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## CHANGING ARTS AUDIENCES: CAPITALIZING ON OMNIVOROUSNESS

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## **“Changing Arts Audiences: Capitalizing on Omnivorousness”**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

These should be boom times for the fine arts in America, as the Baby Boom generation - those born between 1946 and 1965 -- are better educated, wealthier, more urban and more widely traveled than their parents - all correlates of active arts participation. Not only are they very numerous and in many ways similar to those who have attended the arts in the past, their participation in live arts events should be reaching its highest level now as child-rearing activities are waning, and the large cohort of Boomers can more easily go out to enjoy arts events.

But as those in the art world know, the reality is not so rosy. Many arts organizations have experienced lower attendance, some notable organizations have failed or have been drastically reorganized, and all are finding that their audiences are aging. The graying of U.S. fine arts audiences can be graphically seen in the figures periodically collected by the U.S. Bureau of the Census for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). As Table 1.1 shows, in 1982 only the opera audience (shown in the second row of the table) had a higher median age<sup>1</sup> than that of all survey respondents (shown in the first row). By 2002, just twenty years later, only ballet and jazz have audiences younger than the median for all respondents. As can be seen in the right hand column, the graying has been the greatest for jazz, classical music concert attenders and art museum attenders. Special circumstances may account for the rapid aging of the jazz audience,<sup>2</sup> but no art-form specific circumstance can explain the fact that over the twenty years in question, the median age of audiences for classical music and art museums has risen by nine years, the equivalent of 5.4 months per year. In their studies of earlier waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), Balfe & Meyersohn (1996), Peterson & Sherkat (1996), and Peterson et al (2000) conclude that the reason for the increasing age is that the numerous well-educated, affluent, traveled Boomers – and the birth cohorts coming after them – are not more, but are much less likely to attend fine arts events than were the older generations born before World War Two.

**Table 1.1**  
**Median Age of Arts Attenders and of the Entire Sample\***

Wave	1982#	1992#	1997#	2002+	Net Gain
Entire Sample	40	42	43	44	5
Opera	43 (+3)	45 (+3)	45 (+2)	48 (+4)	5
Classical	40 (0)	45 (+3)	46 (+3)	49 (+5)	9
Theater	39 (-1)	44 (+2)	44 (+1)	46 (+2)	7
Musical	39 (-1)	43 (+1)	44 (+1)	45 (+1)	6
Ballet	37 (-3)	40 (-2)	44 (+1)	44 (0)	7
Museum	36 (-4)	40 (-2)	43 (0)	45 (+1)	9
Jazz	29 (-11)	37 (-5)	41 (-2)	43 (-1)	14

\* Values in parentheses indicate years of difference from the median age of the entire sample

# Values for 1982, 1992 and 1997 taken from Peterson et al (2000)

+ Values for 2002 computed by the authors from SPPA data

█ indicates older on average than the entire sample

As clear as they are about the facts of aging arts audiences and the implications for declines in arts audiences,<sup>3</sup> these studies do not point to the reasons for these tectonic shifts in the behavior of potential arts participants. The reasons may be many and various, but this study uses the available SPPA data to point to a significant shift in how cultivation of the fine arts is used in signaling high social status. Put simply, we see a shift in elite status group politics from those highbrows who snobbishly disdain all base, vulgar, or mass popular culture, (here called snobs or univores) to those highbrows who omnivorously consume a wide range of popular as well as highbrow art forms (here called omnivores). It is important for arts policy leaders to understand this general process so they can better interpret all the specific changes they see going on in the contemporary arts worlds and consider how best to take advantages of these changes in promoting the arts.

?` cuttable intro to chapter?

After identifying the origins of the highbrow standard of taste and the more recent shift toward omnivorosity, we will operationalize a strict definition of highbrow status and confirm the importance of omnivorosity as seen in the 2002 SPPA data, and demonstrate a link between expressed taste and reported behavior. We will then examine the differences in leisure activity between highbrow snobs and omnivores, and identify the difference between the

two kinds of highbrows identified in earlier studies. We then inspect lowbrows and find a goodly number who have a taste for the fine arts, and we show that this fraction of lowbrows are excellent candidates for arts cultivation activities. Finally we will discuss the arts policy implications of the findings of the study.

## 2. ART AS A STATUS MARKER<sup>4</sup>

Art, architecture, furnishings, clothing, and all sorts of symbolic display long were used by royal courts to show their power and glory, and early sociologists, most notably of Thorsten Veblen (1899), Georg Simmel (1904), and Erving Goffman (1951) have shown the importance of such display in claiming social status in capitalist societies. Following these early insights, Paul DiMaggio (1982) and Lawrence Levine (1988) have shown that the cultivation of the fine arts while shunning of all that was considered base or vulgar entertainment, began to be used in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to affirm high social status in the United States. Because biological theories of racial and national superiority were used at the time to link arts appreciation and high status, those who cultivated the arts were called “highbrows” and because they ardently distinguished themselves from the common lot of “lowbrows” and their ways, they were often called, and sometimes called themselves, “snobs” (Gould 1996). Many people then as now participated in the fine arts for the sheer enjoyment it gives, many also patronized art because it represented moral rectitude and the best of civilization so that patronizing the fine arts uniquely affirmed the high status of the individual, and in the process rival cities and nations got caught up in the struggle for supremacy in the fine arts. Such people, cities, and nations felt that supporting the arts was something they “ought to do” whether they personally liked art or not.

This view of the fine arts held sway into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Peterson 1997) and is still used today by many of those promoting the arts, yet appeals to the moral imperatives of highbrow snobbery have had less and less appeal to well educated, affluent, cosmopolitan potential recruits especially among those born since World War 2. In a 1992 study, Peterson and Simkus (1992) found that while many older arts lovers shunned popular culture as would be expected from the model of highbrow snob, many younger arts lovers fully embraced popular culture as well. Thus rather than being snobs, these highbrows seemed more nearly culturally omnivorous. In the years since other studies have confirmed the presence of highbrow omnivores in the US as well as in Canada, England, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Austria, and Australia.<sup>5</sup>

As we understand the meaning of omnivorous taste, it does not signify that the omnivore likes everything *indiscriminantly*. Rather it means being *open* to appreciating everything. In this sense it is antithetical to snobbishness which is based fundamentally on rules of rigid exclusion (Bourdieu 1984; Murphy 1988) such as: "It is de rigueur to like opera, and at the same time country music is an anathema to be shunned." While hostile to snobbish closure (Murphy 1988), omnivorousness does not imply an indifference to distinctions, rather its emergence may signal the formulation of new rules governing symbolic status boundaries (Lamont & Fournier 1992). Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has shown that the criteria of distinction, of which omnivorousness is an expression, must center not on *what* one consumes but on the *way* consumption items are appreciated. It is posited that omnivores do not embrace contemporary country music, for example, in the same way that hard-core country music fans do (Peterson & Kern 1995). Rather they appreciate and critique it in the light of some knowledge of the genre,

its iconic performers and compare it with other cultural forms, low and high. Intellectuals have long provided the grounds for an aesthetic understanding of once low art forms such as jazz, blues, country and bluegrass music. More recently country music has begun to be taken seriously as shown in magazine articles in elite cultural periodicals such as American Heritage (Scherman 1994), while books by humanist scholars (Tichi 1994) begin to provide omnivores with tools for an aesthetic understanding of country music, while DeVeaux (1997) does the same for jazz as Cantwell (1984) does for bluegrass.

Numerous factors have been mentioned to explain the shift from snob to omnivore. Drawing on Peterson & Kern (1996) five are touched on here.

*Structural Change* A number of social processes at work over the past century make exclusion increasingly difficult. Rising levels of living, broader education, and presentation via the media have made elite aesthetic taste more accessible to wider segments of the population, devaluing them as markers of exclusion. At the same time, geographic migration and social class mobility have made for the mixing of people of differing tastes, and many people not exposed to fine arts in their youth bring their tastes for popular culture with them as they enter the elite. What is more, the increasingly ubiquitous mass media mean that the diverse folkways of the rest of the world are ever more difficult to exclude or mock, and at the same time, they are increasingly available for appropriation by elite taste-makers (Lipsitz 1990).

*Value Change* Value changes concerning gender, ethnic, religious, and racial differences rationalize the change from snob to omnivore. In the nineteenth century, group prejudice was widely sanctified by scientific theory and expressed in laws of exclusion. This changed gradually until the Nazi brutalities of the Second World War gave "racism" of all sorts such a bad name that most discriminatory laws in this country were abolished. It is now increasingly rare for persons in authority publicly to espouse theories of essential ethnic and racial group differences. The change from exclusionist snob to inclusionist omnivore, can thus be seen as a part of the historical trend toward greater tolerance of those with different values (Abramson & Inglehart 1993).

*Art-World Change* The market forces that began to sweep through all the arts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century brought in their wake new aesthetic entrepreneurs who propounded avant-gardist theories that placed positive value on seeking new and ever more exotic modes of expression, but in the latter half of the twentieth century the candidates being championed for inclusion became so numerous, and their aesthetic range so great, that the old single standard of taste became stretched beyond the point of credibility. It became increasingly obvious that the quality of art did not inhere in the work itself but in the evaluations made by the art world (Zolberg 1990: 53-106), and that expressions of all sorts from around the world are open to aesthetic appropriation (Becker 1982; Motti 1994; Rose 1994; Baumann 2001). This is the aesthetic basis of the shift from the elitist exclusive snob to the elitist inclusive omnivore.

*Generational Politics* Before the middle of the twentieth century youngsters were expected to like pop music and pop culture generally but then to move on to more "serious" fare as they matured. Beginning in the 1950s, however, young white people of all classes embraced popular African American dance music styles as their own under the rubric of rock'n'roll (Ennis 1992), and by the late 1960s what was identified as the "Woodstock Nation" saw its own variegated youth culture not so much as a "life stage" to go through in growing up but as a viable

alternative to established elite culture (Lipsitz 1990; Aronowitz 1993) and in the process, discrediting highbrow exclusion and valorizing inclusion. One of the lasting impacts of this view is that not as many well-educated and well-to-do Americans born since World War 2 patronize the elite arts as did their elders (Peterson & Sherkat 1995).

*Status Group Politics* Dominant status groups regularly define popular culture in ways that fit their own interests and have worked to render harmless subordinate status group cultures (Sennett & Cobb 1972). One recurrent strategy is to define popular culture as brutish and thus to be avoided if not suppressed (Arnold 1875; Elliot 1949; Bloom 1987), another is to gentrify elements of popular culture and incorporate them into the dominant status-group culture (Leonard 1962; Tichi 1994). Our data suggest a major shift from the former to the latter strategy of status group politics. While snobbish exclusion was an effective marker of status in a relatively homogeneous and circumscribed WASP world which could enforce its symbolic dominance over all others by force if necessary (Gusfield 1963; Beisel 1997), omnivorous inclusion seems better adapted to an increasingly global world managed by those who make their way, in part, by showing respect for the cultural expressions of others. As highbrow snobbishness fit the needs of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century entrepreneurial upper-middle class, there also seems to be an elective affinity between today's cosmopolitan business-administrative class and omnivorousness (Bell 1976; Kristol 1978; Gouldner 1979; Briggs 1979; Brooks 2000; Florida 2002).

### 3. IDENTIFYING TASTE GROUPS

We need to show that the omnivore/snob distinction identified in the last century is still meaningful in the early 21st century. Because the numerous music genres are more readily ranked than are genres in other arts fields, most studies use music as the basis for identifying taste groups.<sup>6</sup> Further, as music is the only field in which the survey allows respondents to voice their tastes for popular as well as fine art genera in the SPPA survey, so our measure of taste is based on music. It is also fortunate to be able to focus on music because classical music and opera are arguably having the greatest problems with declining participation. In the 2002 SPPA, 17,135 persons 18 and older were interviewed (Bradshaw & Nichols 2004), of whom 16,724 answered the questions about music tastes, and of these 904 said they "don't like to listen to music,"<sup>7</sup> and 565 said they liked "all kinds" of music, so they were eliminated leaving a final sample of 15,255.<sup>8</sup>

Because highbrow snobs and omnivores share an interest in highbrow culture, the first task is to tell how highbrow is defined operationally in this study. Since we are interested in identifying those who are clearly highbrow in their music tastes, our criterion of inclusion as highbrow is that the respondent chose classical music or opera as their favorite and, if they chose more than that one kind of music, in addition to their favorite they also chose classical music, opera, or jazz as a kind of music they liked.<sup>9</sup> The number of respondents who fit this strict definition of highbrow is 1016, that is 6.7% of the study sample. The non-highbrows represent 93.3% of the sample. We follow the convention and call them "lowbrows" but as we will see below many of them are far from the Archie Bunker, Homer Simpson sort because at least 23% like classical music, jazz, or opera to some degree. We return to look in more detail at these lowbrows in section eight of the chapter, because they are the most likely candidates for becoming more committed fine arts participants.

Following the classic notion of highbrow exclusion identified above, we wanted to create a narrow definition of exclusiveness. Operationally to be defined as a highbrow (HB) in this study, a respondent had to choose at least two from among classical music, opera, and jazz and also chose classical music or opera as their favorite kind of music. To this group were added those persons chose only classical and/or opera music. To be classed as a highbrow snob a respondent had to avoid popular and middlebrow music forms, but as has been found since Wilensky's classic (1965) study, few respondents claim no interest at all in any other middle or lowbrow forms. To allow for a few choices such as musical theater, religious music, world music, choral music etc. highbrows who chose a total of five or less types of music in all are identified as Highbrow Univores (HB-U's). The operational definition of Lowbrow Univore (LB-U) is liking three or fewer kinds of music and not like classical music or opera best. Highbrow Omnivores (HB-O's) are thus those persons defined as highbrow who said they like six or more genres in total, and Lowbrow Omnivores (LB-O's) are those persons defined as lowbrow who said they liked four or more kinds of music. The numbers of respondents of each of these four types is shown in table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1**  
**Distribution of Taste Groups**

	Brow	Level
Number of Music's chosen	Low	High
Few Univore	8,432 (55.3)	526 (3.45)
Many Omnivore	5,803 (38.1)	490 (3.21)

\* Figures in parenthesis are cell percentages of the entire sample. The cell percentages do not sum to 100 because people who said they did not like music and those who said they liked "all" kinds of music are omitted.

#### 4. VALIDATING THE MEASURE OF TASTE

Some commentators have criticized the use of music taste preferring to use reports of arts-going behavior, the argument being that one can say they like a genre whether they do or not, but it is a bit more difficult for respondents to say that they have taken part in a particular activity in the last 12 months when they have not done so (Rees et al 1999; López-Sintas & García-Álvarez 2002) ` more recent . At the same time respondents from smaller towns, those who are poor, and those who are elderly have far fewer opportunities to act on their taste for highbrow culture than do those who live in large cities, are well off, or are young, so taste seems a better measure of people's behavior. What is more, both taste and measures are likely to be subject to positive or negative response set as respondents are tempted to say they like (or have attended concerts of) music with high status, and that they do not like (or have not attended concerts of) music with low status (Peterson 2004).

A good way to show that our taste measure is valid is to show that those with reported highbrow (HB) music tastes significantly more often attend classical music and opera concerts than do our lowbrow (LB) respondents. Table 4.1 shows clearly that HBs are far more likely to attend art music than are LB respondents, and these differences are statistically significant for classical music, opera, and jazz. The three right hand columns of Table 4.1 further confirm the validity of our taste measure, because they show that music taste is a significant predictor of attendance at non-musical fine arts events including theatrical plays, ballet performances, and art museum exhibits.

**Table 4.1**  
**Percent of Highbrows and Lowbrows with Live Attendance at Benchmark Arts Activities**

	Classical Music	Opera	Jazz	Musicals	Plays	Ballet	Art Museum
Highbrow	39	14	27	32	25	10	56
Lowbrow	10	2	9	17	12	3	26
significance							

In addition, HBs were significantly more likely<sup>10</sup> than LBs to engage in each of the following seven arts-related activities: attend, non-ballet dance performances, attend art fairs, visit historical or architectural monuments, read books, read plays, read poetry, and read novels. Highbrows were also significantly more likely than LBs to participate via television in the seven benchmark arts: jazz, classical music, opera, musicals, stage plays, dance, and visual arts. Finally, HBs were significantly more likely to listen to the six benchmark arts available on radio and the six forms available via phonograph recordings and CDs.

In the light of all the evidence presented in this section, it is clear that highbrow respondents active engagement in all fine art and art-related activities closely mirrors their HB musical tastes thus validating our choice of musical taste as a good predictor of engagement in the fine arts.

## 5. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN Highbrow SNOBS AND OMNIVORES

Having established that the distinction between highbrows and lowbrows is still important in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, we will focus here on the highbrows in order to explore whether they still can be clearly divided between highbrows who are univore snobs and highbrows who are omnivores. Highbrow snobs (HB-Us) are those who engage in arts but who shun most involvement in popular culture, while highbrow omnivores (HB-Os) are those who engage in the fine arts and in popular culture activities as well. As noted above, operationally, HB-Us and HB-Os are distinguished from each other by the number of different types of musics they like.

Turning first to the musical tastes of HB-Us and HB-Os, Table 5.1 shows clearly that, as predicted, HB-Os are significantly more likely than HB-Us to like semi-popular and popular kinds of musics. It is also interesting to note that the highbrow omnivores are significantly more likely



to like all the genera of music than does the total sample. This is true except for country music, heavy metal, and rap (shown in the three bottom rows of Table 5.1 where the proportions of highbrow omnivores liking country music, rap, and heavy metal is roughly equivalent to the sample as a whole. This is consistent with the finding that even among most omnivores, some low status genres remain anathema (Bryson 1996, 1997).

**Table 5.1**  
**Percent of Highbrows Snobs and Highbrow Omnivores Who Like Specific Kinds of Semi-Popular and Popular Music**

Genera of Music	Highbrow Snobs	Highbrow Omnivores	Total Sample
musicals	10	59	15
reggae	2	32	13
dance/electronica	2	33	15
blues/R&B	8	71	29
Latin/salsa	2	47	17
big band/ swing	6	67	23
marching band	1	38	10
bluegrass	4	50	20
classic rock	13	74	51
ethnic music	2	50	15
folk music	2	47	13
easy listening	8	61	30
world music	1	32	10
choral music	2	32	7
gospel/hymns	4	50	27
country music	5	47	44
heavy metal	2	21	21
rap	0	13	13

The 2002 SPPA survey asked fewer questions about involvement in non-elite leisure activities<sup>11</sup> than had the versions of 1982 and 1992. Nonetheless, the HB-Os are significantly more likely than HB-Us to engage in all those activities that are surveyed: going to sports events, taking part in sports, going to theme parks, camping or hiking, doing home repairs, and tending house plants or gardening.

Since television programming varies so widely in choice of content and mode of presentation, it would have been very valuable to have a question about the types of TV

respondents regularly viewed.<sup>12</sup> As with the question about music taste, such a question would allow for a quick assessment of the tastes of respondents. Unfortunately no such question was included in the 2002 SPPA survey. The one question about television asked about the number of hours of TV viewed in an average day. The differences between taste groups is not great, but they are in the direction expected from prior studies, LBUs report watching an average of 3.0 hours, LBOs watch 2.8 hours and the figures for HB-Us and HB-Os respectively are 2.4 and 2.6 hours a day. Taking a little closer look, the fewest LBUs report watching no television, and six percent of both kinds of HBs report viewing none. At the other end of the scale of viewing, 30% of LBUs watch four or more hours of TV daily, while the figures for both kinds of HBs is 20%. Gone are the days when the elite largely disdained television entirely disdainfully calling it the “boob tube.”

## 6. WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE? TASTE GROUP CHARACTERISTICS (3 pages)

Having differentiated between highbrows and lowbrows and between univores and omnivores, it is time to ask who these people are. The SPPA provides the standard demographic variables and they will be discussed here, adding in information on taste groups as appropriate.

**Gender** There are more adult women than adult men in the population, and, as is typical in samples of the general population, women are somewhat over represented. Specifically women represent 55% of this sample. The gender differences among the four taste groups are not substantial, but women are more likely to be highbrows. Interestingly HB-Os and LB-Os are more likely to be women than are HB-Us and LB-Us mirroring the common finding that women tend to say that they like more different kinds of music than do men.

**Age** The mean age of highbrows is 54 years, which is significantly higher than that of lowbrows who average 46 years. HB-Us are two years older than are HB-Os on average, but LB-Us and LB-Os average exactly the same age. Although the means are the same, the distribution across the age range shows an interesting pattern of variation. LB-Us are over represented among those under forty and they are also over represented among those over seventy, while LB-Os age distribution matched that of the entire sample.

As just noted, HBs are under represented among those under 40 years old compared with the total sample, and this is particularly true for the HB-Us relative to the HB-Os. All four taste groups have the expected proportion of 40 year olds, and HBs are over represented among those in their fifties, sixties, and seventies, with the HB-Us more likely to be in the higher end of this age range. The difference becomes marked for those over 70; Relative to the total sample, HB-Us are twice as likely to be over 80 and HB-Os are half as likely. This finding that HBs are older than LBs and HB-Us are older than HB-Os follows the findings of Peterson and Kern (1995) who argue that HB-Os are displacing HB-Us.

**Education** In earlier studies education has proved to be the factor that most clearly distinguishes highbrows from lowbrows, and this sample is no exception. As can be seen from Table 6.1, the difference between highbrows and lowbrows is clear from the percentages of each of the four taste groups who have graduated college and it becomes even more marked when

considering the percentage who have gone to graduate or professional school. Just 6% of the LB-U's have attained that level of education, while a significantly higher 11% of LB-O's have gone to graduate school. A significantly higher percentage of highbrows have gone to graduate school, and HB-O's, at 26%, are slightly more likely to have gone to graduate school than have HB-U's.

**Table 6.1**  
**Percent of Each Taste Group that has Completed Given Levels of Education or Higher**

	High School	College	Graduate School
LB-U	81	19	6
LB-O	92	32	11
HB-U	95	53	24
HB-O	97	57	28

**Arts Education** A number of studies have shown education in the arts to be related to arts appreciation and attendance, and we find this to be true in this sample. HBs are more likely to have had courses in art making or appreciation than have LBs, but there are wide variations within both groups as can be seen in Table 6.2. The table shows both the percentage who have had any kind of arts education as a child and the percentage who have had arts education any time in their lives. The pattern of arts education any time parallels that for arts education as a child, so the two can be discussed together. A lower proportion of LBs have had arts education than have HBs. However, the differences between omnivores and univores are greater than those between highbrows. The high proportion of LB-O's that have had arts education will prove important in our discussion of sources of new audiences for the arts.

**Table 6.2**  
**Percent of Each Taste Group that has Received Arts Education**

	Arts Education as a Child	Arts Education at any Time
LB-U	27	34
LB-O	59	70
HB-U	41	52
HB-O	76	88

**Parents Education** The foundations of cultural taste are ordinarily established early in the childhood home (DiMaggio 1982, Bourdieu 1984), and the best index available of home environment is the respondent's mother's and father's education. The proportion of respondents answering these questions was considerably lower than for the other questions, and this must be due in great part to respondents not knowing the information because they were not raised by

one or both parents. Since the education of the parent in such cases would probably not be as relevant to the respondent's tastes, in this instance the absence of information works to the advantage of the analyst.

There is a great deal of difference in parents' education between the taste cultures, particularly that of the father as can be seen in Table 6.3. Just 14% of LB-U's fathers have completed college while at the other extreme, 37% of HB-O's fathers have completed college. The comparable figures for mothers with a college degree is 11% and 25%. Interestingly, the percentage of LB-O fathers who have completed college is higher than that of LB-U fathers and lower than that of the HBs, but LB-O's mothers' education more nearly approached that of the HB-U's.

**Table 6.3**  
**Percent of Parents of Each Taste Group that has Completed College**

	Father Completed College	Mother Completed College
LB-U	14	11
LB-O	23	17
HB-U	32	20
HB-O	37	25

**Family Income** The surveyors made very fine distinctions of income ranges until they reached \$74,999 total family income per year, but then unfortunately they class everyone above that as "\$75,000 and above." Fully 22% of the sample fall in this highest category, and from an inspection of the available data it made sense to dichotomize income at the \$75,000 level, because while those of incomes less than \$10,000 included fewer than average HBs, and those in the income categories above \$10,000 and below \$75,000 varied unsystematically in the proportion of HBs, the proportion of highbrows was significantly higher for those with incomes of \$75,000 and above. Table 6.4 shows that just 17% of LB-U's have substantial family incomes, that the LB-O's are higher at 26%, and that about one third of each of the two HB taste groups report family incomes of at least \$75,000

**Table 6.4**  
**Percent of Each Taste Group who have annual family incomes of \$75,000 or More**

	Income < \$75,000	Income at least \$75,000
LB-U	83	17
LB-O	74	26
HB-U	67	33
HB-O	66	34

**Race** Based on the respondents' own self-classification, the surveyors coded the sample into five racial groups. Seventy-nine percent were classed as white, 9% black, 8% Hispanic, 3% Asian and Pacific islander, and 1% Native American. Eleven percent of Asian/Pacific islanders are highbrow. As can be seen from Table 6.5 this is the highest proportion of any of the groups. At 7%, whites have the second highest proportion highbrow and Native Americans the lowest. The order for the number of kinds of musics chosen is quite different. Whites lead with 4.5 and Native Americans are second with 4.1, while Hispanics are lowest with 3.3 kinds of musics chosen on average. Looking at the taste group choices of the groups, there are only a few notable findings. Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans are all over represented among the LB-U's, and Asian/Pacific islanders are remarkably over represented among HB-U's.

**Table 6.5**  
**Percent of Each Taste Group in each Race**

Race	% of Sample	Mean % Highbrow	Mean Number of Musics Chosen
White	79	7	4.5
Black	9	4	3.7
Hispanic	8	4	3.3
Asian/Pacific	3	11	3.8
Native American	1	1	4.1

**Marital Status** Some researchers have found that marital status affects participation in the arts. Specifically married people living with their spouses (who compose 56% of our sample) are least likely to participate in arts activities relative to those who are married but living apart, divorced, widowed, or never married. However, as the first data column of Table 6.6 shows, in our data there is no significant difference among the four taste groups in the proportion that are married and living with their spouses.

**Table 6.6**  
**Percent of Each Taste Group Married and Percent with Young Children**

	% Married	% with Children <6
LB-U	57	26
LB-O	56	21
HB-U	61	15
HB-O	56	15

**Children in the Home** Quite understandably the presence of young children reduces the ability of parents to take part in leisure activities outside the home including live arts performances. About half the lowbrow families and one third of the highbrow families include a child under 18, and as the right hand column of Table 6.6 shows, 26% of the LB-U's include a child under 6. The comparable figures for LB-O's is 21% and the comparable figure is 15% for both kinds of highbrows. These figures probably over estimate the families with children because there is no data on one third of the sample on this variable and it seems most likely that these missing cases should be added to those without children at home. If that is done, the percents for each taste group are reduced but they are in the same relationship with each other.

**Place of Residence** The arts are most likely to be available in profusion in the largest cities and least likely in rural areas. At the same time many small towns and cities are located within the largest metropolitan areas and thus have the arts readily available. Fortunately the survey provides information on the size of metropolitan areas. About 30% of the sample live in rural areas and small towns outside the standard metropolitan areas. A bit over 20% live in the largest metropolitan areas, those of more than five million inhabitants. The other half of the sample live in cities between these two extremes, and there was no clear pattern of difference between taste groups among these. As table 6.7 shows, however, there were notable differences in the two extreme categories. LB-U's were most likely to live outside of metropolitan areas while HB-U's were least likely. At the same time, highbrows are most likely to live in the largest metropolitan areas as one might expect.

**Table 6.7**  
**Percent of Each Taste Group who Live in Rural Areas or the Largest Cities**

	% small town or rural	% metro areas > 5 million
LB-U	34	21
LB-O	27	22
HB-U	17	29
HB-O	21	27

**Summary Sketch of the Two Sorts of Highbrows** Looking at all these demographic figures together a clear image of the HB-U's and HB-O's begins to emerge. By definition both groups choose classical music or opera as their favorite form of music, but HB-U's say they like few other kinds of music. Their preference for art music is reflected in their likelihood of attending live art music concerts and consuming it via the media more than does the sample as a whole. HB-U's are the oldest taste group, they and their parents are well educated and they are likely to have been schooled in one or more art forms. They are more likely than the sample as a whole to have substantial incomes, be white or Asian, have no young children and are most likely to live in the largest metropolitan areas. In sum, they approximate the classical picture of a highbrow snob (Arnold 1875; Elliot 1949; Levine 1988; Peterson 1997).

By definition HB-Os choose classical music or opera as their favorite form of music and also select a large number of other kinds of middlebrow and popular musics as well. Their enjoyment of art music is reflected in their greater likelihood relative to the other taste groups of attending live art music concerts and consuming it via the media. At the same time, HB-Os are much more likely to take part in a wide range of popular leisure activities than are HB-Us. On average, HB-Os are older than the sample as a whole but not as old as HB-Us. They are as likely as HB-Us to be well-to-do and live in large metropolitan areas though not as likely to live in the largest metropolitan areas as are HB-Us. Relative to HB-Us, they are more likely to be female, more likely to be well educated, have had education in the arts, and come from well educated families, but relative to the other taste groups they are less likely to be married and living with their spouse.<sup>13</sup> In sum, they have the characteristics of highbrow omnivores (Peterson and Kern 1996; Eijck 2001)

## 7. “HEAD HUNTING AMONG THE LBOs”

To this point we have examined a great deal of evidence showing that, contrary to expectations formulated in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, many highbrows like and participate in forms of popular culture. It is possible that LBs have been mis-characterized as well? They comprise just over 93% of the SPPA sample, so it is tempting to look at the other side of the coin to see if any number of LBs say that they like and participate in fine arts activities? Of course every lowbrow person in the population is a potential fine-arts participant, but it makes sense to focus on those who are more likely to participate. To do this we begin by taking the 40% of lowbrows who seem to be open to a range of cultural experiences, those who say that they like four or more forms of music. Looking at this group, we find that fully 44% say that they like classical music or opera. Such LBs would seem to have the best prospects of being or becoming active arts participants and they will be the focus of attention in the discussion that follows. For the sake of identification, we call them Lowbrow Omnivores with Highbrow Taste (LBO-HTs).

**The Arts-Related activity of LBO-HTs** Table 7.1 clearly shows that a considerable number of LBO-HTs already report attending live performances of the three bench-mark fine arts. Twenty seven percent attended classical music concerts, 5% attended live opera, and 17% attended jazz concerts. As Table 7.1 shows, these levels are well above those of other LBs and the sample as a whole, and they are within range of the attendance levels of HBs at classical music and jazz concerts.

**Table 7.1 (7.5)**

### Percentage of Three Taste Groups who have Attended Benchmark Arts Activities

	classical music	opera	jazz
Highbrows	39	14	27
Lowbrow O-HTs	27	05	17
Other Lowbrows	07	02	08
Total Sample	12	03	11

We turn now to the other seven arts-related activities regularly tracked by the SPPA. As Table 7.2 shows, LBO-HTs have levels of attendance well above those of other LBs and the sample as a whole. When comparing LBO-HTs with HBs, we find that the latter are more likely than LBO-HTs to go to art museums. However, LBO-HTs have rates of attendance at musicals, plays, and ballet comparable with those of HBs, and they have attendance rates at other dance performances, art fairs, and historical sites that are actually higher than HB rates. These findings show that these LBs with omnivorous music tastes, like their omnivorous highbrow counterparts, are also likely to attend the full range of live arts-related activities.

**Table 7.2 (7.5)**  
**Percentage of Three Taste Groups who have Attended Other Arts Activities**

	musicals	plays	ballet	other dance	art museum	art fair	historical site
Highbrows	33	25	10	11	56	48	48
Lowbrow O-HTs	32	24	09	14	49	55	55
Other Lowbrow	13	09	02	05	21	31	28
Total Sample	18	13	04	07	28	36	34

In this day and age most people spend more time engaged with the arts via the media than they do attending live performances, therefore it is interesting to ask how likely LBO-HTs are to participate in the arts via the media. As shown in Table 7.3, the SPPA includes seven measures of watching via video/TV/CD/DVD, five measures for listening to the radio, and four measures for playing recorded performances. The table shows that the percentage of LBO-HTs who consume arts via the media is roughly as high as that of HBs for all art forms (the shaded cells below) with the exception of opera and enjoying musicals via radio or video.

**Table 7.3**  
**Percentage of LBO-HTs who Participate in Selected Media Arts Relative to Highbrowss**

Key	x HB higher than LBO-HT	x HB and LBO-HT are comparable	not asked
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	classical music	opera	jazz	musicals	plays	dance	visual art
video	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
radio	x	x	x	x	x		
phonograph	x	x	x	x			



While the results are not given here in tabular form, the percentage of LBO-HTs is comparable to that of HBs for all six measures of reading and creative writing. And turning to the SPPA data on the six measured arts and crafts activities that range from making music to weaving, we find that in every case LBO-HTs' rates of activity are as high or higher than the rates for HB respondents. We can also look at the music genre preferences and leisure time preferences of LBO-HTs, but we will do this below when considering how best to appeal to this large group of energetic and arts-engaged people who are not highbrows but who are far from being the stereotypical lowbrow person as well.

**Demographics of LBO-HTs** But who are these people, do they have particular demographic characteristics and not others? The results show that LBO-HTs are more likely to be female than are HBs and the other LBs. They are six years younger than HBs and two years older, on average, than the other LBs. Of more interest, while HBs are over represented in each age from the fifties to the eighties, LBO-HTs are more likely than the sample as a whole to be in their fifties and are not as likely as HBs to be sixty or over. This suggests that for many the paucity of locally available art-music events may be part of the reason that LB)-THs have highbrow music as only a secondary interest.

LBO-HTs tend to be wealthier than the other LBs and somewhat less wealthy than HBs, while they are even more likely than HBs to be white. And LBO-HTs are more likely to come from middle-sized cities, while HBs are more likely to come from the metropolitan areas with greater than five million inhabitants.

LBO-HTs are much more likely than other LBs and only somewhat less likely than HBs to have a college or graduate school education. The same pattern holds true for parents' education. { GR` wants the following cut: LBO-HTs' fathers are far more likely than the other LBs and somewhat less likely than HBs to have BA degrees. Likewise, LBO-HTs' fathers are far more likely to have graduate degrees than are other LBs, but LBO-HTs' mothers are as likely to have college degrees as are the mothers of HBs. } The findings concerning the respondents' arts education break the overall pattern in a way that should be of interest to all with arts-policy interests. LBO-HTs are more likely than HBs to have had arts education when they were young or at some later period in their lives. These findings suggest that while HBs are attracted to the arts initially through their early family experience, LBO-HTs are more likely to be attracted to becoming involved with the arts by taking arts appreciation classes.

**Music Tastes of the LBO-HTs** Not surprisingly, given the basis of their selection, 95% of these LBs say that they like classical music. In addition, 27% say they like opera and 50% say they like jazz. The comparable figures for the other lowbrows is 6%, 0, and 17%. In addition a significantly greater parentage of LBO-HTs like each of the other 18 forms of musics than do highbrows or the other lowbrows. Thus they are clearly omnivorous in their tastes. When asked what is their favorite kind of music, their choices are diverse, but oldies rock is selected more than any other genre. Interestingly LB-HTs show a strikingly similarity to HB-Os in their music tastes. The data show that a higher proportion of LBO-HTs select every kind of music as their favorite more often than do the other LBs with the exception of the same musics that are not as often liked by HB-Os: rap, Latin, country, gospel, and heavy rock music.

## 8. SUMMARY FINDINGS RELEVANT FOR ARTS POLICY

While the SPPA survey was not designed to learn what sorts of appeals are likely to motivate greater arts participation, nevertheless it can be used to get a better understanding of the quite different kinds of people who are good candidates for greater arts participation. Our primary findings can be summarized in four points.

- ✧ Some highbrows, called here HB-Us, have nearly exclusive tastes for the fine arts, thus fitting the classical stereotype of the HB snob.

- ✧ Many arts participants, called here HB-Os, have a primary orientation to the fine arts, but also like a wide range of popular culture offerings as well.

- ✧ A goodly number of LBs, here called LBO-HTs, contrary to enduring stereotypes of LBs (Bloom 1987; Levine 1988; Gabriel need a more recent cite) say they like fine art music. They are numerous, omnivorous in their tastes, and younger on average than HBs. What is more' over a quarter already report attending classical music concerts, and over half report hearing or seeing classical music via records, radio, or television.

- ✧ Looking across all the data collected in this SPPA survey for 2002 on the four tastes groups distinguished as highbrow or lowbrow and univores or omnivorous, the level of omnivorousness in tastes is now more important in predicting participation in the arts than is what used to be called the "level" of taste.

**Discussion** HB-Us clearly represent the classic image of the arts audience. Exclusive in their arts and leisure activities as well as their tastes, they are most likely to be drawn to arts participation and patronage by appeals that express the precious and exclusive nature of the fine arts and the danger they face from the encroachments of popular culture. Such appeals can work not only at the individual level but at the level of the city and nation. The formula is familiar enough, put in generic terms it runs thus: a first-class city (nation) deserves a first class symphony orchestra (ballet company, arts museum, etc). Alternatively the new concert hall (museum) proves that our city (nation) has arrived among the great cities (countries) of the civilized world. In 2005 the pitch for greater support for the arts at the National Endowment for the Arts is: "A great nation deserves great art."

While appeals to exclusiveness may energize HB-Us to support the fine arts, such appeals are not likely to have that effect on HB-Os and LB-HTs, who see "art" in many forms of music and culture beyond the classic fine arts and beyond the purview of the National Endowment for the Arts. These HB-Os and LB-HTs like and participate in many sorts of cultural activities in addition to those supported by the NEA, so they most likely see such appeals as elitist and as an attack on their eclectic tastes. It stands to reason that appeals to these two groups should assert the importance of the fine arts as part of the aesthetic repertoire of the fully developed omnivore.

Arts marketers have often seen themselves in a zero-sum competition with popular culture and other arts venues. This leads them to think that if people attend one activity, they will not attend another. In stark contrast to this assumption, HB-Os not only attend a wider range of activities, but, on average, they participate in them more often. In consequence, it seems reasonable to conclude that more is to be gained in attracting people to participate in each arts

activity from the cross-promotion of other arts and popular culture activities than from fostering competition with them.

Experienced arts managers and arts administrators will be able to point to any number of efforts in recent years that aim to make the arts seem less elitist and exclusive. The oft-voiced fear has been that such efforts amount to pandering to the masses, but, as the line of studies on omnivorism have shown, there are many who like the fine arts the best but like much of popular culture as well. Recognizing that there is this coherent group of non-traditional fine-arts fans, it should be easier to craft appeals that cast the fine arts as a vital part of the mix, one that, if taken seriously, can help hone the appreciation for other forms as well. The findings of this study suggest that LBHTs are likely candidates for further cultivation in arts participation. And from what we know of their demographic characteristics and leisure activities, they would most likely respond to the same range of appeals that are useful in attracting HB-Os to participating in the arts.

In conclusion, while highbrows and lowbrows have traditionally been counterposed to each other, this study clearly shows that differences in the exclusiveness of tastes exist within each group setting off univores from omnivores. The study also suggests that the difference between univores and omnivores is now more important than the differences between highbrows and lowbrows. This is a significant departure from a time several decades ago when having highbrow tastes was the most important factor in predicting arts participation. This shift has clear-cut implications for arts policy.

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## NOTES

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1. Median age means that half the sample falls above and half below the age reported.
2. From the 1930s through the early 1950s jazz was the music of the young, and few outside the African American community over age 60 in 1982 had learned to like it. What is more in the early 1970s a fusion of jazz and rock championed by Weather Report, Pat Metheny, and John McLaughlin and his Mahavishnu Orchestra was briefly very popular among youthful rock fans.
3. There seems to be no national measure taken from ticket sales of the rate of arts participation over recent decades, but Bradshaw & Nichols (2004:2) provide evidence from SPPA data on the proportion of US adults who said that they attended the benchmark fine arts over the past 12 months. Comparing the figures for 2002 with those of 1992, reported attendance at all eight art forms was unchanged or declined significantly over the decade. One could argue that the panic following the events of 9/11, 2001 could have depressed attendance at live performances during the survey year, but the lower figures for US adults that listened to the arts via the radio, played arts recordings, or watched the arts on television/VCR/DVD do not support that conjecture. Each one of the seventeen measures of consumption via the media of the benchmark arts reported by Bradshaw & Nichols (2004:4) dropped significantly from 1992 to 2002, strongly suggesting that a real decline in fine arts participation is taking place.
4. Portions of this section have been drawn from Peterson & Kern (1996).
5. Studies showing that many high status persons are not snobs but participate in a wide range of lowbrow pursuits as well include Peterson & Simkus (1992), Peterson & Kern (1996), Ward et al (1999), van Eijck (2001), Lopez & Garcia (2002), Holbrook et al (2002), Coulangeon (2003), Emmison (2003), Fisher & Preece. (2003), and Bellavance et al (2004).
6. Since the 1970s there have been studies ranking music genres. There have also been studies that make rankings in other art forms and leisure activities. Calls for basing rankings on a wide range of activities, as exemplified by the early work of Bourdieu (1984), have been made, but because, sadly, the

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SPPA has not collected information on popular culture expressions in dance, visual arts, theater, cinema, or television, we cannot begin that project here, and realizing these ambitions is a task for the coming years.

7. While it would be interesting to know what kind of people don't like to listen to music, it seems unlikely that they are good prospects for becoming involved with the fine arts.

8. Persons who say they "like all kinds" of music sound as if they may be perfect omnivores, but their demographic characteristics are quite different from those people who express a goodly number of choices. There is circumstantial evidence that these people may have been bored with the interview as indicated by their all-or-nothing responses to blocks of questions near the end of the interview.

9. Jazz was chosen as a complement to liking classical music or opera in defining highbrow because over the past fifty years jazz has become widely institutionalized as a form of fine art music (Peterson 1972; DeVeaux 1997; Lopes 2002). It has its musical canon, conservatories, and critical establishment, its own division within the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as performances and performers subsidized by diverse private and corporate foundations.

10. Wherever the word "significant" or "significantly" is used in a comparison between numbers, it means that the difference obtained between the scores in question could have been found by chance in only one out of a hundred cases. This is said to be a difference significant at least the .01 level of probability.

11. There are no questions about fishing or hunting, motor car racing or professional wrestling, bowling or playing computer games.

12. Studies made in the 1990s used types such as local news, ESPN, sports, music television, soap operas, comedy series, National Public Television, and dramatic series. Today it would be possible to create a more discriminating list.

13. We planned to follow-up the finding of Peterson and Kern (1995), based on the 1992 SPPA survey, that over time HB-Os are replacing the older HB-Us, but this has proved impossible. The 2002 respondents, on average, reported liking fewer kinds of music than did respondents in 1992, resulting in a smaller proportion of highbrow and lowbrow omnivores than in 1992. This may represent a real change, as people reduced their options and focused their preferences in the months following 9/11. But this seems unlikely given the explosion in access to music via the media that took place between 1992 and 2002 (Peterson and Ryan 2004). One unexamined possibility is that the difference is due to administration effects. In 1992 the SPPA questions were attached to the Crime Victimization Survey, and in 2002 they were attached to the Current Population Survey. While the former was quite brief for people who had not recently been the victim of a crime, the latter is a mind-numbingly detailed set of questions about hours of employment, income, work place, health, job training, and the like. Under such conditions, one can well imagine the interviewee wanting to cut short the telephoned questions.