societies are no longer class-based societies and that contemporary cultural consumption patterns do not simply reflect class positions. This article addresses several theories that characterize the association between class and cultural consumption in contemporary society. It goes on to analyze the effect of class position on highbrow cultural consumption — using both leisure activities and cultural tastes — in Italy, Sweden, West Germany, Israel, and the U.S. It asks whether differences in cultural consumption, given other salient cleavages such as race/ethnicity, gender, and religious observance, are associated with class. Results show that class correlates with highbrow cultural consumption in different ways in the cases studied. The dividing line for consuming highbrow culture is located at the top of the class structure in Israel, the U.S., and Sweden; it is located at the bottom of the class structure in Italy and West Germany. Gender, race, and religious observance are important in conditioning culture consumption, but they do not fully mediate the association between class and cultural tastes.

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