



Nordic democracy of taste? Cultural omnivorousness in musical and literary taste preferences in Finland

Semi Purhonen^{a,*}, Jukka Gronow^b, Keijo Rahkonen^a

^aDepartment of Social Research, University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 18, FIN-00014 Helsinki, Finland

^bDepartment of Sociology, Uppsala University, P.O. Box 624, SE-751 26 Uppsala, Sweden

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Abstract

This article explores cultural omnivorousness in music and literature in Finland, one of the so-called Nordic welfare states. Based on nationally representative survey data, literature and music are examined for respondents' likings of different genres. Cultural omnivorousness is first examined by measuring omnivorousness as the sum of the likings of musical and literature genres ("omnivorousness by volume"), and second, by counting only those combinations of likings that cross cultural boundaries ("omnivorousness by composition"). Different taste combinations are constructed and explained by socio-demographic variables motivated by earlier research on omnivorousness and cultural tastes (most notably by Pierre Bourdieu). The results suggest that no matter how omnivorousness is operationalised, socio-demographic factors offer better explanations for literary preferences than for musical ones. In both literature and music, being female and highly educated were the main determinants of omnivorousness. If musical and literary genres are divided into "highbrow", "middlebrow" and "lowbrow", then the omnivore type combining likings from all three categories was the most typical of all combinations in both cultural fields, whereas the hypothetical "univore snob" (with likings exclusively limited to the highbrow genres) was practically non-existent. The results also show that those being omnivorous in music are largely omnivorous in literature also.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The question of cultural omnivorousness

Since its formulation by Richard A. Peterson in the early 1990s (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996), the so-called omnivore thesis has inspired lively

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: semi.purhonen@helsinki.fi (S. Purhonen), jukka.gronow@soc.uu.se (J. Gronow), keijo.rahkonen@helsinki.fi (K. Rahkonen).

discussion and a number of empirical studies in many countries. Even if the results leave many open questions with no definitive answer in sight, we can nevertheless speak about a genuinely cumulative process of knowledge as far as empirical results and methodological issues are concerned (see Peterson's own survey of this debate, in Peterson, 2005; for a selection of recent contributions, see Ollivier et al., 2008).

The omnivore thesis has been tested in several countries with more or less extensive sets of data and with more or less convincing – and varying – results. The thesis can be read as a major critique of Pierre Bourdieu and the picture of strict and hierarchical class tastes he painted in *La Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]). In his classical work, Bourdieu analysed the connection between the objective structure of social positions and the structure of symbolic activities (cultural tastes and practices). He conceptualised them into two separate but interconnected spaces: the space of social positions (social space) and the space of lifestyles. Social space is constituted by three kinds of capital – economic, social and cultural capital. Bourdieu argued that there is a structural homology between social position and cultural practices, as well as between cultural practices in different cultural fields. In both cases, the habitus serves as a mediating mechanism, as it refers to class-based principles of tastes, knowledge, and practices. Bourdieu considered legitimate taste and “highbrow” cultural activities (taste for and participation in the classical fine arts etc.) typical to the dominant classes, ultimately as means of power. As indicators of cultural capital or, more generally, of social status, he saw them contributing to social exclusion, cultural dominance and inequality.

The omnivore thesis essentially claims that during the last few decades, the taste of the dominant class, or more particularly its highly educated cultural elite, has lost much of its exclusiveness and has in fact become inclusive. What makes the new ruling class or elite culture distinctive is its omnivorousness. When originally formulated by Peterson et al., the thesis focused on music and the empirical evidence came from the changing musical tastes in the US. One of the reasons for this focus was Bourdieu's claim that music, as the most “spiritual” and “pure” of the arts representing radical negation of the social world, is the field in which the relationship between cultural capital and taste is most distinctly manifested (Bourdieu, 1984:13–19; cf. Peterson, 2005:259–260). However, according to the omnivore thesis, the cultural elite or the educated upper middle classes preferred not only classical or other kinds of art music traditionally associated with highbrow culture, but also various genres of popular music. In fact, according to Bryson (1996), this group disliked only a few genres like “heavy metal” (for a criticism of this thesis, see Tampubolon, 2008).¹ The empirical tests of the omnivore thesis have mostly been restricted to one cultural field or, alternatively, documented only cultural practices, not knowledge or taste. More comprehensive, comparative empirical data have simply not been available (see e.g. López-Sintas and Katz-Gerro, 2005). In any case, an essential element of Bourdieu's argument is the transferability of the habitus to different cultural domains, which

¹ As pointed out by Holt (1997), the omnivore thesis, although an extremely interesting empirical observation deserving all due attention, does not necessarily challenge Bourdieu's general model of the distinctive nature of the legitimate taste of the ruling class. Bourdieu could easily defend himself by arguing that the particular objects or the musical genres of likes and dislikes are not decisive, but rather the style in which they are appreciated (reflexive, critical, formal, distanced relationship versus direct and emotional involvement) is significant. Likewise, recordings of country music can equally well become part of the legitimate, good – or even vanguard – taste and belong to the most “vulgar” and popular culture. As many argue, the (post)modern cultural vanguard scene in fact increasingly plays on such ambivalences with their multiple and changing meanings and contexts (e.g. Featherstone, 1991; see also Laermans, 1992). Within the limits of this article we are not, however, able to analyse these questions systematically.

thereby brings systematicity² and unity to the production of cultural practices and tastes (Bourdieu, 1984:172–175). Consequently, it is important that we identify homologies between cultural hierarchies – as well as between tastes, knowledge and practices – in all, or as many as possible, cultural fields. Likewise, if omnivorousness can be similarly detected from several cultural fields, it would constitute powerful evidence for omnivorousness as a true “indicator of the democratization of the arts” (Peterson and Rossman, 2007:312).

In this article our purpose is to analyse in detail the omnivorousness of taste in two cultural areas, music and literature, in Finland. Drawing upon recently collected nationally representative survey data, both areas are analysed in terms of the liking for different cultural genres. This dual focus enables us to compare omnivorousness in musical taste and in literary taste. In previous studies, omnivorousness has usually been considered in terms of musical taste only, probably because of practical reasons (availability of data) and because Peterson’s own early studies concentrated on music (e.g. Bryson, 1996, 1997; Van Eijck, 2001; Emmison, 2003; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007; Coulangeon and Lemel, 2007; Lundy, 2007). Few studies have addressed the question in the field of literature (Van Rees et al., 1999; Zavisca, 2005; Torche, 2007), and only in some of the most recent studies has the omnivore thesis been addressed simultaneously with a wide range of cultural domains (e.g. Virtanen, 2007; Warde et al., 2007, 2008; Prieur et al., 2008; Lizardo and Skiles, 2009).

There are several reasons why we here explore cultural omnivorousness in two fields of culture instead of just one, just as there are several reasons why we have selected particularly music and literature as our object of research. The first motivation to explore and compare two cultural fields comes from the already referred Bourdieu’s idea of homology between cultural fields and coherent habitus according to which taste dispositions are organised. On the other hand, however, Bourdieu also states that structural homologies between fields always take a specific and unique form within a particular field; i.e. each field has its specific logic, history and capital that is valued (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:97–114). Both of these Bourdieusian arguments make it interesting to include two cultural fields – music and literature – in the analysis. The second motivation to study two cultural domains comes from Peterson’s call for “testing the omnivore idea across the full range of style choices” (Peterson, 2005:267). By analysing omnivorousness in the fields of music and literature we join Lizardo and Skiles (2009) who have recently answered to Peterson’s suggestion by comparing omnivorousness in music and television. While there are plenty of previous studies on omnivorousness in music and some studies on omnivorousness in literature, we are not aware of any single study in which the question of omnivorous taste in both of these two fields would have been systematically addressed.

The fields of music and literature, if understood as specific sub-domains in the field of culture, arts and media, can be seen as located relatively close to each other if the whole spectrum of society is concerned (cf. Bourdieu, 1993). There are, however, important differences between these two cultural fields, especially if considered as different forms of action. Reading books is

² According to Bourdieu (1984:173), systematicity “is found in all the properties – and property – with which individuals and groups surround themselves, houses, furniture, paintings, books, cars, spirits, cigarettes, perfume, clothes, and in the practices in which they manifest their distinction, sports, games, entertainments, only because it is in the synthetic unity of the habitus, the unifying, generative principle of all practices.” One can note that the idea of distinct “taste cultures” that cross several cultural fields, as formulated, for instance, by Herbert J. Gans (1999; originally 1974), has significant parallel with the Bourdieusian hypothesis of the homology between cultural practices in different cultural fields. Gans (1999:93) claimed that “every major taste culture has its own art, music, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, films, television programs, architecture, favoured foods and so forth”.

obviously heavily dependent on formal schooling and educational skills (e.g. Kraaykamp and Dijkstra, 1999; Van Rees et al., 1999; Torche, 2007; for evidence from Finland, see Liikkanen et al., 2006:247–260) whilst the case of listening to music is not as straightforward (which is, of course, not to say that listening to music would be totally free from educational requirements, but the issue is usually dealt with by the hidden curricula in schools and not openly; see Bourdieu, 1984; Lynch, 1989; Kelly, 2009). In addition, one can simply say that reading a book usually demands more time and effort whilst music can be listened to also “in action” (DeNora, 2000), that is, through a variety of media and techniques as well as in different spatial and social settings where routines and also pure chance may play a part.

Another difference between the fields of literature and music is that previous research from many countries (e.g. Tepper, 2000; Bukodi, 2007; Torche, 2007), including Finland (e.g. Eskola, 1990; Liikkanen et al., 2006; Hanifi, 2007), has shown that women read more and are in general more involved than men in the field of literature. Past research has typically not found listening to music similarly female-dominated activity (for example, cultural statistics from Finland constantly suggest men being more active in listening to music than women; see Liikkanen et al., 2006). It should be emphasised, however, that the gender difference in reading does not necessarily mean that women would be also more omnivorous readers. A recent study from Chile shows, for example, that despite the fact that Chilean women tend to read more books than men, gender did not have any effect on the diversity of literary genres liked (Torche, 2007:85–89).

1.2. *The Finnish context*

Finland has usually been considered one of the so-called Nordic welfare states (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1999; Kautto et al., 2001) that offer relatively equal educational opportunities and the lowest levels of socio-economic inequality in the world. In this sense, Finland is an interesting choice for studying issues of omnivorosness and social differentiation of cultural practices and tastes. In the Finnish sociological discussion it has often been claimed that, as a small population and a small linguistic area, Finland is a relatively homogenous society with a culture in which distinctions and social differentiation of taste and lifestyle play only a minor role, thus offering a counterpoint to Bourdieu and his study in the 1960s France (e.g. Mäkelä, 1985; Alapuro, 1988a, 2006; Tarasti, 1990; Liikkanen, 1998). It has even been suggested that in Finnish culture, there are simply “not enough” cultural objects among which distinctions can be made, the cultural differences overall are small and thus one cannot speak about cultural hierarchies at all in a definite sense. The somewhat qualified reception Bourdieu’s work received in the 1980s became, roughly speaking, the dominant opinion of mainstream sociology in Finland (Rahkonen, 2008).

Questioning the applicability of Bourdieu’s theory in Finland has, of course, some sound historical reasons (given by Mäkelä, 1985). For example, compared to many other European countries, Finland’s agriculturally based society modernised and industrialised only recently—after the Second World War. In the subsequent decades, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, Finnish society, with the support of a large political consensus on the ideals of the welfare state, was built through many social policy reforms in which the equality of all citizens was emphasised and differences between social classes and income groups were narrowed. Moreover, unlike France, for instance, there was never a proper feudal nobility in Finland that could have slowly cultivated different tastes and distinctions vis-à-vis the lower classes. And finally, despite the bitter Civil War (1918), the Finnish working class never built a strong counterculture that could oppose the values of the dominant culture (e.g. the will to pursue education; cf. Willis, 1977), as took place, for instance, in Britain. To this list could be added the historical impact of the alliance

between intellectuals and the peasantry in the Finnish nationalist movement, which took place in the late nineteenth century (Alapuro, 1988b).

There are, however, at least two main reasons why this criticism of the applicability of Bourdieu's model to the Finnish context can be questioned. First, the critique was not based on any systematic empirical research. Although there have been many studies in which some of the key questions proposed by Bourdieu have been addressed, synthetic and systematic research or testing of Bourdieu's ideas has not been done, owing to the lack of suitable data. Second, even if we were to agree with the above-mentioned historical reasoning, Finnish society has experienced significant and substantial changes since the sociological debates of the 1980s (see e.g. Julkunen, 2001; Heiskala and Luhtakallio, 2006).³

Nevertheless, even if we disagree with the argument that strongly rejects the applicability of Bourdieu's approach for Finnish culture, the historical background of Finnish society makes it especially interesting to study the amount and social profile of omnivores in Finland. If Finland is indeed a country largely characterised by a monoculture or a "common culture" (cf. Bennett, 2007), then it would be plausible to expect that in Finland, high status groups are not "snobbish" but involved with all kinds of cultural fields, products and genres, including those common among lower status groups.

It is not self-evident, however, that a strong welfare state or even an active cultural policy aimed at minimising the differences between socio-economic groups is necessarily effective in equalising the cultural sphere in terms of cultural consumption and tastes. In principle, it is also possible that if members of the upper classes "find it increasingly hard to distinguish themselves according to material consumption (. . .), they may respond by participating to a greater extent in culture" (Katz-Gerro, 2002:224). This might well be the case in a situation where the position of the old cultural elite is threatened by social mobility due to opening educational possibilities (like, for instance, in France during the last decades; see Coulangeon and Lemel, 2007:107), but is not, however, very likely when the cultural resources have been more equally distributed for quite awhile as is the case in Finland. In any case, without claiming *a priori* any Finnish exceptionalism, we believe that in studying phenomena like omnivorousness, it is important to take into account the different social, structural and cultural settings that characterise the country under scrutiny, as far as the data permit (cf. Katz-Gerro, 2002).

Omnivorousness of cultural taste has not been previously studied in Finland in the way measured by Peterson and Kern (1996), who addressed the question directly in terms of taste preferences. There are, however, two recent studies that have dealt with omnivorousness by measuring it through cultural participation and practices. Alasuutari's (2009) brief study, in which omnivorousness was measured by the number of musical genres listened to, by and large supports the basic findings of the omnivore thesis in Finland (for the analysis of the same data, see also Liikkanen, 2009). Virtanen's (2007) comparative study of cultural consumption in fifteen European Union countries showed that the Nordic countries were clearly leading in the proportion of omnivores in the population. Whereas the average proportion of omnivores in the fifteen countries was only 13%, the proportion in Sweden was 33%, in Denmark, 24% and in Finland, 23% (Virtanen, 2007:215). In her study, too, omnivorousness was operationalised in terms of cultural participation (e.g. concert attendance, musical genres listened to) and not directly by taste preferences.

³ Among the most salient of these changes are increasing urbanisation, post-industrialisation, the rise of information technology and the knowledge-based economy, the membership in the European Union, and globalisation, especially the globalisation of cultural goods, products and influences.

1.3. The aim of this study

The purpose of this article is to explore the omnivorousness of cultural taste and how that omnivorousness is socially structured in the areas of music and literature in today's Finland. We can thereby shed light on the question of whether there are grounds for calling Finland, one of the Nordic welfare states, also a Nordic “taste democracy”, to use the phrase coined by Van Eijck and Knulst (2005). Van Eijck and Knulst did not explicitly define what they meant by taste democracy, but concluded, however, that in the Netherlands, “it is doubtful whether a preference for highbrow culture renders much prestige today”, and therefore, “there is, in other words, no more need for snobbism” (Van Eijck and Knulst, 2005:527). Perhaps an even more important characteristic of a taste democracy than the level of overall proportion of those with omnivorous cultural preferences is the absence of high-status groups with exclusive cultural tastes, namely, upper-class snobs. In this sense, the “democracy of taste” can be understood as the opposite of the “aristocracy of culture”, to use Bourdieu's (1984:11–96) phrase.

In its original formulation, the omnivore thesis referred to the increasing number of omnivores among the population and in particular among the higher educated social groups (Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996). Since the data of our study does not allow any systematic historical or longitudinal comparisons, we shall examine the weaker version of the thesis: that is, it is more typical for the higher educated people to be cultural omnivores (i.e., to have an inclusive taste stretching over the border between highbrow and popular culture) than it is to be cultural univores (i.e., to have an exclusive taste like is the case with cultural snobs restricted to the highbrow culture). We shall also compare our results, whenever possible, with those of other countries in order to find out whether omnivorousness is more typical in Finland than in the other countries studied. The question which naturally follows is whether the social profiles of the omnivores are similar in the different countries or whether we can identify clear national profiles in this respect. It could be expected that cultural omnivorousness would be more common in socially less hierarchical countries with more equally distributed educational opportunities and economic resources.

One problem with studies examining cultural omnivorousness is that to date, there has been no consensus among sociologists on how to measure omnivorous taste (see Peterson, 2005).⁴ To deal with this problem, we apply two sources from earlier literature on the subject that we have found to be particularly valuable. On the one hand, we are influenced by Alan Warde et al.'s work (e.g. Warde et al., 2007, 2008; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009), and on the other, the work of Van Eijck et al. (e.g. Van Eijck, 2001; Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008).

From Warde et al. we first adopt the idea that when operationalising omnivorousness, we should somehow distinguish between “omnivorousness by volume” and “omnivorousness by composition”. Omnivorousness by volume refers to the breadth of appreciation and taste, which can be measured in its simplest form, for example, by the total number of musical (or literary) genres liked by individuals. In contrast, as pointed out by Warde et al. (2008:149), omnivorousness by composition is in a sense a more selective measure, since it refers only to

⁴ Peterson has addressed the paradoxical nature of measuring omnivorousness by referring to a study in which omnivorousness is operationalised so that “a person who chooses just New Age music and Rap, the highest and lowest status musics according to their measure, is counted as highly omnivorous, while a person who chooses Reggae, Pop/Rock, Jazz, Blues, Swing, and Oldies, musics with essentially the same status score, is counted as univorous” (Peterson, 2005:263). It is easy to agree with Peterson (2005) that “this measure of the status-spread of music choices is interesting, but it violates the root idea of omnivorousness”.

combinations of tastes that cross symbolically significant boundaries, usually between highbrow and popular genres (see also Van Eijck, 2001; Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008; Peterson, 2005; and the critical discussion by Lundy, 2007).

The second thing we borrow from Warde et al. is the way how different combinations of tastes are built. We calculate, following Warde et al. (2007, 2008) and Warde and Bennett (2008) “ratios of legitimacy” for each musical and literary genre according to which we can classify all genres into three groups: “highbrow”, “middlebrow” and “lowbrow”. Measured in this way, true omnivore tastes are only those that combine likings from these three groups of genres (in the best case, all of them). Here is the point where we follow Van Eijck by counting all possible combinations of those three taste patterns and analysing them in detail (cf. Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008).

1.4. *Research questions and hypotheses*

The research questions addressed in this article are:

1. How is omnivorousness of taste distributed according to basic socio-demographic variables – by gender, age, education, income and residential area – and how far can omnivorousness be explained by such variables in Finland when it is operationalised “by volume”, that is, simply as the number of musical and literary genres that people like?
2. How is omnivorousness of taste distributed according to the same five socio-demographic variables and how far can these variables explain omnivorousness in Finland when operationalised “by composition”, that is, as combinations of preferences from three different groups of musical and literary genres according to the cultural legitimacy of the groups?
3. How do omnivorousness in musical taste and omnivorousness in literary taste – both of which are analysed identically – differ from each other in respect of answering the research questions 1 and 2?

These research questions can be broken down into several hypotheses. In relation to the first research question, we put forward five hypotheses, one per each socio-demographic variable included in the analyses. It is expected that omnivorous taste, as measured by volume, is influenced by all these factors: gender, age, education, income and residential area.⁵ Previous studies do not, however, totally agree how omnivorousness is influenced by these variables.

Several earlier studies have shown that *gender* plays a role in structuring cultural consumption, often because women tend to participate more than men in highbrow culture, a difference also manifested in preferences (e.g. Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000; Katz-Gerro, 2002; Kane, 2004; Lizardo, 2006). This gender difference has also been found in Finland (e.g.

⁵ One evident socio-demographic factor, occupational status, is not included among the independent variables considered here, although the data at hand would have made it possible. The deliberate exclusion has been made mainly for the sake of analytical parsimony. Preliminary analyses showed that the effect of occupational status is much less powerful than the effect of, for instance, educational level, on musical and literary omnivorousness in Finland (indeed, after controlling for education, the effect of occupational status was only minor). In addition, inclusion of occupational status would have decreased the number of cases that could be included in the multivariate analyses since nearly 200 respondents did not fit into the occupational classification used (because of either missing or unclear data). In some of the previous studies, the relationship between occupational status and omnivorousness is analysed in detail (e.g. Peterson and Simkus, 1992) whereas in others, occupational status is not included in the analyses (e.g. Peterson and Kern, 1996).

Rahkonen and Purhonen, 2004; Alasuutari, 2009; Purhonen et al., 2009). As far as cultural omnivorousness is concerned, the results are less clear. In the formulations of the original omnivore thesis, gender played only a minor role (see Peterson and Simkus, 1992:164–165; Peterson and Kern, 1996:903). A wide-ranging recent study from the United Kingdom shows, for its part, that the effect of gender is significant by indicating that women are more omnivorous than men—but only with regard to participation and not in the matter of cultural taste (Bennett et al., 2009:184–185; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009). On the one hand, there are some studies suggesting that women seem to be more omnivorous than men (e.g. López-Sintas and Katz-Gerro, 2005), but on the other hand, in other studies the relationship is inverse (e.g. Van Rees et al., 1999; Van Eijck, 2001), or the gender differences are overall non-significant and small (e.g. López-Sintas and García-Álvarez, 2002; Vander Stichele and Laermans, 2006; García-Álvarez et al., 2007). However, since women are more involved than men in highbrow culture in Finland, our first hypothesis (*H1a*): *Women are more omnivorous than men.*

In some studies, *age* has been clearly associated with omnivorousness, the elderly being more omnivorous than the young (e.g. Van Eijck and Knulst, 2005; for a slightly more complicated picture in the US, see Tampubolon, 2008). On the other hand, the results by Warde and Gayo-Cal (2009), for instance, from Britain show that the middle aged are the most omnivorous, the youngest and the oldest age groups being more limited in their preferences. By contrast, studies of cultural participation carried out in the Netherlands (Van Rees et al., 1999), Spain (López-Sintas and García-Álvarez, 2002) and Flanders (Vander Stichele and Laermans, 2006), have shown that the young age groups are the most omnivorous. Despite these rather conflicting results, age is nevertheless an important factor to take into consideration. One should keep in mind that the original thesis about the rise of the new omnivorousness in the US by Peterson (1992) was based on the hypothesis and claim about social change that had taken place. Age and especially generational difference were thought to be salient explanatory factors in that process, the baby-boomers interpreted as the first age cohort in which omnivorousness had replaced snobbish elite taste (“univore highbrow”) among high-status groups (see Peterson et al., 1996, 2000; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Rossman, 2007). Hence, our second hypothesis (*H1b*): *Younger age groups are more omnivorous than older age groups.*

The whole discussion about omnivorousness has been centred on the role of *education* and, more generally, on social status. According to the original thesis, omnivorousness has taken the place of highbrow culture, and omnivores are more likely to be those in higher social positions and with higher education (for a survey of this discussion, see Peterson, 2005). To our knowledge, all studies in the field have shown that there is a positive relationship between a high level of education and omnivorous taste, both in music and in literature.⁶ Accordingly, our third hypothesis is clear (*H1c*): *The highly educated are more omnivorous than the less educated.*

It is indisputable that the level of economic resources affects cultural consumption (e.g. Räsänen, 2003), and therefore, it is interesting to explore whether there is any connection between economic capital and cultural taste (cf. Bourdieu, 1984:177–178). In other words, not only high education but also other kinds of assets, including income, have been shown to be associated with cultural omnivorousness. For example, in the Russian study on omnivorous taste in literature, Zavisca (2005) found that along with education, income was one of the key

⁶ It seems that the field of television is an exception since it has been found that omnivorous television watchers are less educated than the average (Ollivier and Gauthier, 2006; see also Lizardo and Skiles, 2009).

determinants of omnivorousness. Therefore, we hypothesise here that (H1d): *Those with high personal income are more omnivorous than those with low personal income.*

Last, the type of *residential area* might be considered for its impact on cultural omnivorousness, since people living in large cities obviously have more opportunity to avail themselves of cultural consumption of various kinds (see e.g. Alderson et al., 2007; García-Álvarez et al., 2007; cf. also Virtanen, 2007; Alasuutari, 2009). Therefore, our final hypothesis relating to the socio-demographic variables included in the analyses is (H1e): *Those living in urban areas are more omnivorous than those living in the countryside.*

Regarding our second research question, we do not expect to find differences in the characteristics of omnivorousness depending on the operationalisation chosen. Hence, our hypothesis is here (H2): *Operationalised either way, by volume or by composition, the social profile of omnivorousness is similar; that is, the answers to the hypotheses H1a–H1e (whatever they are) remain the same also when omnivorousness is measured by composition.*

Lastly, the third research question leads to our final three hypotheses. First, despite some studies suggesting high specificity of cultural domains (e.g. Erickson, 1996), we anticipate that (H3a): *The effects of socio-demographic factors on omnivorousness are in the same direction (i.e., as expected in H1a–H1e) both in music and in literature.* However, taken as a whole we expect that (H3b): *Omnivorousness in literature will be explained better by the socio-demographic factors than omnivorousness in music.*⁷ Our very last hypothesis here, regarding the relationship between omnivorousness in music and in literature, is (H3c): *A considerable proportion of omnivores in music are omnivores also in literature, that is, there is a homology between the field of music and the field of literature in terms of omnivorousness.*

2. Data, methods and variables used in the analysis

2.1. Data

This article draws on a new nationally representative Finnish survey that was designed with the recent debates of cultural consumption in mind as part of the research project “Cultural Capital and Social Differentiation in Contemporary Finland” (Rahkonen et al., 2006). The data were collected by Statistics Finland (the Central Statistical Office of Finland) in the latter part of the year 2007. The random sample of 3000 persons, ages 18–74, was taken from the database of Statistics Finland, which consists of all Finnish citizens (inhabitants of the Åland Islands – a semiautonomous province of Finland – were excluded). The response rate was 46.3% (a total of 1388 returned questionnaires). Although this response rate could have been better, it is roughly the same rate as in other recent mail surveys in Finland (see Melkas, 2008). A comparison of the respondents and non-respondents showed that women, older men and the highly educated were slightly overrepresented. For this reason, the data were weighted by an index to correct these biases. The weights were calculated by Statistics Finland.

The research has been carried out in cooperation with a British research project “Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion” (Bennett et al., 2003, 2009), which will enable us eventually to

⁷ This hypothesis is motivated by earlier studies from Finland (e.g. Liikkanen et al., 2006), according to which involvement in the field of literature is, in general, more dependent on formal education and gender than is the case with involvement in music. We are aware that this expectation, in a sense, is not congruent with Bourdieu’s (1984:18) claim that “nothing more infallibly classifies than tastes in music”. More important, however, than the way this hypothesis is formulated, is the possibility to analyse and compare the issue: can omnivorous taste be better explained by socio-demographic factors in the case of music or literature?

conduct cross-national comparisons. The questionnaire was constructed following the example of the British survey (see Thomson, 2004, for technical details), but with a number of national or cultural modifications that endeavoured to preserve comparability as far as possible.⁸ In formulating the survey questions, the focus group interviews conducted earlier in the project (in the years 2005–2007) as well as previous Finnish surveys of similar topics (e.g. Alasuutari, 1997; Erola et al., 2005) were of great help. However, similar representative survey data that would have made possible systematic and specific study of cultural practices and tastes or of the omnivore thesis have not been previously available in Finland.

2.2. Methods

As the first step in our analysis (see section 3.1), in which omnivorousness is operationalised in terms of volume, we count the number of musical genres and literary genres liked. Then, in the explanatory analysis, both of these scales are analysed according to five basic socio-demographic variables: gender, age group, level of education, monthly personal income and residential area. This was done by applying a Poisson regression model. Poisson regression is used for count data (non-negative integers) when the assumption of normality is not met and assumes that the data are distributed in a Poisson distribution (Cameron and Trivedi, 1998; Duntzman and Ho, 2006). Parameter estimates (β) and corresponding standard errors were estimated by maximum likelihood algorithms (method: hybrid). The Wald chi-square statistic was used to assess the explanatory power of the regression variables. The overall fit of the model to the data, as indicated by the likelihood ratio chi-square statistic, is also given. Besides taking into account the main effects of each independent variable simultaneously, with Poisson regression model we can also test the interaction effects between the independent variables.

As the second step in the analysis (section 3.2), in which omnivorousness is operationalised in terms of composition, we first divided the different musical and literary genres into three groups by calculating “ratios of legitimacy” for each of the genres (Warde et al., 2008; Warde and Bennett, 2008; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009). Thereafter, we are able to specify all possible taste combinations ranging from different types of univore tastes to different kinds of combinatory omnivores both for music and for literary genres. Then we analyse the main taste combinations again according to socio-demographic variables, this time by means of logistic regression analysis (Menard, 2001), as we explain the group membership in each taste combination (i.e. the dependent variable is naturally dichotomous). Relationships are pointed out in terms of odds ratio coefficients ($\text{Exp}(B)$). Compared to the reference category (odds ratio = 1.0), odds ratio less than 1 indicates negative association and odds ratio greater than 1 positive association. In addition, Wald statistic for each individual independent variable (which corresponds to significance testing of b coefficients in OLS regression) and Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 as an effect size measure for the overall models are also given. Again, besides the main effects of the independent variables, interaction effects are taken into account.

⁸ Even though our data will enable us to make cross-national comparisons with the respective British data, such comparative analyses are excluded from this article, owing to lack of space. The cultural fields in which there are comparable questions to be analysed further include television, film, reading (newspapers and magazines as well as literature), music, the visual arts, cultural attitudes and leisure-time activities – most of these are covered in all three dimensions of cultural practice: knowledge, taste and participation. Both British and Finnish surveys also contained comprehensive information on respondents’ socio-demographic characters.

2.3. Variables

2.3.1. Musical and literary genres

Personal likings for both musical and literature genres were asked in a questionnaire that used a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from “like very much” to “dislike very much”). In addition there was a sixth response alternative, which, in the case of musical genres, was “have not listened” and in the case of literature, “have not read”. The likings of altogether thirteen musical genres and eleven literary genres were asked. The list of musical genres included Finnish schlagers, rock, modern jazz, blues, Finnish folk music, world music, classical music, opera, country and western, electronic dance music, heavy metal, hip-hop and R&B, and religious music. Literary genres included thrillers and whodunits, sci-fi, fantasy and horror, romances, biographies, modern literature, classical literature, poetry and plays, religious books, self-help books, leisure/hobby books, and other non-fiction. The descriptive statistics of the likings of all these genres are presented in [Appendix A](#).

Among musical genres, both Finnish schlagers (domestic popular music sung in Finnish) and rock are the most popular genres in Finland. Modern jazz, world music, opera as well as electronic dance music and hip-hop and R&B belong to the least liked musical styles. Classical music is well liked, at least compared to opera, which is the most disliked musical genre in Finland. For instance, heavy metal (cf. [Bryson, 1996](#)) is disliked much less than opera.⁹ Blues and country and western are rather popular genres with many respondents liking them at least somewhat. Religious music and Finnish folk music are quite popular too, with almost as many liking them as those who dislike them.

Thrillers, romances, biographies and other non-fiction are the most well liked literary genres in Finland. Thrillers and whodunits lead the list with almost one third liking them very much and another one third liking them to some degree. Religious books are the least liked of all—about one-fifth of the respondents disliked them and almost one third had never read any. Almost half the respondents liked romantic literature at least somewhat, whereas biographies were liked at least to some degree by as many as 58% of the respondents. In addition to religious books, science fiction, fantasy and horror were among the most disliked literary genres. A good many respondents even liked modern literature, poetry and plays, at least somewhat. Classical literature was only slightly more popular than modern literature. The two genres of non-fiction as well as self-help books are all rather popular literature genres in Finland.

2.3.2. Omnivorousness by volume

Our first measure of omnivorousness is operationalised as a sum of musical genres liked on the one hand and literary genres liked on the other (here those who responded to the given genres with “somewhat” or “very much” were combined in the count). The mean score for the number of liked music genres is 4.64 ($SD = 2.39$, range = 0–13), and for the number of literary genres, 4.26 ($SD = 2.52$, range = 0–11). Both variables are approximately normally distributed, except that in the case of the number of liked literary genres, there is a fairly large zero category ($n = 134$) consisting of those who did not like any of the literary genres. As is often the case, the distributions somewhat violate the assumption of the Poisson regression that the conditional

⁹ Heavy metal is indeed a strangely popular musical genre in Finland: only 33% of the respondents disliked “heavy” very much or somewhat, while in Britain, for example, as many as 75% disliked heavy metal (see [Savage, 2006:163](#)). This peculiar popularity of heavy metal in Finland is well known from other contexts. To some extent the extraordinary popularity of metal applies to other Scandinavian countries as well if considered in terms of music charts (though we are not aware of any comparative study of the subject).

variance and mean are equal (Cameron and Trivedi, 1998). Consequently, some slight overdispersion was evident in the Poisson regression model, but fitting an alternative model to account for the overdispersion (negative binomial regression) did not substantially alter the results, which suggests that Poisson regression is appropriate in this case.¹⁰

2.3.3. *Omnivorousness by composition*

Our second measure of omnivorousness is based on a compositional criterion by which we divided the different musical and literary genres into three groups according to their legitimacy. The ratio of legitimacy is calculated for each of the genres by dividing the number of those respondents with the highest education (a university degree) as a percentage of all who like the genre (at least somewhat) by the number of those respondents who were the least educated (no educational qualifications whatsoever) as a similar percentage of all who like the genre (Warde et al., 2008; Warde and Bennett, 2008; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009). In other words, these ratios express the relative share of the more highly educated as compared to those with the lowest educational level among those respondents liking a genre. The ratio between these proportions can be interpreted as a rough measure of cultural legitimacy if, like Bourdieu (1984, 1996), we assume that higher education and its institutions really are the main producers of cultural hierarchies and legitimacy and thus legitimate tastes as well. Hence, in this way – and it should be emphasised that this is only one possible way – we can establish a compositional criterion for omnivorousness, which enables us to identify symbolic boundaries that only “true omnivores” might cross.¹¹

After calculating the ratios, genres with different ratios of legitimacy are divided into three categories. Warde et al. (2008:156) and Warde and Gayo-Cal (2009) called these categories “legitimate”, “common” and “unauthorised”. Those genres where the highly educated formed at least twice as many as those with low educational levels of all who liked each genre belong to the legitimate culture; the genres with 1–2 times more university graduates than those with no qualifications are classified as common culture; the genres liked by more respondents with low educational levels than by the highly educated (i.e. the legitimacy ratio is under 1) are labelled unauthorised.

Even though this three-fold division of different combinations of tastes is the basis of our analysis regarding omnivorousness by composition, we are not totally satisfied with the actual labels with which Warde et al. used. The division is obviously a product of the procedure that

¹⁰ For count data, it is usual that the variance exceeds the mean. The problem is that large overdispersion leads to deflated standard errors and thus increases the probability of making Type I error. According to Cameron and Trivedi (1998:77), “if the sample variance is more than twice the sample mean, then data are likely to remain overdispersed after the inclusion of regressors”. Here, the ratio between sample variance and mean was 1.23 in the case of music and 1.49 in literature. In addition, overdispersion can be measured by, e.g., Pearson χ^2 dispersion statistic. Values more than 1 (the ratio of the deviance value to its degrees of freedom) indicate overdispersion. Answers vary to the question of how much larger than 1.0 should it be before some sort of correction is necessary. Zuur et al. (2009:225–226) state that deviation “larger than 1.5 means that some action needs to be taken to correct it”, whereas Lindsey (1999:560) has suggested that “one only looks for overdispersion if the deviance is at least twice the number of degrees of freedom”. Here, the Pearson χ^2 statistic was 1.11 in the case of music and 1.21 in literature. This suggests that overdispersion is not a serious problem for the subsequent analyses.

¹¹ As Warde et al. note, herein lies a potential risk of tautology because, in a sense, according to the criterion, “powerful or privileged people like things which powerful or privileged people like” (Warde et al. (2008:156). Nonetheless, the criterion is instrumentally useful as it “generate[s] a plausible classification with which to explore the characteristics of the likes and dislikes of omnivores” (Warde et al., 2008). Other ways to establish the compositional criteria for omnivorousness include, besides using a subjective criterion (e.g. Peterson and Kern, 1996), relying on different statistical techniques like factor analysis (e.g. Van Eijck, 2001; Lundy, 2007) or latent class analysis (e.g. Van Rees et al., 1999; García-Álvarez et al., 2007).

aims to build a simple hierarchy among the genres, but terms like “common” and, especially, “unauthorised” carry also connotations beyond that. Therefore, henceforth in this article, we call these three categories of genres, for the sake of simplicity, the “highbrow”, “middlebrow” and “lowbrow” cultural patterns. By this terminological choice we do not want to commit ourselves to the American research tradition of highbrow and lowbrow culture (see Levine, 1988) in which distinct “taste cultures” are emphasised, although the seminal work by Gans (1999) – often elided in the Bourdieusian tradition – deserves full attention. The terminological choice is motivated by practicality and instrumentality (cf. Katz-Gerro, 2002:220; Peterson and Rossman, 2007:310–311): by highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow we refer to the place each cultural genre has in a hierarchy produced by the compositional criterion developed by Warde et al. (Warde et al., 2008; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009).

After conducting all the steps described above, we can finally analyse how the respondents are divided into all the possible combinations of the three patterns, representing highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow cultures. The last step in our analysis measuring omnivorousness by composition is to examine each main taste combination in detail and explain the likelihood of belonging to them according to different major socio-demographic factors. Special emphasis is, of course, on the likelihood of belonging to the true omnivore type which combines tastes from all three categories of genres, highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow.

2.3.4. *Socio-demographic variables*

The independent socio-demographic variables included in the analysis are presented in Appendix B. The five variables chosen – gender, age, education, income and area – are all socio-demographic characteristics connected to several research hypotheses, according to previous studies, as shown in section 1.4. All the independent variables used in the analyses are categorical.

In the analyses, gender is treated as a dichotomous variable with males being the reference category. Age is divided into six 10-year-long age groups (with the exception of the youngest group, which is only a 7-year-long group with respondents 18–24 years of age). Although treating age as a continuous variable would be more economical and in some cases even more effective (with respect to proportion of the variance explained), we have preferred to use age as a category, since that enables us to observe possible non-linear relationships between age and the dependent variables.

Education was measured using four categories that follow the basic classification of vocational education used by Statistics Finland. The first category (referred to as “no/basic”) includes respondents with only compulsory basic education (elementary school) or less. The second category (“vocational”) includes respondents with different types of vocational school education as well as those with upper secondary school studies and no further education. The third category (“college”) is comprised of those with higher vocational diplomas (roughly comparable to bachelor’s degree) or degrees from different types of colleges and polytechnics. The last category (“university”) includes those with university degrees (M.A. or higher).¹²

¹² Thus, it is important to note that “lower university degrees” (B.A.), which have only recently been instituted in Finnish universities in the wake of the Bologna process of the European Union do not belong in the highest level of educational category (“university”), but rather are classified in the third category (“college”). Missing cases (i.e., 3% of the respondents who did not state their educational level, $n = 42$) were included, following the classification of Statistics Finland (Melkas, 2008), in the first category which includes those respondents with only compulsory basic education or less.

Table 1

The number of musical and literary genres liked by independent background variables (parameter estimates (β) with standard errors in parentheses and Wald chi-square statistics from Poisson regression).

	Number of musical genres liked	Number of literary genres liked
Gender (Wald χ^2)	52.95 ^{***}	175.40 ^{***}
Female	0.19 (0.03) ^{***}	0.37 (0.03) ^{***}
Age group (Wald χ^2)	29.10 ^{***}	29.08 ^{***}
25–34	–0.07 (0.05)	–0.01 (0.05)
35–44	0.00 (0.05)	0.16 (0.05) ^{**}
45–54	0.08 (0.05)	0.10 (0.05)
55–64	0.11 (0.05) [*]	0.11 (0.05) [*]
65–74	0.13 (0.05) ^{**}	0.20 (0.05) ^{***}
Education (Wald χ^2)	25.95 ^{***}	132.15 ^{***}
Vocational	0.12 (0.04) ^{**}	0.36 (0.05) ^{***}
College	0.15 (0.04) ^{***}	0.45 (0.05) ^{***}
University	0.25 (0.05) ^{***}	0.61 (0.05) ^{***}
Income (Wald χ^2)	5.79	3.66
1000–2000	0.02 (0.03)	–0.05 (0.03)
2000+	0.09 (0.04) [*]	–0.01 (0.04)
Area (Wald χ^2)	11.54 ^{**}	11.80 [*]
Suburban	–0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)
Village	–0.10 (0.04) [*]	–0.10 (0.05) [*]
Country	–0.13 (0.05) ^{**}	0.01 (0.05)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 for the whole model	142.31 ^{***} (df = 14)	451.31 ^{***} (df = 14)

Notes: The reference categories ($\beta = 0$) are the following: gender: male; age group: 18–24 years; education: no/basic; income: under 1000 EUR per month; area: city centre.

^{*} $p < 0.05$.

^{**} $p < 0.01$.

^{***} $p < 0.001$.

The last two independent variables included in the analyses are income and residential area. Income is the respondents' personal disposable monthly income (in Euros). Personal monthly net income is divided into three rough categories: the first consists of those making less than 1000 Euros per month; the second includes those making 1000–2000 Euros per month; and the third consists of those making over 2000 Euros per month. Last, we used four alternatives to characterise the type of residential area: city centre; suburb or housing estate; small town or village; countryside (in the tables below, the second category is called simply “suburban”, the third, “village” and the fourth, “country”).

3. Findings

3.1. Omnivorousness by volume

First, we shall examine cultural omnivorousness by measuring it in terms of volume. The purpose of our analysis is now to determine how omnivorousness by volume is distributed socially in Finland, and how well it can be explained by socio-demographic variables. Are there any differences between the areas of these two cultural domains? The results are presented in Table 1.

As expected, although both models are statistically significant, the fit of the model to the data is much better when explaining the number of literary genres liked than is the case with the number of musical genres (the likelihood ratio being over three times higher in literary—the larger the likelihood value, the better the fit of the model to the data). There are, however, interesting and statistically significant relationships not only between the socio-demographic variables and the volume of liked literary genres, but also between the explanatory variables and musical genres as well.

Gender has a substantial effect on both measures of omnivore taste, with women clearly liking more musical and literary genres than men. This gender effect is stronger on the volume of literary genres liked than on the musical genres. While gender is the most powerful determinant of omnivorousness by volume, the effect of age in both cultural domains is much more moderate. The results show, however, that both in music and in literature, the two oldest age groups (those between 55 and 74 years of age) differ from the reference group (the youngest, i.e. those between 18 and 24 years of age) in a way that is statistically significant. In literature, also those between 35 and 44 years of age were significantly more omnivorous than the youngest group.

Education has a strong effect on both scales of the number of genres liked, but again the effect is more prominent in the case of literature. The higher the education, the higher the number of genres liked, both in literature and in music. Even the difference between those with vocational education and those with only compulsory education (the reference category) is clear and statistically significant. Overall, the effect of income on omnivorousness by volume, both in music and in literature, is small and mostly insignificant. Also the impact of residential area on omnivorousness by volume is rather modest in magnitude, although statistically significant in both music and in literature. The effect of residence is more systematic in the case of the number of musical genres liked: respondents living in the countryside liked fewer musical genres than those living in urban areas.

Only one statistically significant interaction effect was found between independent variables predicting the number of musical genres liked; it represents the interaction between gender and age (Wald chi-square statistic = 15.00, $p < 0.01$). The effect of aging (especially the move from the age group 35–44 years old to the age group 45–54 years old) on the number of musical genres liked is much stronger among women, whilst among men there is actually no noticeable age effect at all (Fig. 1). Thus, where age and gender are concerned, it is particularly the middle-aged and older women (and not the elderly men) who like more musical genres when compared to younger age groups. In other words, the gender difference in favour of women in the number of music genres liked is overwhelmingly greatest among the oldest groups.

As a final remark, it is worth noting that when we estimate the correlation between literary and musical omnivorousness by volume, we find that this relationship is very strong and positive ($r = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the fields of music and literature strongly overlap in this sense, suggesting that omnivorous taste clearly crosses the border between these two cultural fields.

3.2. Omnivorousness by composition

In Table 2, following Warde et al. (2008:156–157; see also Warde and Bennett, 2008), we have calculated the ratios of legitimacy for all the musical and literary genres represented in our questionnaire. The idea is roughly that those genres with high ratios of legitimacy can be interpreted as being part of the highbrow culture; those with low ratios are part of the lowbrow

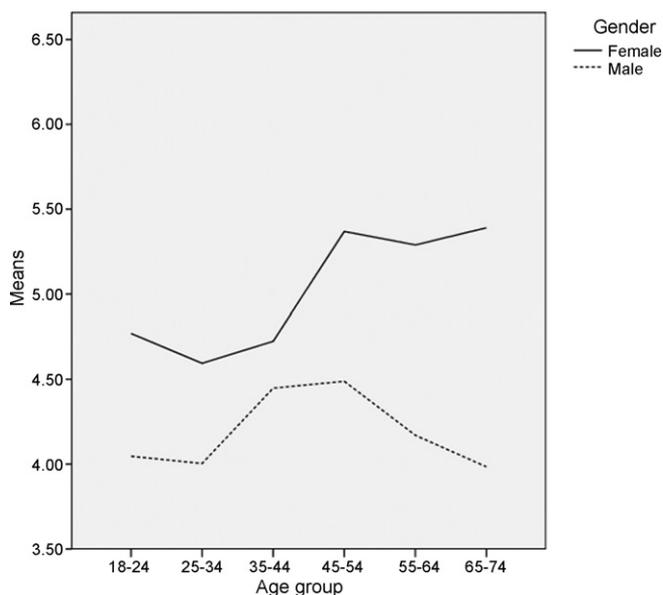


Fig. 1. The Number of musical genres liked by age group and gender in Finland (means).

culture; and those with medium ratios belong to the middlebrow or common culture. For instance, classical literature and opera have notably high ratios of legitimacy, and Finnish folk music and romantic novels have low ratios, whereas for instance, rock music and thrillers belong to the common culture. In the case of musical genres, these ratios of legitimacy ranged from 0.53 (religious music) to 2.65 (world music), and in the case of literary genres, from 0.82 (religious books) to 4.41 (modern literature). Since the genres differ significantly in overall popularity among the respondents, the first column (*a*) of Table 2 gives the percentages of all those who have liked the genre at least somewhat.

In Table 3, all the musical and literary genres have been divided into three classes according to their legitimacy. The genres are divided rather evenly into the three classes of legitimacy so that each class includes at least two genres from both literature and music (Table 3). In other words, the genres selected for our questionnaire covered different tastes quite well. Of all the thirteen musical genres, four are highbrow (world music, opera, classical music and jazz); four are middlebrow (blues, hip-hop, rock and heavy metal); and the rest, as many as five, fall into the lowbrow class. Among the eleven literary genres, three are highbrow genres (modern and classical literature as well as poetry); six are middlebrow (science fiction, thrillers and whodunits, self-help books, other non-fiction, leisure books and biographies). Only two literary genres are lowbrow (romances and religious books).

In the next step we analyse how the respondents are divided into all the possible combinations of these three patterns, representing highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow cultures (Table 4). Altogether seven combinations are possible in addition to a group of respondents who did not like any genre at all. An interesting result arises directly from these combinations: in Finland, the proportion of people whose likings cut across all three categories of genres based on their cultural legitimacy, is quite large: slightly over 40% of the respondents belonged to this group in their musical likings and almost one-third in literature. On the other hand, what is also remarkable,

Table 2

Respondents' likings of musical and literary genres and the "ratios of legitimacy" for each genre.

	Total % of all respondents who like the genre (a)	Those with university degree as a % of all who like the genre (b)	Those with no qualifications as a % of all who like the genre (c)	Ratio of legitimacy (b/c)
Musical genres				
Finnish schlagers	66.9	11.2	19.0	0.59
Rock	68.9	16.3	12.7	1.28
Modern jazz	18.3	24.4	11.4	2.14
Blues	42.9	20.0	11.7	1.71
Finnish folk music	30.9	12.1	21.9	0.55
World music	18.5	26.8	10.1	2.65
Classical music	43.9	22.5	9.4	2.39
Opera	20.7	26.1	10.1	2.58
Country and western	42.3	12.6	17.2	0.73
Electronic dance music	24.2	11.9	18.2	0.65
Heavy metal	36.0	14.2	11.4	1.26
Hip hop and R&B	21.7	17.9	12.0	1.49
Religious music	29.0	12.2	23.1	0.53
Literary genres				
Thrillers and whodunits	61.2	17.3	11.1	1.56
Scifi, fantasy and horror	24.9	17.9	10.4	1.72
Romances	45.4	12.9	15.2	0.85
Biographies	56.1	17.2	13.5	1.27
Modern literature	27.4	30.0	6.8	4.41
Classical literature	33.9	28.5	8.3	3.43
Other non-fiction	54.3	17.9	12.1	1.48
Poetry and plays	26.7	19.7	9.7	2.03
Religious books	16.3	15.5	19.0	0.82
Self-help books	25.7	16.8	11.2	1.50
Leisure/hobby books	54.1	16.0	11.7	1.37

Table 3

Classification of musical and literary genres by the rate of legitimacy (literary genres in *italics*).

Highbrow: ratio of legitimacy > 2 ("legitimate")	Middlebrow: ratio of legitimacy = 1–2 ("common")	Lowbrow: ratio of legitimacy < 1 ("unauthorised")
<i>Modern literature</i>	<i>Scifi, fantasy and horror</i>	<i>Romances</i>
<i>Classical literature</i>	Blues	<i>Religious books</i>
World music	<i>Thrillers and whodunits</i>	Country and western
Opera	<i>Self-help books</i>	Finnish schlagers
Classical music	Hip-hop and R&B	Finnish folk music
Modern jazz	<i>Other non-fiction</i>	Electronic dance music
<i>Poetry and plays</i>	<i>Leisure/hobby books</i>	Religious music
	Rock	
	<i>Biographies</i>	
	Heavy metal	

Table 4

Frequency distributions of the respondents' likings of all possible combinations of highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow taste patterns in music and literature.

	Music		Literature	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Only highbrow	0.5	7	0.2	3
Only middlebrow	4.4	61	22.7	316
Only lowbrow	10.1	140	0.9	12
Highbrow + middlebrow	6.2	86	14.9	207
Highbrow + lowbrow	6.6	91	0.1	2
Middlebrow + lowbrow	28.7	399	19.9	276
Highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow	40.8	567	31.7	439
No reported likings at all	2.7	37	9.6	134
Total	100	1388	100	1388

exclusive highbrow culture, or cultural snobbery, seems to be almost non-existent in Finland, both in literature and in music.

What can be said of the other “pure” tastes in Finland? 23% of the respondents liked only middlebrow literature, whereas 10% of the respondents liked only lowbrow music. Those who liked only middlebrow in music and only lowbrow in literature were few. Altogether only about 15% of all the respondents were univores in their musical tastes and somewhat more (24%) in literature. The combination of middlebrow and lowbrow was quite common in both cultural areas.

The two omnivorous combinations linking highbrow either with middlebrow or lowbrow culture are rather rare in music. However, in literature the highbrow + middlebrow combination is quite common (15%). Interestingly, the highbrow + lowbrow combination is out of the question in literary genres. Taken all together, the three possible omnivore combinations, that is, the combinations of highbrow with one or two of the other cultures, account for more than half of all the respondents in music and almost as many in literature. If omnivorousness by volume (cf. section 3.1) is examined according to the main taste combinations, it is not surprising that the true omnivores by composition also like more genres than the other groups.¹³

The last step in our analysis was to examine each taste combination and explain the likelihood of belonging to them according to different major socio-demographic factors. The smallest combinations with less than 5% membership are not included in these logistic regression analyses. Both in music and literature we therefore have five combinations to explain. In music, which will be analysed first (see Table 5), these are “only lowbrow”, “highbrow + middlebrow”, “highbrow + lowbrow”, “middlebrow + lowbrow” and “highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow”.

¹³ From the thirteen possible genres in music, the omnivores who combine all three cultural tastes clearly chose more genres (*mean* = 6.63, *SD* = 1.98) than others did (the overall mean in music was 4.64 genres). The figures are almost exactly the same in literature, in which there were eleven possible genres (among true omnivores, *mean* = 6.65, *SD* = 1.75, while the overall mean in literature was 4.26 genres). In other words, these true compositional omnivores were quite clearly the most omnivorous also when measured by the volume of genres liked. On the other hand, the univores – those respondents with likings limited to one cultural category based on their legitimacy – liked, of course, the least number of total genres in both music and literature.

Table 5

Main combinations of highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow genres in musical taste by independent background variables (adjusted odds ratios and Wald statistics from logistic regression analysis).

	Only lowbrow	Highbrow + middlebrow	Highbrow + lowbrow	Middlebrow + lowbrow	Highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow
Gender (Wald χ^2)	10.98***	2.00	2.10	8.59**	33.04***
Female	0.50**	0.70	1.43	0.68**	2.03***
Age group (Wald χ^2)	57.61***	27.50***	36.95***	58.52***	15.95**
25–34	3.17	0.84	1.86	0.90	0.63*
35–44	2.84	0.24**	1.91	1.09	0.96
45–54	8.81**	0.28**	2.23	0.75	1.11
55–64	19.29***	0.20**	4.91**	0.40***	1.27
65–74	21.02***	0.04*	10.55***	0.14***	1.32
Education (Wald χ^2)	8.64*	19.85***	3.44	30.39***	26.28***
Vocational	0.79	a	1.43	0.60**	1.71**
College	0.56*	a	0.83	0.45***	2.34***
University	0.21***	a	1.26	0.23***	3.07***
Income (Wald χ^2)	5.73	2.62	1.61	10.18**	5.66
1000–2000	0.71	0.96	0.71	1.44*	1.07
2000+	0.45*	1.54	0.70	0.90	1.49*
Area (Wald χ^2)	2.03	7.41	2.14	14.21**	11.39**
Suburban	0.98	1.10	0.78	1.40	0.84
Village	1.43	0.48	1.15	1.83**	0.67*
Country	1.62	0.20	0.75	2.34***	0.51**
Nagelkerke pseudo R^2	0.23	0.23	0.10	0.14	0.11

Notes: The reference categories (odds ratio = 1.00) are the following: gender: male; age group: 18–24 years; education: no/basic; income: under 1000 EUR per month; area: city centre.

^a Only two cases in the reference group were found belonging to the category “highbrow + middlebrow”, causing the odds ratio coefficients in the other educational groups to be meaningless.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

The age of the respondents explains the strong likelihood of belonging to the first taste pattern, liking only lowbrow, which is the only univorous type in music with over 5% of the respondents. The odds ratio of belonging to this category is as many as 20 times greater among the oldest age groups than among the youngest. Liking only lowbrow music is also male dominated. The higher educated respondents showed five times less likelihood of having this musical taste. Higher income also correlated negatively with this taste, but not as strongly as did education. Thus, the typical lowbrow music lover is an uneducated, older man.

The highbrow + middlebrow taste combination in music is much more common among younger respondents than among the older ones. It is impossible to calculate the odds ratios for educational levels because in this case the basic educational level to which the others are compared had only two respondents. At the same time, this small number shows quite literally that this taste combination is extremely rare among the least educated.

The highbrow + lowbrow combination in music is more common in older age groups than in the younger ones. In a way, this combination is the opposite of the highbrow + middlebrow combination. In addition to age, hardly any other factor explains belonging to this taste

combination, and the overall degree of explanation is rather low, only 10%. It is understandable that education in particular does not explain this taste combination because it combines the typical tastes of both the more highly educated and the lower educated.

The taste combination middlebrow + lowbrow in music is more common among men than women and among younger than older age groups. Its popularity diminishes remarkably with increasing education: the least educated have this taste about four times more often than the most highly educated. This taste combination is also related to the area of living: it is clearly rural.

Finally, women are substantially more likely to display the true omnivore taste combination in music (highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow), being twice as common among women than among men. Age has no impact with the exception of those between 25 and 34 who belong less often to this omnivorous taste combination when compared to the youngest age group (those under 25). The differences in the educational levels are very clear. This combination is over three times more common among the university educated than among those with only a basic level of education. The correlation with education is strong: even the vocational level remarkably increases the likelihood of having this taste. A higher income also increases the likelihood to some extent as does an urban residential area. The overall degree of explanation is quite low (11%), understandably because of the considerable size of this taste group (40.8%, $n = 546$), which makes it less sharply differentiating.

One particularly interesting and statistically significant interaction effect was found among the independent variables when explaining the taste combination combining all the three categories (highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow) in music. It represents the interaction effect between gender and residential area ($Wald = 10.90$, $p < 0.05$) which shows that among the inhabitants of city centres, omnivorousness is almost as common among men as among women, while in other areas and especially in the countryside, women are clearly more omnivorous than men (see Fig. 2). Hence, women are, roughly speaking, equally omnivorous regardless of

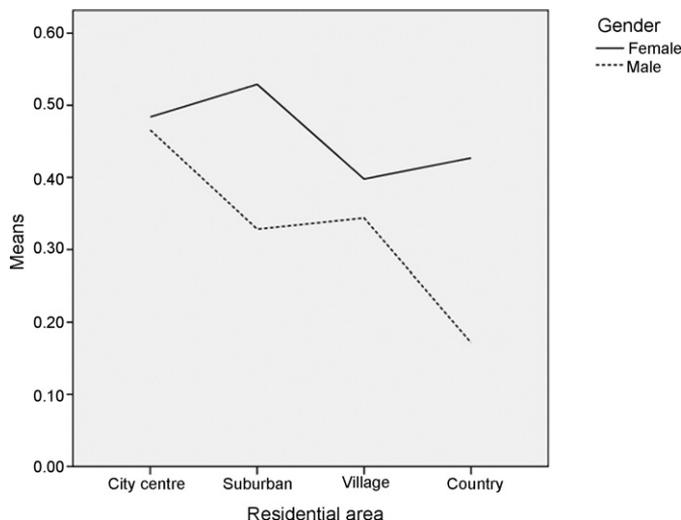


Fig. 2. The taste combination of “highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow” in music by residential area and gender in Finland (means).

Table 6

Main combinations of highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow genres in literary taste by independent background variables (adjusted odds ratios and Wald statistics from logistic regression analysis).

	Only middlebrow	Highbrow + middlebrow	Middlebrow + lowbrow	Highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow	No reported likings at all
Gender (Wald χ^2)	132.99***	17.07***	20.70***	161.18***	26.81***
Female	0.14***	0.50***	2.00***	6.69***	0.30***
Age group (Wald χ^2)	21.95***	4.18	16.00**	33.74***	3.39
25–34	1.29	0.95	1.28	0.73	0.84
35–44	0.96	0.87	1.08	1.39	0.56
45–54	1.06	0.92	0.74	1.53	0.77
55–64	0.79	1.26	0.59	1.60	1.05
65–74	0.28***	1.44	0.60	3.01***	0.87
Education (Wald χ^2)	24.28***	66.49***	27.33***	28.39***	44.98***
Vocational	1.42	1.74	0.66*	2.16**	0.30***
College	0.86	3.90***	0.53**	2.90***	0.17***
University	0.40**	9.49***	0.18***	4.03***	0.10***
Income (Wald χ^2)	1.05	1.02	1.02	2.85	4.34
1000–2000	1.15	0.95	1.13	0.76	1.40
2000+	0.97	1.16	1.26	0.83	0.80
Area (Wald χ^2)	1.20	7.75	3.44	1.20	1.87
Suburban	1.10	1.13	1.21	0.84	0.73
Village	1.28	0.72	1.24	0.79	1.00
Country	1.01	0.55	1.61	0.84	0.87
Nagelkerke pseudo R^2	0.26	0.15	0.07	0.26	0.17

Notes: The reference categories (odds ratio = 1.00) are the following: gender: male; age group: 18–24 years; education: no/basic; income: under 1000 EUR per month; area: city centre.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

residential area, but the character of the residential area, its urban nature, has a substantial effect on compositional omnivorousness in music among men. Thus, the powerful main effect of gender on omnivorousness (as measured by composition) in musical taste cannot be interpreted without taking into account this interaction between gender and respondents' residential area.

In literature, the five taste combinations with more than 5% of the respondents are “only middlebrow”, “highbrow + middlebrow”, “middlebrow + lowbrow”, “highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow” as well as “no reported likings at all”. Together they cover 1312 respondents, that is, almost all who responded to the survey. Table 6 shows the results from a similar logistic regression analysis with the five background factors that were used in the case of music.

The only common univore taste in literature, only middlebrow, is strongly masculine; women are over seven times less likely to share this taste. In addition, those belonging to the oldest age group as well as those with university degrees are less likely to have this univorous middlebrow taste. Neither income level nor residential area has any effect on the taste culture only middlebrow in literature.

Highbrow + middlebrow in literature is also a strongly masculine type. Men belong to it twice as often as women. Age, income and residential area have no effect, but education definitely has: those with the highest educational degrees belong to this taste group over nine times more often

that the least educated. Thus, this combination is above all typical of men with higher education. This is hardly surprising if we remember that the literary lowbrow taste, which is not a part of this combination, included romances and religious literature, both of which are clearly feminine literary genres (see Purhonen et al., 2009).

Middlebrow + lowbrow culture in literature is predominantly a feminine taste combination: it is twice as common among women than among men. Age, income and residential area have no effect, but education, once again, definitely has. The taste combination is clearly connected to lower levels of education: those with the highest education are five times less likely to belong to this group than those with only a basic education. Therefore, as far as gender and education are considered, middlebrow + lowbrow can be interpreted as the opposite of the type highbrow + middlebrow. It should be noted, however, that in middlebrow + lowbrow, the rate of variance explained by the five background variables is rather low (with only 7% being explained). All the other taste combinations both in literature and in music were better explained.

As might be expected, the true omnivore type in literature, combining all three tastes, highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow, is strongly dominated by women: the likelihood of belonging to this group is almost seven times greater among women than among men. As far as age is concerned, only the oldest respondents are more omnivorous than the rest. All the other age groups are very close to each other. The less educated belong to these literary omnivores less often, and the highest educated most often (about four times more than those with no educational qualifications). Personal income and type of the residential area again have no significant effect at all. As a matter of fact, unlike in music, these two variables play practically no role whatsoever in any of the literary taste combinations that we analysed.

The last group in literary taste shown in Table 6 contains about 10% of the respondents, namely, those who did not express any liking for any genre at all (this group not only consists of those who expressed dislikes or neutral attitudes, but also those who did not answer this question). These “non-likers” are three times more likely to be men than women and at least three times more likely to be uneducated than to belong to the other educational levels. Other factors have no effect.

If measured in terms of omnivorousness by volume, there was a strong correlation between the breadths of appreciation of the musical genres and that of the literary genres (see section 3.1). That the musical and the literary omnivores are to a great extent the same persons holds true even when measured in terms of omnivorousness by combination. Among all omnivores who combine tastes from all three categories in music ($n = 567$), about half (49.1%) also belong to the corresponding group of true omnivores in literature, with 20% belonging to the highbrow + middlebrow combination and about 15% to both the middlebrow + lowbrow and the only lowbrow literary taste combinations. In a similar way we can see how the omnivores who combine all three (highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow genres) in literature ($n = 439$) are divided into classes of musical tastes: true literary omnivores are even more often (64.9%) true musical omnivores. Among the literary omnivores 17.3% share a middlebrow + lowbrow musical taste. All their other musical tastes or taste combinations are minuscule in size.

4. Discussion and conclusions

4.1. Summary

This article explored omnivorousness in two cultural areas, music and literature, in Finland. Drawing upon representative survey data, both areas were analysed in terms of the likings for

different cultural genres. Omnivorousness was first measured as a sum of the musical and literary genres liked (“by volume”) and second, by counting only those combinations of likings that cross significant taste boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow culture (“by composition”). By counting ratios of legitimacy to all the analysed musical and literary genres, we constructed three basic taste patterns, highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow, as well as counted the adherents of all the different combinations. Then we analysed how the omnivores, both as measured by volume and by composition, as well as the other major taste combinations, are distributed socially in Finland and can be explained by the main socio-demographic variables.

We put forward five hypotheses, one per each socio-demographic variable – gender, age, education, income and residential area – included in the analysis when omnivorousness by volume was explained. Our first hypothesis, the one relating to gender (*H1a*), was confirmed: women proved to be clearly more omnivorous than men. The second hypothesis (*H1b*) suggesting that younger age groups would be more omnivorous than older age groups was rejected. Contrary to our expectations, the effect of age, although only moderate in magnitude, showed that it was the middle-aged or older who were more omnivorous than the young adults. Especially this was the case among women in musical omnivorousness. As indicated by an important interaction effect between gender and age, the gender difference in favour of women was much more prominent among older than among younger age groups. The third hypothesis (*H1c*) – perhaps the most obvious one according to the previous studies – that the highly educated are more omnivorous than the less educated, was clearly confirmed. On the other hand, the fourth hypothesis (*H1d*) suggesting that also those respondents with high personal income would be more omnivorous than those with low income was largely rejected: the effect of income was overall very small. Those with highest income were statistically more omnivorous than the group with lowest income only in music. Finally, our fifth hypothesis according to which those living in urban areas would be more omnivorous than those living in the countryside (*H1e*) was at least partly confirmed. The positive effect of living in urban areas was clearer in music, whereas in literature only those living in small villages proved to be less omnivorous than those living in city centres and other areas.

We analysed omnivorousness by operationalising it in two different ways. We expected no differences in the characteristics of omnivorousness because of the operationalisation chosen, that is, according to our hypothesis (*H2*), the answers to the previous hypotheses *H1a–H1e* predicting the effects of independent variables on omnivorousness should be the same also when omnivorousness was measured by composition. This hypothesis was largely confirmed. Our main result remained the same when omnivorousness was measured by composition instead of by volume: more highly educated women are still the omnivores. This consistency of findings between the two ways of measuring omnivorousness highlights the solidity of the gender effect on omnivorousness in Finland. Some small differences were, however, found. In music, the effect of age was slightly different when omnivorousness was measured by composition (i.e. in the case of the “true omnivores”) than when measured by volume. Also in literature, the effect of age varied mildly depending on the operationalisation of omnivorousness. This variation between measurements suggests that age effect on omnivorousness is not very robust. In addition, residential area did not have any effect at all in literary omnivorousness when measured by composition whilst by volume there was a small effect.

Last, we presented three hypotheses regarding the relationship between omnivorous taste in the two fields of culture, music and literature. We expected that the effects of socio-demographic factors on omnivorousness point to the same direction in music and in literature (*H3a*); that omnivorousness in literature will be explained in general better by these socio-demographic

factors than omnivorousness in music (*H3b*); and that many omnivores in music are omnivores also in literature (*H3c*). With only very minor exceptions, all these three hypotheses were confirmed.

When omnivorousness was measured by volume, the effects of socio-demographic factors pointed to the same direction in music and in literature (*H3a*), but when measured by composition, there were some differences between the two fields in the effects of age, income and area (including the interaction effect that was found between gender and residential area in true musical omnivorousness). However, the most important effects, those of gender and education, were similar both in music and in literature also when omnivorousness was measured by composition. This, again, highlights the solidity of our findings regarding the effects of gender and education on omnivorousness.

When it comes to the hypothesis *H3b*, omnivorousness was really explained better in literature than in music, both when measured by volume and by composition. Measured by volume, the fit of the model to the data in literature was about three times higher than in music. Measured by composition, true omnivores who combine all three taste patterns, highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow, were again explained better in literature than in music. This was due to the magnitude of the effects of gender and education. Even though pointing to the same direction, the effect of gender was, both by volume and by composition, clearly stronger in the case of omnivorous literary taste than in musical taste. Education, for its part, had a stronger effect on omnivorousness in literature than in music only when measured by volume.

Also the last hypothesis (*H3c*) was confirmed, which indicates that significant proportion of omnivores in music really is comprised of those respondents who are omnivorous also in literature, both when measured by volume and by composition. This finding that omnivore taste clearly crosses the border between the fields of music and literature can be seen as powerful evidence supporting the idea that omnivorousness is a significant structuring principle behind cultural tastes that is not restricted to some isolated cultural sphere but applies to the whole range of cultural preferences in different fields.

4.2. *Locating the findings in a wider context*

To put it roughly, the urban middle-aged or older well-educated women are the most omnivorous people in Finland. How do our results relate to the findings of previous studies conducted in other countries? On the one hand, the results are mainly in line with previous studies, especially when it comes to the positive effects of high education and urban residential area. On the other hand, however, the results are trickier and provoke more questions. This applies to the effects of gender and age, and is, in itself, not so surprising because also the previous findings from earlier studies are, in these respects, not quite consistent with each other.

First, our most solid finding, namely, that women are clearly more omnivorous than men in Finland, is in line with some of the earlier studies (e.g. López-Sintas and Katz-Gerro, 2005; Zavisca, 2005) but by far not with all of them (e.g. Van Rees et al., 1999; Van Eijck, 2001; López-Sintas and García-Álvarez, 2002; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009). In addition, the gender effect proved to be surprisingly powerful in Finland, perhaps more powerful than anywhere else. In fact, gender was, in music and in literature both by volume and by composition, the most powerful determinant of omnivorousness in Finland, that is, even more powerful than the effect of education.

Second, our results regarding age differences in omnivorousness – according to which omnivorousness is slightly more related to the middle-aged or older age groups than the younger

age groups – are also in line with some earlier studies (e.g. Van Eijck and Knulst, 2005; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009) but not with others (e.g. Van Rees et al., 1999; López-Sintas and García-Álvarez, 2002; Virtanen, 2007). Neither when measured by volume nor by composition do our results indicate that omnivorousness would be characteristic of the generations born after the Second World War, among those who have experienced both the democratisation of higher learning and the spread of popular commercial culture.

In addition to the nature of the effects of gender and age on omnivorousness, the proportions of omnivores and highbrow snobs provoke some further questions. In fact, the way that different taste combinations are distributed can even be interpreted as the most striking result of our study. In Finland, univores are quite rare, both in music and literature. Consequently, cultural snobs, people with exclusively highbrow tastes, are statistically almost non-existent. Most respondents' tastes are a combination of all three patterns, highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow, or at least of two of the three. As many as 41% of all respondents were true omnivores in music, and 32% were true omnivores in literature, whose tastes combined genres from all three taste patterns. If those who combine highbrow taste with only one of the other two taste patterns are added, then well over half the population in music and almost half in literature can be classified as omnivores. These figures are very high compared to the results of any other country for which even remotely comparable data exist.

How many omnivores and snobs are found in a given study depends, of course, on the method of measurement (cf., Peterson, 2005). The question is what criteria we use in order to classify some respondents as being omnivores and others as snobs. Because these criteria vary among different studies, that is, omnivorousness is defined in various ways, the shares of omnivores produced by different studies are consequently not directly comparable. In this respect, the findings regarding the social characteristics of omnivores can be seen as more reliable, as indicated also in this study by the fact that the main results were the same independently of the way of operationalisation of omnivorousness.

The original omnivore thesis was based on a criterion according to which possible omnivores were defined beforehand as liking highbrow music (classical music and opera; Peterson and Kern, 1996). Our way of defining omnivorousness in this paper has been different. Our compositional criterion for respondents to be counted as omnivorous was rather demanding because we required likings from all three categories of genres, highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow. At the same time our criterion of omnivorousness was fairly loose because we did not distinguish between liking “very much” and “somewhat” but combined these two categories together. Consequently, it is in principle possible that among our true omnivores, there are respondents who did not like any of the musical or literary genres “very much”; the minimum requirement was to like only “somewhat” at least three genres that fall into three different categories (of highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow).

It is possible, however, to make some careful observations concerning the shares of omnivores, without trying simply to compare the incomparable. For example, in the study on the musical genres Dutch-speaking Belgians had listened to in recent months, 18% of the respondents were classified as musical omnivores and 12% as highbrow univores (Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008). Another study, exploring cultural participation in Flanders (Vander Stichele and Laermans, 2006), identified the group of “omnivore art participants” varying between 8–11% in 2000–2003 and the group equivalent to exclusive highbrows (“traditional art participants”) to be approximately similar in size (9–13%). In the Spanish study on cultural participation the group of omnivorous respondents was 12% and those of highbrow univores 9% (López-Sintas and García-Álvarez, 2002). The group of omnivores was 8.8% and exclusive highbrows only 2.75% in the

study of American's musical preferences (García-Álvarez et al., 2007). Peterson and Rossman (2007) have, in turn, identified the size of highbrow omnivores as 3.21% and highbrow univores as 3.45% in their study on musical taste preferences in the US.

The first conclusion from these studies, as well as from others that we are aware of, is that the proportion of omnivores is after all rather modest, which can be interpreted as suggesting that omnivorousness “has the ability to serve as a marker of distinction, as the highbrow pattern has done” (Virtanen, 2007:83). The second observation is that the share of highbrow univores – snobs – is rather equal to the corresponding figure of omnivores in each study (see also López-Sintas and Katz-Gerro, 2005). In this respect, our result that, in Finland, true omnivores are clearly the largest taste pattern both in music and in literature, and that exclusive highbrows hardly exist at all in both of the fields, is really a distinctive case. On the other hand, the large number of omnivores in Finland is in line with the previous finding according to which the Nordic countries, including Finland, were clearly leading when it comes to the proportion of omnivores in the populations of 15 European Union countries (Virtanen, 2007). In any case, further comparative research in which omnivorousness is defined in identical terms in all countries under investigation is clearly needed.

4.3. Omnivorousness and highbrow taste

It could be argued that, in fact, the inclusive taste of the omnivores has become the new legitimate taste of the highly educated (e.g. Warde et al., 2007, 2008). The results about the large proportion of omnivores in Finland who combine all the three basic taste patterns – highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow – in their literary and musical taste preferences do not support this thesis.¹⁴ If omnivorousness has become widely spread, and, indeed, numerically the most dominating taste pattern, its social function must be radically different from the taste of the small cultural elites as envisaged by Bourdieu (1984). The omnivores could hardly be called the new aristocrats of culture if they include large parts of the educated middle classes.

Moreover, it should be noted that the interpretation of omnivorousness as an asset of cultural capital, which could be functional for the higher classes in adapting to their professional lives and to other daily interactions and communications (cf. Erickson, 1996; Lizardo, 2006), does not help much to explain our main finding, namely, why omnivorousness is so strongly connected with female gender in Finland. In fact, it seems that the pattern behind Finnish omnivorousness is heavily dependent on the way in which highbrow cultural orientation is socially structured (cf. Van Eijck and Knulst, 2005; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2007). In Finland, older cohorts and especially elderly women are much more involved in highbrow culture, both in music and in literature, than are younger cohorts and men (e.g. Liikkanen, 2009; Purhonen et al., 2009). Hence, it is only logical that if we consider highbrow taste as a *sine qua non* of true omnivorousness, then it follows that only those who share highbrow taste have actual possibility to be counted as omnivores. From this perspective, it can be said that, in a sense, omnivore taste is created mainly by adding different tastes for popular culture to highbrow taste, and not so much conversely, namely, adding liking for highbrow culture to popular tastes (cf. Peterson and Rossman, 2007:313).

There are, however, at least two main reasons why the interpretation that omnivorousness would be somehow directly resting on or even reducible to highbrow cultural orientation should

¹⁴ It should be remembered, of course, that the results of this study are cross-sectional and therefore not indicative of temporal processes.

be called into question in the context of our findings. Because of these reasons, the characteristics of Finnish omnivores (i.e. they are mainly women) cannot be solely a result of the characteristics of the Finnish highbrows. First, we measured omnivorousness by two different ways, that is, by volume and by composition. The social profile of omnivores was similar in both cases. When operationalised as the sum of the likings of musical and literature genres, genres belonging to the highbrow culture did not enjoy any special status. In fact, genres representing various forms of popular culture were clearly more numerous in the lists of musical and literary genres included in our questionnaire. Second, when omnivorousness was analysed by composition, the results show that true omnivores were different from other taste combinations in which highbrow taste was also included (“highbrow + middlebrow” in both music and in literature and “highbrow + lowbrow” in music). For example, gender did not have any significant effect when the combinations of highbrow + middlebrow or highbrow + lowbrow in music were explained, whereas women belonged significantly more often than men to the omnivore combination of highbrow + middlebrow + lowbrow. Therefore, the female domination in musical omnivorousness cannot be directly explained by the characteristics of highbrow pattern because, in such case, also other combinations including highbrow, should have been similar. In other words, because of these differences among the taste combinations, the qualities of omnivore type (e.g. the female emphasis) have to have something to do with the combinatory logic of these taste patterns (cf. Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008). Another example from literary taste: whereas the true omnivores in literature combining all three categories, highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow, were clearly more often women than men, the taste combination of “highbrow + middlebrow” was significantly more common among men. Again, because of the opposite gender differences and because highbrow was included in both of the combinations, the result cannot be deduced from something that has to do with highbrow pattern only. The difference between the two combinations is, of course, that lowbrow genres are included in the one but not in the other. Here, the reason for the female domination of the literary true omnivores embracing all three categories of genres is, actually, easy to find: those genres labelled as lowbrow in literature – romances and religious books – were more liked by women than by men.

Further research analysing the relationship between omnivorousness and highbrow cultural orientation is obviously needed. Besides the fact that we measured omnivorousness in two different ways, by volume and by composition (which enabled us to compare the results of these two procedures), and that we explored omnivorousness in two different fields of culture, music and literature (which enabled us to compare the results in these two fields, including the demonstration that there is a homology between the fields in terms of omnivorousness), the merit of the present study was that we analysed in detail not only the type of true omnivores but also other major taste combinations. Our study showed that there were also other significant taste combinations than true omnivores with their own particular and systematic characteristics. For example, the combinations of highbrow + middlebrow and highbrow + lowbrow in music were, according to their age profiles, counterpoints to each other. In addition, by analysing these other combinations it could be shown that differences between combinations really exist and that the social profile of omnivores cannot be easily explained by referring, for example, to the differences in involvement in highbrow culture.

4.4. *Conclusion and limitations*

Is Finland then a taste democracy? It has been almost a commonplace in Finnish sociology to claim that Finnish culture is more homogenous than that of many other European countries

because of the historical absence of a cultivated upper class characteristic of the court societies of Continental Europe. Owing to this absence and to other specific historical developments in Finnish history, cultural differences are often claimed to be smaller and the culture less hierarchical. These claims, however, have not usually been based on systematic empirical evidence.

Whether or not Finland is a democracy of taste depends, of course, on what we mean by this phrase. If the widespread omnivorous taste disposition or even more importantly, the non-existence of high status univore snobs is a good indicator of the prevalence of a democratic taste disposition in the society, then the answer is a cautiously yes: Finland is a democracy of taste. Perhaps nowhere else – at least as far as we have more systematic information – are cultural snobs as rare and the all-encompassing omnivorous taste combination as usual as in Finland.

Nevertheless, besides the already discussed problem with comparability in the proportion of omnivores, it is good to keep at least three reservations in mind. First, we have studied only two cultural areas, music and literature. Therefore, in principle it is possible to find other cultural areas in which steep hierarchies and real cultural snobs exist. Second, even though our findings about the large groups of omnivores with their all-encompassing tastes do not really fit into Bourdieu's (1984) picture of the superior and hegemonic taste disposition of the small ruling elite, our omnivores are a distinctive social group with highly educated older women as their typical representatives. On the other hand, this group of omnivores is as big as the educated middle classes in modern society. This can be interpreted as giving indirect support to the thesis by Lahire (2004, 2008). According to his French study, it is not the exception but rather the rule that in today's society, personal tastes are individualised and not homogenous, but combine elements from different taste patterns and levels of cultural legitimacy in various ways.

The third reservation concerns the fact that we have measured only taste preferences, and not cultural participation or actual consumption. We agree with Peterson that "if one is interested in measuring taste as we are here, respondents' self-reports of their preferences seem a more direct measure of the way they use art in shaping identity and symbolically announcing their place in the world" (Peterson, 2005:265). Van Rees et al. (1999) and López-Sintas and García-Álvarez (2002) have argued strongly for the benefits of analysing the participation instead. Obviously it would be ideal to use and compare the results of all measures of cultural practices: knowledge, taste and participation.

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Appendix A

Descriptive statistics of the variables measuring liking/disliking of musical and literary genres in Finland (range 1–5, 1 indicates “dislike very much”, 5 indicates “like very much”).

	Mean	SD
Musical genres		
Finnish schlagers	3.83	1.21
Rock	3.93	1.03
Modern jazz	2.71	1.01
Blues	3.31	1.06
Finnish folk music	3.01	1.07
World music	2.84	0.90
Classical music	3.32	1.14
Opera	2.61	1.16
Country and western	3.23	1.05
Electronic dance music	2.84	1.07
Heavy metal	3.03	1.27
Hip hop and R&B	2.70	1.12
Religious music	2.92	1.17
Literary genres		
Thrillers and whodunits	3.89	0.89
Scifi, fantasy and horror	3.00	1.04
Romances	3.49	0.94
Biographies	3.72	0.89
Modern literature	3.21	0.84
Classical literature	3.35	0.92
Other non-fiction	3.67	0.80
Poetry and plays	3.13	0.87
Religious books	2.90	0.90
Self-help books	3.14	0.83
Leisure/hobby books	3.67	0.76

Notes: Here, the sixth response alternative, which was in the case of musical genres “have not listened” (proportions ranged from 0.6% in Finnish schlagers to 10.3% in world music) and in the case of literature “have not read” (proportions ranged from 11.5% in other non-fiction to 31.4% in religious books), is coded together with the neutral category 3 “neither like nor dislike”. Hence, the remaining categories constituted a usual 5-point Likert scale.

Appendix B

Frequency distribution of the independent socio-demographic variables.

	%	N
Gender		
Male	48.1	667
Female	51.9	721
Age group		
18–24	12.1	168
25–34	17.6	245
35–44	18.5	256
45–54	19.7	273

Appendix B (Continued)

	%	N
55–64	19.9	277
65–74	12.1	169
Education		
No/Basic level	17.4	242
Vocational	39.0	541
College	29.4	408
University	14.2	197
Income		
Under 1000 EUR per month	31.0	414
1000–2000 EUR per month	45.6	609
Over 2000 EUR per month	23.4	312
Area		
City centre	16.9	233
Suburban	50.9	702
Village	17.3	239
Country	14.9	205
Total	100	1388

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Semi Purhonen is postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Besides cultural sociology, consumption, cultural capital and social stratification, his research interests include age and generation, social theory, and methods of social research.

Jukka Gronow is professor of sociology at Uppsala University, Sweden. He works on the sociology of consumption, especially food consumption, and social theory. His books include: *The Sociology of Taste* (Routledge, 1997), *Ordinary Consumption* (Routledge, 2001) edited with Alan Warde; and *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (Berg, 2003).

Keijo Rahkonen is adjunct professor of social policy and Head of the Department of social research at the University of Helsinki, Finland. He has published widely on Pierre Bourdieu's sociology, social theory and the future of the welfare state. His recent publications include "Bourdieu in Finland: An Account of Bourdieu's Influence on Finnish Sociology", in *Sociologica: Italian Journal of Sociology on line* 2 (2008).