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Using mixed methods for analysing culture: The Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion project

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Abstract

This paper discusses the use of material generated in a mixed method investigation into cultural tastes and practices, conducted in Britain from 2003 to 2006, which employed a survey, focus groups and household interviews. The study analysed the patterning of cultural life across a number of fields, enhancing the empirical and methodological template provided by Bourdieu's *Distinction*. Here we discuss criticisms of Bourdieu emerging from subsequent studies of class, culture and taste, outline the arguments related to the use of mixed methods and present illustrative results from the analysis of these different types of data. We discuss how the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods informed our analysis of cultural life in contemporary Britain. No single method was able to shed light on all aspects of our inquiry, lending support to the view that mixing methods is the most productive strategy for the investigation of complex social phenomena.

Keywords

Bourdieu, cultural capital, distinction, methodology, mixed methods

Introduction

The issue of the relationship between cultural capital and social distinction has remained on the intellectual agenda ever since Bourdieu's publication of *Distinction* in France in 1979. Bourdieu's thesis, in broadest outline, identified a correspondence between class position and taste for legitimate culture, which resulted in a dominant class claiming and reproducing social privilege as a concomitant of its superior cultural competence. Subsequently, some scholars have contended that social boundaries and divisions around class have dissipated. Others have argued for the dissolution of cultural boundaries that separated legitimate from popular culture, and the propensity for tastes to concentrate at different levels – high, middle and low brow. This has made empirical adjudication of Bourdieu's general thesis difficult. It has required those engaging in the debate to determine whether tastes cluster, if so whether patterns correspond to social group boundaries, whether people recognise social or cultural boundaries, and whether social groups make judgements about social superiority or inferiority in relation to others on the basis of cultural tastes. It thus raised a great many central issues for the sociology of consumption and stratification which are still far from decisively resolved.

Many of the unresolved issues are empirical ones, where evidence can be adduced to support or contest interpretation. However, there has been neither consensus about, nor perhaps the requisite research resources for, an appropriate way to mount the necessary empirical investigation. Bourdieu received robust criticism for the methods

that he employed, typically for the ways in which he manipulated quantitative data. Both European and American scholars of stratification found the survey flawed in various ways, disparaged his preferred technique for survey analysis, and suggested that the statistical associations that he reported were weak and unreliable. The other elements and forms of evidence reported in *Distinction* received less critical attention in these circles, even though Bourdieu's multiple method approach (mixed-method, *avante la lettre*) was central to the empirical and theoretical picture he was able to paint (Silva and Edwards 2004). Subsequent work, which in more recent American hands tended to morph into the debate about the cultural omnivore, was based almost exclusively upon the study of national surveys of cultural participation. This showed class differences, but not ones which were strongly associated with commitment to high culture. The predominant tendency among empirical sociologists in the United States, where engagements with Bourdieusian themes concerning issues of cultural consumption and class predominated, was to declare that Bourdieu was both theoretically obscure and empirically mistaken, particularly if, as was assumed, he was proposing universal generalisations about the relationship between class habitus and cultural taste.

Bourdieu was never without sympathisers in the USA and perhaps the decisive intervention from a methodological angle was Douglas Holt's (1997) persuasive review and resolution of the criticisms of *Distinction*, as they relate to questions of transferability across space and time. While attempting to defend aspects of Bourdieu's theory of taste against American critics, Holt pointed to the limitations of the techniques and measures that have typically been employed to assess his claims. Holt's intervention implied the necessity for the use of qualitative evidence to properly assess a key feature of Bourdieu's account: that of *orientations* to culture, revealed through qualitative interviews through which he was able to elaborate upon not just what 'cultured' individuals engaged with or liked but also what these activities and preferences meant to them. Other post-Bourdieuian scholars, (e.g. Lamont 1992, Halle 1993, Ollivier 2008) have used extensive qualitative interviews as a means of elaborating and modifying the Bourdieusian view of the relationship of taste to culture in the North American context. Furthermore, since *Distinction* was published, a further sub-field of cultural research, ostensibly emerging from the Cultural Studies tradition, have used smaller scale, qualitative and ethnographic forms of inquiry into cultural participation to convincingly reveal the meaningfulness and complexity of engagement with popular, commercial and media cultures – an emphasis which is either marginal to, or entirely absent from, the bulk of US survey work. Such studies imply important alternative relations between cultural taste and power (e.g. Thornton 1995, on the possibility of *sub-cultural* capital) but are unable to extrapolate and generalise their findings to a broader population. Such developments reveal the *methodological* and *theoretical* issues that the relationship between cultural capital and taste raises. They suggest that any study aiming to both pronounce on patterns of cultural participation and to theoretically engage with the nuances of cultural orientations, i.e. to engage with Bourdieu on his own terms as an imaginative empirical sociologist, requires multiple methods. We report on one such study here.

In the recent growing shift towards 'methodological eclecticism' (Devine and Heath, 1999) concerns have been raised about researchers' neglecting the difficulties of employing a range of methods. Although combining different qualitative methods is

seen as problematic (Mason, 1996), more often objections are directed to the combination of qualitative and quantitative ones, on the grounds that the latter emphasize causality, variables, and a heavily pre-structured approach, while the former are concerned with the elucidations of participants' perspectives, process and contextual detail (Bryman, 1992). Although often conceptualised as opposite, both approaches attempt to tell stories about the social as these emerge from data generated through particular sets of techniques and practices (Hardy and Bryman, 2004). In this paper we reflect on the experience of research conducted on a project employing a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. The ESRC-funded project *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion (CCSE)*¹ was a systematic assessment of the applicability of Pierre Bourdieu's work in respect of the social determinants of taste and the role played by cultural capital in social differentiation in contemporary Britain. The quantitative research instrument comprised an hour-long questionnaire of 511 questions administered to a main representative sample of the UK population of 1564 individuals and to an ethnic boost sample of 227 individuals. The design of the questionnaire was informed by the evidence of cultural tastes and practices derived from a prior discussion of 25 focus group involving 143 participants. Follow-up household interviews were conducted with 28 respondents from the survey, 2 focus group participants and, in some cases, their partners, yielding a total of 44 interviews in 30 households, for which participant observation notes were also produced.² Interviews with elites comprised the last phase where 11 individuals occupying prominent positions in business and politics participated.

In this paper we describe some key issues where multiple methods help throw light on substantive issues in relation to cultural capital class and taste over which debate had stalled. To explore the dissonances and complementarities of our research methods in interpreting the patterns of taste in contemporary culture, we begin with an account of the survey analysis which employed Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), a technique central to *Distinction*. We go on to show how testimonies retrieved from two substantive qualitative methods – focus group and interviews – increased and sharpened our understanding of the social aspects of taste. This narrative sequence, note, is not the order in which the fieldwork was conducted.

1. A cultural map of Britain in 2003

One initial challenge was to find a way of extrapolating from the many questions which we asked about cultural taste, participation, and knowledge to provide a platform for analysis. We used Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA),³ a form of principal components analysis, which allows people's cultural preferences to be plotted in Euclidian space. This is the method that Bourdieu himself used in *Distinction*, and remains significant within France, although it has been remarkably under-utilized in Anglophone social science (see LeRoux and Rouanet, 2004). MCA has an interesting relationship to Bourdieu's theoretical framework (see generally Weininger, 2005).

MCA represents graphically cultural tastes and practices and, by inspecting the resulting figures (and the accompanying statistical information), their clustering and fracturing can be interpreted. This provides a visualization of the organization of the cultural landscape. A particular strength of the *visualising* of cultural practices is that it reveals the relationality of social life implicit in Bourdieu's theorising,

notwithstanding subsequent critical readings of his claims that he portrays the relationship between taste and social class as determinist.

MCA creates a cultural map, showing the spread of relations between forms of cultural preference and participation. The analytic method is ‘inductive’ and ‘descriptive’ and does not presuppose that any particular ordering of practices will be found. Through inspecting the separation (or proximity) of different cultural activities, we are able to infer whether an uneven distribution of cultural capital can be detected from the ‘cultural map’ itself. This feature of MCA makes it extremely attractive as an analytical method. Our project’s research questions, whilst wide ranging, are not exhaustive, and readers need to be attentive to how we operationalize and define the measures which we use to construct the map. Of course, we are aware that while the MCA does not assume a social order the questions in our survey certainly do.

Two features of MCA further strengthen its appeal, while also alerting us to issues we need to be wary of. Firstly, the cultural maps we produce do not smuggle assumptions about the social determinants of taste into them. The maps are constructed purely with respect to the organization and mutual relationships between our questions about cultural life. Secondly, the coordinates of every single individual in our survey can be located on the cultural map uniquely. Through inspecting this ‘cloud of individuals’ we can gain further insights into the organisation of cultural practices by assessing whether similar kinds of people are located closely together. Since we are able to ascertain where our interviewees are located, we can link their survey responses to their personal testimonies. This generates rich dialogue between quantitative and qualitative data. We explore this in the third section of this paper.

To construct the cultural map we retained 41 questions, about seven fields of cultural activity (TV, Films, Reading, Music, Visual art, Eating out and Sport). The questions fall into two distinct types: participation (17 questions) and taste (24 questions), allowing us to assess inductively the relationship between them.⁴ Our MCA includes 168 active modalities covering the cultural fields. Using a contingency table, MCA assesses the relationship between the different modalities and identifies the number of axes separating out the responses. These axes operate to separate out responses relationally, vis-à-vis each other, in a way that can permit us to assess whether some stand in opposition to others. Putting it crudely, if everyone who liked Westerns as film genre also liked television soap operas, they would be located in the same position, and if no one liked both then these genres would be located at diametrically opposite sides of the graph. Four axes were found best describing the differences between liking of and participation in the various cultural practices selected. In this paper we elaborate on the most significant, i.e. most divisive, of the four axes: in figure 1 (this section) we explore the first axis in relation to the modalities selected and in figure 2 (section 3) the first and the second axes in relation to the position of selected individuals.

Figure 1 maps the coordinates of each of the modalities where they contribute significantly (i.e. above the mean) to this first and most important axis. To aid interpretation of the associations across cultural fields, modalities concerned participation are marked in diamond-shaped symbols, and those to do with taste are in squares. The size of the modality, shown in the shape next to the name of the modality, indicates the numbers of people who fall into a given category: thus we can

see that more people like soap operas than modern literature. Where a participation question has 0 it means that something is never done, when it has 1 it is occasionally done, and a 2 means it is frequently done. When a taste question has a minus sign this means it is disliked, a positive sign indicates it is liked, and an equal sign indicates neutrality. For number of paintings possessed, number of books read and hours of television watched significant number categories are shown.

Figure 1 reveals that on the first axis, most of the likes and indicators of participation are on the right hand side, and many dislikes and lack of engagement are on the left hand side. To be more specific, on the left the only positive values are for liking Western films, social sports, fish and chips, and watching more than 5 hours television during a weekday. On the right hand side, there is only one negative value, for disliking eating in fish and chip restaurants. The range of tastes and forms of participation which appear on the right hand side are varied. The most extreme right hand location is for attending the opera frequently, followed by eating at French restaurants regularly, going to orchestral concerts, to the theatre, and to rock concerts, and liking Impressionist art. These activities are counter-posed most powerfully with eating fish and chips, never eating out at all, having no books, and never going to museums. We only measure participation in terms of the variables we used to construct the map, and it can only be understood in these terms. We highlight two general points:

---Figure 1

Firstly, the MCA allows us to pull out certain homologies between fields. For instance, those who like Impressionist painting also like opera and French restaurants. Those who most appreciate modern art, also tend to like science fiction books and heavy metal music. Some areas of fields seem less likely to yield distinctions: types of television programmes, for instance (though not the amount of time spent watching TV), are rarely an element of a distinctive cultural clustering, and nor are genres of film very often. Given that Bourdieu himself says relatively little about these media, and that these forms of media have become increasingly important, we can draw the conclusion that this field is not marked so clearly by differentiation and discrimination as music, in particular. This confirms the role that these media play in providing some points of cultural convergence for groups whose tastes might, in other aspects, be sharply divergent. More generally, we need to be careful not to focus simply on those modalities which are clearly separated, and recognize that a large number of variables is located at the centre of the map, indicating that they do not imply exclusion vis-à-vis other practices. In other words, some aspects of cultural life do not carry any symbolic 'baggage'. The fact that one likes police dramas or whodunit books, or does not like eating in Italian restaurants or reading religious books, for instance, seems to say very little else about one's cultural orientations in twenty-first century Britain. There are forms of cultural preference and participation, which are not especially divisive or particularly at play in the game for cultural status which Bourdieu expounds.

Secondly, the prime division on this first axis relates to participation. This is somewhat different from the results reported in *Distinction*, where Bourdieu found both taste and leisure practice on both sides of the first axis. Indeed, it is this which allowed him to differentiate between high and popular culture. Our findings initially

seem consistent with recent research on social capital and participation, which points to a strong trend in recent years for some groups in the population to become 'disengaged' (Warde et al., 2003; Li et al., 2003), and for others to become multiply engaged, as a form of cultural omnivorousness or voraciousness. The fact that intensive television watching is one of the few positive activities to be found on the left of Figure 1 might also reflect the relative absence of home-based and informal activities included in the MCA. Most of the forms of cultural participation on the right of this axis are located outside the home and then share one or other of three further characteristics: they are either strongly associated with established culture (museums, art galleries), or are forms of commercial entertainment that involve admission charges (cinema, rock concerts, musicals), or they are forms of legitimate culture applying admission charges (opera, theatre, stately homes, orchestral concerts).

2. The meanings of preference and disengagement

The interpretation of quantitative data can be complemented and made more complex with materials emerging from the qualitative phases of the investigation. We have reflected elsewhere on the methodological issues surrounding the use of focus group research in approaching issues of cultural taste in our research (Silva and Wright, 2005) as well as revealing their potential richness in contributing to our understanding of the applicability of Bourdieusian notions of taste and power in contemporary Britain (Warde, 2008). In this section, we consider how the focus groups might deepen our understanding of the patterns of cultural life that emerge from the MCA.

Focus groups were held, prior to the survey, in six locations covering the four nations of the UK and including metropolitan, rural and provincial settings. These included 143 participants. The groups were designed to take in a range of socio-economic, ethnic and sexual identities and to have a balance of age and gender. Groups were recruited in a variety of ways, including from community groups or organisations (in the cases of working-class pensioners and Pakistani middle- and working-class groups), through pubs and clubs (including several in South Wales and in the Borders region of Scotland), and by snowballing from personal, professional or institutional contacts (including groups of low-paid women in Northern Ireland and company directors in London). Each group was given two specific topics to discuss, relating to various aspects of cultural life. In addition each group was asked to reflect on various forms of cultural participation within and around the home, a topic which tended to revolve around television but also brought out some discussion of radio, gardening and DIY. The wide-ranging nature of the focus group discussion allows us to make some robust claims about its utility as a marker of the discursive terrain of contemporary notions of cultural divisiveness, which are of particular use in deepening understanding of the cultural map.

Two interlinked points are worthy of note. First, there was clear evidence within focus group discussions that culture and cultural taste are widely recognised to be sociologically 'loaded', i.e. to contribute to both questions of identity and status. Second, and at the same time, we found relatively little evidence of cultural tastes being used as a source of resentment or hostility. In terms of the former point numerous claims were made, in terms not dissimilar to those which animate social scientific accounts of taste, which recognised a tension between taste reflecting personal choice or idiosyncrasies, on the one hand, and membership and management

of status groups, on the other. An exchange, from a group conducted with gay men in the Midlands, represents this well.

Tarquin: Taste is different to fashion. Taste is something that you like and you prefer. Fashion is something that someone else dictates.

Bob: Taste is judgemental. Because you know, fashion itself as a word is a judgemental word. Therefore you're making judgements about people.

Tarquin: What you prefer.

Bob: What people? - It's subjective/objective.

Tarquin: Your taste for something is going to be what you prefer. That's fashion, though.

Ronald: No, taste is what society prefers.

Bob: Yeah, there's a lot of. Yes, taste is manipulated by people who are not you as well.

After some initial reluctance to address explicitly the topic of what constitutes good and bad taste, this group of men, who, importantly, knew one another before the group met, were able to discount the social risks of disagreement over these issues. They identify distinctions between an ephemeral 'fashion' and a more permanent 'taste' and, importantly, recognise the *social* pressures at play in its formation. The 'group-ness' of the focus-group works here to allow a form of collective identification and exploration of issues of taste which counters the risks inherent in judgement-making in one-to-one interview settings. Generally, though individual participants in household interviews tended to avoid explicit judgements about the taste of others, recognising perhaps the social value attributed to forms of openness (see Warde et. al, 2008).

In focus groups, by contrast, the forms of solidarity afforded by group discussion – especially amongst groups who were known to each other before the meeting – allowed more explicit forms of judgement to emerge and the orientations and meanings which inform cultural division are elaborated more openly. A group of young working-class men and women from South Wales, who constituted the skilled workers focus group, for example constructed an 'out-group' of the stereo-typed white working-class, the 'mush', characterised by 'shell-suits', 'gold-chains', 'bleached blonde hair' and 'massive ear-rings'. Another group held in South Wales with semi-skilled and un-skilled workers similarly constructed older people, who didn't drink or spent their leisure time in art galleries, arts cinemas or museums as 'geeks' – fully recognising that this group's own expressed preferences, for pub culture, but also for drinking and watching DVDs in the home, would lead them to be conceptualised as 'piss-heads'. Focus groups revealed, then, that participants from a range of social positions have an awareness of what is at stake in what Bourdieu terms the *game* of culture (Silva and Wright, 2005). Their talk helps to articulate what is at stake in the spread of tastes and activities which our MCA reveals.

Given that watching television frequently was the only prevalent preferred activity on the 'disengaged' left hand side of the cultural map, focus groups help in elaborating on the meaning of television viewing. When talking about their viewing preferences, a group of students and young professionals make it clear that they conceptualise television as in a diminished position in a cultural hierarchy, but they use their ability to classify it and dismiss it as such as evidence of their relative cultural sophistication.

Sean: I think it's worse living on my own because then, the time I do spend watching TV tends to be about five-hours in length and it involves constant moving between programmes, none of which I particularly enjoy! There's this wonderful moment when something like the *West Wing* really is on but, the rest of the time it's so often just watching crap 'til one in the morning because I can't be bothered to go to bed.

Joanna: Do you have cable?

Sean: No, no! I don't think I would, I didn't have a TV for a while one of my house-mates moved out and it was great, yeah, I quite liked that. I didn't have the self-discipline not to get another one, though.

(...)

These two young professionals, one a university lecturer, the other a local manager in a global company, show little sense of pleasure in their television viewing but rather are keen to express their awareness of its apparent poor quality. They exhibit the kind of 'grazing' or 'video-mode' viewing which Nicholas Abercrombie (1996) and others (Bennett et al., 1999) have associated with the consumption of popular cultural texts. In the context of watching television, in this exchange the different modes are accessed through judgements of the apparent intrinsic 'crap-ness', or dreadfulness of the things they consume. In this exchange, time is to be filled with television, rather than to be reclaimed through television, a reflection of a lack of domestic pressures. The recognition of 'occasional' moments of quality, exemplified by the American political drama the *West Wing*, but contrasted with the hours of television available through cable, construct television as an almost hypnotic device – 'if I don't sit down, then I'm alright', suggests Joanna, whilst Sean bemoans his lack of self-discipline at being unable to free himself of owing a television, when the opportunity arose, through a domestic re-arrangement. This conception of the inherently corrosive or damaging characteristics of television recurs in another exchange from a group of London-based women professionals:

Mandy: I'm not a snob when I'm talking about what's better and what's good and what's bad because, all the trashy things..., I mean, *Big Brother*, I have to confess to watching but it's absolute trash and so that's bad, (...) we shouldn't be polluting our heads and minds and, with such..., we should be – I don't know, expanding our minds maybe a bit more in other ways...

Janine: But sometimes you just need to chill out because we're always so busy and challenging ourselves in so many ways.

Here *Big Brother* is emblematic of television, and television is emblematic of a corrosive, polluting mass culture which, in Mandy's exasperated opinion, is becoming inescapable, taking away opportunities for personal challenge offered by other forms of participation. Television's position in the domestic space in these examples is implicated in negotiations between the external world of work and the private sphere of recreation. While passivity feels more like a choice in the context of a life which is intellectually 'challenging in so many ways'. For others, the lack of choice might make passivity feel more like a trap. This is suggested in a group of low-paid women from Belfast.

Beth: I find the TV a sort of double-edged thing, because when you're in the house there isn't much else to do, sometimes when you're tired it's nice and easy, you just put the TV on but like other times it's just churning out this stuff and sometimes you're not into it but what else? You know, it's cheap and it's easy and it can draw you into it as well. (...) Sometimes I feel like I watch it too much, it's controlling my life or it's – I suppose if I did have more money I would go out and do other things or, I don't know ...

These discussions give some considerable insight into the patterns identified by the MCA, with the ambivalence about watching television among those with high cultural capital being explained and reinforced during collective discussions. The focus group discussions throw light on the types of social interaction and exchange that result in people clustering together on the cultural map. Television still significantly marks differences and boundaries, with the amount of time spent watching TV being a significant discriminating feature of contemporary cultural life.

3. The individual and cultural life in social space

MCA permits the data to be examined from the point of view of the distribution of individuals along any axes or across the space of lifestyles. Each individual surveyed can be identified by a coordinate on each axis. In this section we seek, by inspecting the location of individuals on the cultural map, to further enhance the dialogue we are pursuing between quantitative and qualitative methods. To do this we draw from semi-structured interviews and take advantage of an unusual strength of our research design. Because we interviewed a sub-sample of those who also answered our survey, we are able to uniquely place these individuals within the space of lifestyles, drawing upon their survey responses, and then, by assessing their accounts from the interviews, elaborate and extend our analysis in several ways. This approach is in the spirit of Bourdieu who, in *Distinction*, used qualitative vignettes and case studies alongside his survey analysis. However, he could not work with the 'cloud of individuals', because technological developments in computing at the time did not permit this – relying instead on the location of supplementary variables to interpret MCA graphs. Moreover, Bourdieu's case studies did not include respondents from his survey sample, so he was unable to compare the quantitative and qualitative aspects of his inquiry.

Figure 2 shows the locations of all 1564 individuals surveyed in our main sample, and it highlights the positions of 22 individuals from this sample who we interviewed in their homes in a follow up part of the study.⁵ These individuals are positioned according to axes 1 and 2. The first axis, which we explored in section 1, primarily differentiates those who are formally engaged in public cultural activities (on the right) from those who are not (on the left), while the second separates those with tastes for contemporary (at the top) rather than established (at the bottom) culture. By introducing information from the semi-structured interviews, we are able to interpret these axes more extensively.

---Figure 2

The apparent disengagement of many respondents in the survey indicated by the MCA might be better read as relative lack of formal cultural engagement, but which is often compensated by considerable informal involvement in kin-based and local circles. Margaret Staples (1517 on Figure 2) hardly went out, had little interest in sports, disliked most forms of music having a ‘disengaged’ profile typical of the position predicated for the left side of the MCA. Yet, while the interview brought out some concomitants of these patterns confirming the ‘correctness’ of her position on the cultural map it also showed that although her leisure was home based, on Sundays the family regularly went for long walks, and they attended the church. Frank, her husband, was the leader of the local brass band, and they socialized with friends in couples, mostly entertaining at home. Far from being disengaged, then, the Staples had a full cultural life, but not one connected to formal or legitimate forms of cultural participation.

If the interviews can enrich the interpretation of the MCA, the converse is also true. When conducting the interviews, extensive prior information about both the activities and preferences of the interviewee allowed some anticipation of their circumstances and dispositions. Moreover, when they described and elaborated on their activities, these could be put in context (see Silva, 2006), through consideration of their relative position on the cloud of individuals and its relation to the space of lifestyles. This can be illustrated by the example of Stafford Rathbone (544 on Figure 2), a sixty-year old Afro-Caribbean man from a Midlands city, located at the very centre of our cloud of individuals. The centre of the space, as described above, is, logically enough in a relational spread of tastes, characterised by those activities and preferences which are not especially divisive or symbolically loaded. Knowledge of this can be brought to bear on the interpretation of Stafford’s reflections on his tastes and forms of participation. These are both almost exclusively based in and around the suburban housing association bed-sit in which he lives, and structured by his working day as an assembler and welder at a factory near the centre of the city. This was borne out in his answers in this interview, which revealed a passing interest in music – classical music listened to on the radio, regular viewing of TV sport and the news and no interest in film at all (save for a reference to a cinematic adaptation of the crucifixion which he’d seen many years before). His cultural participation was centered largely on the home, through the television and radio, but also through reading the Bible.

Stafford’s preference for news was explained in the context of his experience of migration. ‘I’m not from here’, he said, and so the news offered a means of keeping up to date with the world, including the Caribbean. Sport was also a means of keeping his mind active and he participated through backing horses or doing the football pools. It was the unpredictability of sport that made him prefer it to drama. He suggested that, at his age you could always work out what was going to happen in dramas. He played football, went to the cinema and out into town to pubs and restaurants when he was a much younger man but, as he describes, ‘he’s just a spectator now.’ In his spare time he concerns himself with ‘doing what he has to do’ in terms of cleaning his flat, shopping and cooking, combined with sport on TV at the weekends and the occasional trip to the bookmakers. The over-riding impression of the interview with Stafford is, not a lack of engagement with ‘culture’ *per se*, but a lack of recognition that culture should be something about which he should concern himself. His location in the centre of the space, where tastes and activities do not distinguish, add weight to this interpretation.

The MCA also allowed us to identify a range of resources and circumstances which might account for the dispositions of the interviewees and the likelihood that their social networks, or other people like them, had similar attributes. For example, we asked respondents (and their partners) about their eating out habits. Reminded of the answer they had given in the survey about the favourite and least favourite types of restaurant, sometimes elicited extensive reflection on the meaning of the choice. Jenny Hamilton (1190 on Figure 2), a creative writing tutor in her late forties from South-West Scotland, chose French cuisine as her favourite, a preference which emerged during a period in which she and her research scientist husband had lived in France. She maintained a liking for rare meat, for fresh vegetables and liked to ‘de-glaze a pan’ with wine – habits and tastes picked up in France which she kept and felt comfortable in her professional milieu. Karim Majid, a thirty five year old health and safety consultant, reported ‘Indian restaurants’ as his preferred choice but, on reflection, explained that this was as much a result of his being viewed as expert in Indian food within a group of work colleagues who, ‘always want to drag me to an Indian so I can tell them what to order’. Here the preference is for a type of cuisine – one that is not distinguishing on this axis – which is far more part of the everyday of contemporary British culinary experience. While the MCA allowed us to confirm that some features of any interviewee’s profile and portfolio were shared with culturally and economically similar people, the household interviews allowed us to explore how these choices might be meaningful in the context of an individual’s social networks and experiences.

Conclusions

We have demonstrated various points of connection and complementarity between the different methods utilised in the process of our investigation of cultural capital in the UK. In particular we have shown how the analytical method of multiple correspondence analysis provided a way of describing the *relationality* of the social which uses the survey data with no pre-assumed clustering of ‘dependent’ variables. Focus group discussions and qualitative interviews then became a means of articulating the forms of division and clustering revealed by the MCA, deepening our understanding of meanings and practices. We submit that this mixing of methods, or methodological eclecticism, has allowed us to engage theoretically and empirically with the claims in *Distinction* in a manner unique among the many interventions based on the exclusive use of either surveys or interviews.

We have shown that to link evidence from qualitative interviews with the locations of survey respondents within the ‘cloud of individuals’, produced by the MCA, allows us to interpret the axes in more sophisticated ways than would be possible if we only had access to the survey or the qualitative data alone. Moreover this innovation, unavailable at the time of *Distinction*, represents a significant enhancement of Bourdieu’s own approach which used quantitative and qualitative methods in parallel but separately. Our ability to operate a dialogue between our methods has real interpretive advantages, allowing us to answer questions about cultural participation raised by survey findings alone. We showed, for example, that a primary division between engagement and disengagement on the first axis might be better understood in the light of the qualitative interviews and focus groups as contrasting formal and informal engagement. Those on the left of the space on the cultural map are not

obviously ‘socially or culturally excluded’, and indeed often have vibrant cultural lives. Apparent differences from those on the right appear predominantly related to the different roles of family, kin, friends and the local community links in their lives. At the same time, the interpretation of data emerging from qualitative sources is enhanced by our knowledge of the relative position of individuals in our constructed social space and their proximity or distance from individuals we know to share similar or different orientations. The major divisions revealed by MCA, indicate a significant area of *shared* cultural ground, where less appears to be invested in preferences and orientations, and where less is at stake in the game of culture. Where we know that culture is divisive, though, focus group discussion – and the forms of group solidarity and protection that they provide – constitute the best means through which to probe and interpret the meanings of these divisions. Group discussions are more likely than one-to-one interviews to generate accounts of hostility to other groups or clusters of tastes.

Some forms of interpretation are clearly illegitimate; conclusions can only be drawn in answer to questions amenable to the specific types of evidence generated by a given analytic technique. This was the essence of Holt’s (1997) point about the inadequacy of the methodological grounds upon which American sociologists typically evaluated the arguments of Bourdieu. Often what is presented as an explanation should, in many instances, be deemed no more than conjecture or inference on the basis of necessarily inconclusive evidence. However, used in conjunction with other types of data makes interpretation more secure. So, in our study, analysis of survey data about degrees of engagement in formal and legitimate culture offered no compelling single interpretation of the reasons for the existence of the cultural divisions uncovered. Use of other methods made it possible to eliminate some interpretations, for instance that ‘social exclusion’ is the primary cause of cultural inequality, and also to conclude that cultural competence does not play the precise role proposed in *Distinction* in the contemporary British context (see further in Bennett et al., 2008).

This paper could be read as an objection to methodological purism, against the insistence that there is one best method – or worse, one best technique for data collection – which will serve to generate the most reliable conclusions. We maintain, hopefully uncontroversially, that the full range of research questions posed in social sciences cannot be answered using only one method. One implication, however, is not very often pursued; if a research question is complex, then more than one method is probably *necessary*. The relationship between class and taste is just such a complex matter. We might want to know about what people do, what people like, how people practically classify cultural products, how they feel about others with different tastes, and what they envisage to be the significance of differences in taste. No single method or technique would be sufficient for the purpose. Methodological eclecticism, most productively provides not a means of checking on the accuracy of facts, but the plausibility of interpretations. It is, we suggest, the enhanced coherence of interpretations that can be derived from the use of multiple methods which justifies, and will often demand, such a research design.

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Figure1: Axis 1 and 2, with variables contributing to axis 1 indicated

Factor 2

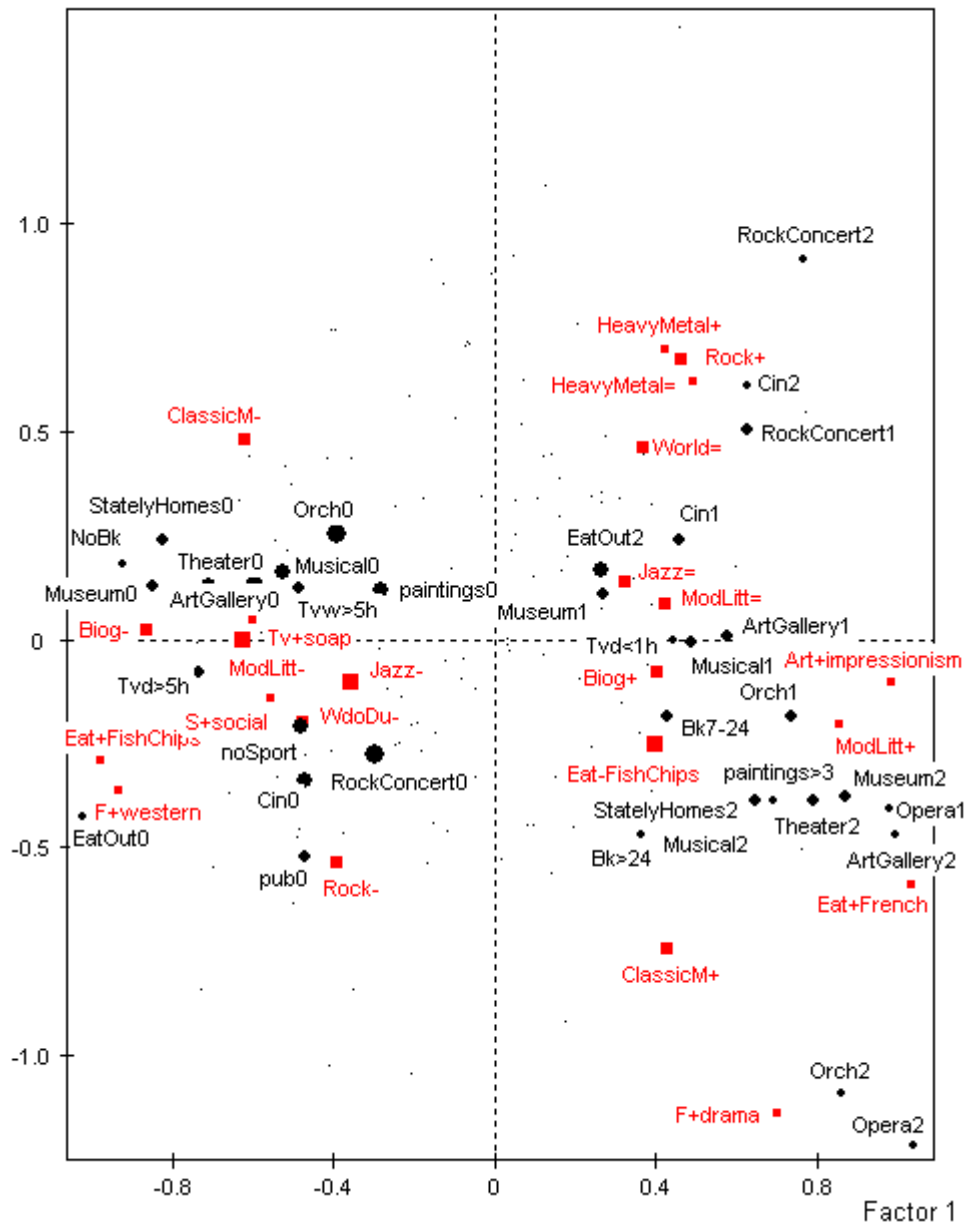
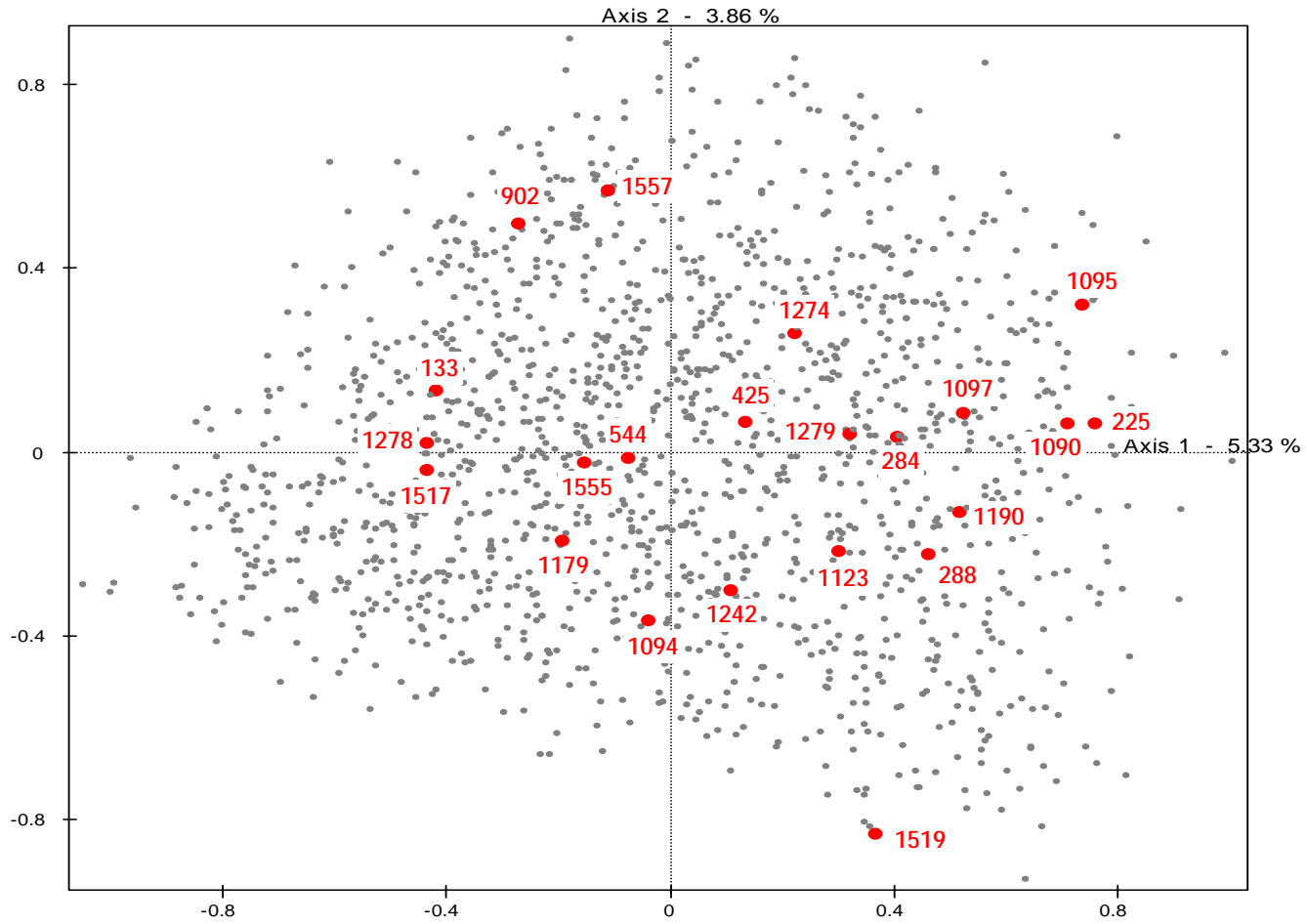


Figure 2
MCA: Social position of survey respondents in cultural space and identification of qualitative interviewees ¹



¹ Includes only respondents from the main sample (N=1564). The individuals interviewed qualitatively who do not belong to the main sample (ethnic minority boost and focus groups samples) are not identified on the MCA.

Notes

¹ ESRC funded project award no R000239801. The team comprised Tony Bennett (Principal Applicant), Mike Savage, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde (Co-Applicants), David Wright and Modesto Gayo-Cal (Research Fellows). The applicants were jointly responsible for the design of the national survey and the focus groups and household interviews that generated the quantitative and qualitative data for the project. Elizabeth Silva, assisted by David Wright, coordinated the analyses of the qualitative data from the focus groups and household interviews. Mike Savage and Alan Warde, assisted by Modesto Gayo-Cal, co-ordinated the analyses of the quantitative data produced by the survey. Tony Bennett was responsible for the overall direction and coordination of the project. The results will be reported at length in *Culture, Class, Distinction*, Routledge, 2008.

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³ The assistance of Brigitte LeRoux, Henry Rouanet and Johs Hjellbrekke has been essential to this endeavour.

⁴ For the questionnaire see Thomson 2004, also on <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/cultural-capital-and-social-exclusion/project-publications.php>

⁵ For details see Silva 2005, also on <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/cultural-capital-and-social-exclusion/project-publications.php>

Biographical details

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Alan Warde is Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester. He works on the sociology of culture and the sociology of consumption, with particular reference to food and eating. He is a joint author of *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Routledge, 2008), a book based on the project reported here. His previous book was *Trust in Food: an institutional and comparative analysis*, (Palgrave, 2007), with Unni Kjaernes and Mark Harvey.

David Wright is an Assistant Professor in Sociology at the University of Warwick. He was a Research Fellow on the Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion project and is co-author of *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Routledge, 2008). His research interests are in the literary field, cultural taste and cultural policy.