sociological science

Dissecting Taste Distinction: Cultural Tastes and Perceptions of Individuals' Status and Qualities

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Abstract: A rich literature in sociology argues that familiarity with legitimate culture creates favorable perceptions of individuals' status and qualities, which in turn yield privilege. Yet, it remains unclear *which* tastes affect *what* perceptions by *how much*. To address these important questions, we designed a survey experiment in Denmark that "dissects" and quantifies the effect of individuals' tastes across six taste domains (music, food, performing arts, leisure, sport, and literature) on perceptions of status and qualities. Ignoring taste domains, we find that an individual whose taste profile *in general* includes more legitimate tastes is perceived more favorably in terms of status and qualities but less favorably in terms of sociability. Dissecting taste distinction by domain, we find that tastes in music and food have the strongest effect on perceptions, whereas tastes in other domains have little effect. Finally, we find that the substantive (and not just statistical) effect of tastes is large with regard to perceptions of cultural sophistication and sociability but small with regard to perceptions of social rank, earnings, and respectability. Overall, our results show that not all taste domains matter equally, legitimate tastes elicit both positive and negative perceptions, and tastes are powerful signals.

Keywords: cultural tastes; cultural stratification; perceptions; distinction; status; survey experiment

Reproducibility Package: If you wish to reproduce our results, you can access the data set and accompanying R code at https://tinyurl.com/yjm8f9ce. Please be aware that we provide the data set solely for the purpose of reproducing the results we present in the article. You may not use the data set for any other purpose without written consent from the authors.

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SOCIOLOGISTS argue that individuals convert familiarity with legitimate culture into economic and social privilege. In support of this idea, a vast empirical literature reports that familiarity with legitimate culture, such as a taste for opera, art, or golf, correlates with economic and social advantage, for example, higher education (Jæger 2011), income (Reeves and de Vries 2019), wealth (Sherman 2016), a high-status job (Rivera 2012), elite position (Friedman and Reeves 2020), and a high-quality network (Lewis and Kaufman 2018). The assumed mechanism through which tastes enhance privilege is *taste distinction*, that is, strategies with which individuals use legitimate tastes, consciously or not, to differentiate themselves from others to create impressions of status and qualities (Bourdieu 1984; Lizardo 2018).

In this article, we ask if some tastes and taste domains are more powerful than others in eliciting positive or negative perceptions of an individual's status and qualities. For example, are tastes in music a stronger status signal than tastes in sport (Johnston and Baumann 2009; Lizardo and Skiles 2015)? Bourdieu (1984, P. 18) famously proposed that "...nothing more clearly affirms one's 'class,' nothing more

infallibly classifies, than tastes in music." Yet, existing research provides no clear evidence on whether some taste domains matter more than others, instead assuming that, irrespective of domain (e.g., music vs. food), more legitimate tastes *always* signal higher status and better qualities (Jackson 2009; Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Thomas 2018, 2022). Empirical research also focuses on single taste domains, often music or food, or combines tastes in different domains in aggregate measures of highbrow or lowbrow tastes, thereby obscuring differences across domains (Bennett et al. 2009; Bryson 1996; Chan 2010; Flemmen, Jarness, and Rosenlund 2018). These limitations mean that we do not know if some taste domains matter more than others in shaping perceptions.

We designed a survey experiment to measure the effect of tastes (and taste domains) on perceptions of an individual's status and qualities. Our experiment addresses the limitations outlined above by disaggregating taste distinction into its constitutive components, thereby asking *which* tastes affect *what* perceptions by *how much*. In the experiment, we present participants with vignettes describing hypothetical individuals whose taste profile includes specific tastes in several domains (e.g., music and food) and then ask them to rate each vignette regarding perceived status and qualities. We use Denmark as the empirical context because, as we explain later, Denmark has comparatively low-income inequality, which means that differences in tastes, beyond differences in wealth and income, should shape perceptions of status and qualities. Our research makes three key contributions to research on taste distinction.

First, we dissect the effect of six taste domains (music, food, performing arts, leisure, sport, and literature) on perceptions of status and qualities. Within each domain, we include a set of specific tastes, such as different genres of music, types of food, and leisure activities. We collected nationally representative survey data to measure the perceived legitimacy of tastes within each domain, proxied by their implied social rank (Childress et al. 2021; Jæger, Rasmussen, and Holm 2023; Robette and Roueff 2014). For example, respondents in our survey associate a taste for opera with higher social rank than a taste for heavy metal, a difference we interpret as evidence that, in the domain of music, opera is more legitimate than heavy metal. Based on the taste hierarchy that emerges from our survey data, we pre-register hypotheses pertaining to the expected effect of more (vs. less) legitimate tastes in each domain on perceptions of an individual's status and qualities. For example, we hypothesize that a taste for opera and classical music (high legitimacy) leads to more favorable perceptions than a taste for heavy metal and rap/hip-hop (low legitimacy).

Second, we analyze the effect of tastes across multiple dimensions of status and qualities (Jarness and Friedman 2017; Lamont 2000). In the experiment, we include three indicators to capture perceptions of status (social rank, earnings, and respectability) and two indicators to capture personal qualities (cultural sophistication and sociability). Multiple dimensions of status and qualities enable us to assess the scope of taste distinction, including if, across taste domains, more legitimate tastes *always* elicit more favorable perceptions. Drawing on research in social psychology, we argue that while a taste for legitimate culture, such as opera, might elicit favorable perceptions of social rank, earnings, and cultural sophistication, this taste might elicit a less favorable perception of sociability because it conveys

snobbishness and distance to the "masses" (Hahl and Zuckerman 2014; Reeves and Friedman 2024). If true, legitimate tastes need not always be advantageous, a scenario that has received little attention in existing research (Fiske et al. 2002; Hahl and Zuckerman 2014; Reeves and Friedman 2024; Thomas 2022).

Third, we design the survey experiment such that we can directly compare the substantive effect of tastes with those of other socio-demographic characteristics such as occupation, ethnic background, and gender. By doing so, our experiment not only addresses *which* tastes affect *what* perceptions but also by *how much*. In addition to tastes, our vignettes include information on the occupation (e.g., lawyer vs. cleaning assistant), ethnic background (minority vs. majority), gender (female vs. male), family background (father's occupation), and municipality of residence (high vs. low income) of the hypothetical individuals described in the vignettes. Because we randomize information on socio-demographic characteristics, we can directly compare their effect with those of tastes. Measuring the substantive (and not only the statistical) effect of tastes on perceptions is important because existing research offers no clear evidence on whether tastes matter a little or a lot. Moreover, theories of cultural taste would suggest that tastes have a substantively large effect on perceptions of status and qualities (Bourdieu 1984).

Empirical results show that tastes have statistically significant and substantively meaningful effects on perceptions of status and qualities. Ignoring taste domains, vignettes whose taste profile *in general* includes more (vs. fewer) legitimate tastes (irrespective of domain) elicit more favorable perceptions of social rank, earnings, cultural sophistication, and respectability but less favorable perceptions of sociability. These results support theoretical arguments that legitimate tastes signal high status and favorable qualities but low sociability. However, when we dissect taste domains not all domains matter equally: tastes in music and food consistently have the strongest effect on perceptions, whereas tastes in performing arts, leisure, sport, and literature have the weakest effect. Finally, the substantive effect of tastes is strong with regard to perceptions of cultural sophistication and sociability but weak with regard to perceptions of status, captured by social rank, earnings, and respectability.

Cultural Hierarchy and Taste Distinction

We now present our theoretical framework. First, we define cultural legitimacy and hierarchy. Second, we explain how familiarity with legitimate culture is misrecognized as evidence of status and qualities. Third, we describe how each of the six taste domains we consider reflect respectively non-pecuniary (e.g., sophistication) and pecuniary (e.g., cost) qualities of highbrow culture. Fourth, we consider different dimensions of status and qualities through which distinction might manifest. Finally, we present pre-registered empirical hypotheses.

Cultural Legitimacy and Hierarchy

The legitimacy of cultural tastes (i.e., genres/activities/objects) refers to the degree to which tastes are widely regarded as signals of status, authority, or competence.

For example, opera is more legitimate than heavy metal because it is considered more sophisticated, enjoys greater institutional support (Accominotti, Khan, and Storer 2018; Feder and Katz-Gerro 2015), and is disproportionally consumed by individuals with high socioeconomic status (SES; Chan 2010; Lizardo and Skiles 2015; Roose and Stichele 2010). Legitimacy also depends on the way in which a cultural activity is consumed: abstract, aesthetically oriented modes of consumption are often considered more legitimate than tangible, practical modes of consumption (Daenekindt and Roose 2017; Jarness 2015; Lamont 2000).

Tastes derive legitimacy from a cultural hierarchy, that is, a macro-level "object-sorting system" (Mohr et al. 2020, P. 64) that gives tastes shared social meaning (DiMaggio 1991; Lizardo 2018; Wuthnow 1987). Legitimacy refers to different underlying components of status, such as wealth (Veblen 1934), sophistication (Simmel 1957), deference (Ridgeway, 2014), affinity with high SES (Bourdieu 1984), or honor (Weber 1978). Existing research shows that individuals with different SES and socio-demographic characteristics have the same hierarchy of tastes in mind when linking this hierarchy to perceptions of artistic respectability (Childress et al. 2021), prestige (Kataoka 2017), status (Jæger et al. 2023), and social rank (Domañski 2022; Jæger and Larsen 2024). We later use survey data to map the legitimacy of tastes in the context of Denmark.

Cultural Tastes and Distinction

A cultural hierarchy is a necessary condition for tastes to act as status signals. The legitimacy of tastes maps onto the difference between *highbrow* and *lowbrow* culture, the oldest and most general cultural hierarchy in Western societies (DiMaggio 1992; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004). Theoretically, Bourdieu (1977, 1984) argued that tastes vary in the degree to which they reflect qualities of (more legitimate) highbrow and (less legitimate) lowbrow culture. For example, opera is regarded as sophisticated and intellectually demanding, both qualities of highbrow culture, which means that a taste for this genre of music signals a refined cultural disposition. In contrast, as heavy metal is regarded as unsophisticated and primitive, both qualities of lowbrow culture, a taste for this genre signals an unrefined disposition (Gans 1974; Levine 1988).

Tastes differ in the degree to which people associate them with *non-pecuniary* or *pecuniary* qualities of highbrow and lowbrow culture. A taste for opera, renaissance art, and eighteenth century British poetry derives legitimacy from associations with non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture (e.g., sophistication and intellectual demand), whereas a taste for caviar, golf, and horseback riding derives legitimacy from associations with pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture (e.g., cost and exclusivity; Heffetz 2011; Veblen 1934). Although we expect that all six taste domains facilitate distinction, they likely differ in the degree to which distinction draws on associations with non-pecuniary (e.g., music and literature) and pecuniary (e.g., food and leisure) qualities of highbrow and lowbrow culture. We expand on this idea in the next section.

Taste Domains

Theories of cultural taste do not clarify if some taste domains create stronger (or perhaps different) distinction than others. For one, tastes in music might be more effective status signals than tastes in literature because more people listen to music than read books. As explained earlier, taste domains also differ in the degree to which the legitimacy of tastes within them reflects associations of tastes with non-pecuniary or pecuniary qualities of highbrow and lowbrow culture. Opera might be more legitimate than heavy metal in the domain of music because, in this domain, legitimacy derives principally from associations of tastes with non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. In contrast, in the domain of food, caviar might be more legitimate than nuggets because legitimacy in food derives principally from associations of tastes with pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. Finally, taste domains might differ in the degree to which the difference between highbrow and lowbrow culture is socially salient. For example, the difference between highbrow and lowbrow culture has been argued to be highly salient in the domain of music (Lizardo and Skiles 2016) but less salient in the domain of food (Johnston and Baumann 2009). Building on these arguments, we now consider how tastes in each domain facilitate distinction.

Music. Tastes in music facilitate distinction because music genres differ in the extent to which they reflect non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture, for example, sophistication, abstraction, and technical prowess (Accominotti et al. 2018; Bryson 1996; van den Haak 2020). Nowadays, music is widely accessible to consumers via radio or digital streaming services (e.g., Spotify and Deezer), which suggests that tastes in music should not reflect pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. Moreover, tastes in music have a weak tie quality by signaling an individual's social identity to a wide audience (Lizardo 2006). Finally, empirical research documents that music genres differ in terms of perceived prestige and artistic respectability (Childress et al. 2021; Domanski 2022; Kataoka 2017) and that there are clear SES gradients in music tastes (Coulangeon and Lemel 2007; Lizardo and Skiles 2015; Veenstra 2015).

Food. Tastes in food facilitate distinction due to their association with pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture, particularly by signaling exclusivity and "distance from necessity" (Bourdieu 1984). In addition, tastes in food reflect associations with non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture, such as sophistication (e.g., if a food has a rich flavor or texture) or signal authenticity and exoticness through the ways in which the food is prepared and consumed (Hahl, Zuckerman, and Kim 2017; Johnston and Baumann 2009; Oleschuk 2017). Finally, research documents SES gradients in food tastes (Darmon and Drewnowski 2008), also in Denmark in which our research is situated (Ditlevsen, Halkier, and Holm 2022), with low-SES groups preferring cheap, nutritious, and fatty food and high-SES groups preferring more expensive, healthy, and sophisticated food.

Performing arts. Tastes in performing arts (e.g., classical concert, ballet, and standup comedy) facilitate distinction due to their association with non-pecuniary and pecuniary qualities of highbrow and lowbrow culture. Going to a classical concert is more legitimate than going to a pop concert because classical music is considered more sophisticated and intellectually demanding, both non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture (Accominotti et al. 2018; Feder and Katz-Gerro 2015;

Levine 1988). Yet, as a ticket to a classical concert can be cheaper than a ticket to a pop concert, performing arts need not differ in terms of their association with pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. For this reason, the legitimacy of performing arts likely reflects both non-pecuniary and pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. Finally, empirical research documents SES gradients in the taste for, and participation in, performing arts (Bennett et al. 2009; Chan 2010; van Hek and Kraaykamp 2015) and differences in perceived prestige (Jæger and Larsen 2024; Jæger et al. 2023; Kataoka 2017).

Leisure. Tastes in leisure facilitate distinction due to their association with pecuniary and non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture (Heffetz and Frank 2008; Veblen 1934). Some leisure activities, such as sailing, hunting, and horseback riding, are prohibitively expensive for most people (Daloz 2009; Reeves and Friedman 2024). Other leisure activities, such as attending a flea market or watching a movie in the cinema, are neither particularly expensive nor exclusive. Moreover, some leisure activities, such as going to an art museum (sophisticated and abstract) or yoga (aesthetic and mentally demanding), derive legitimacy from their association with non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. Finally, empirical research documents SES gradients in leisure activities (Bennett et al. 2009; Chan 2010; Katz-Gerro 1999) and differences in the perceived prestige of these activities (Jæger et al. 2023; Kataoka 2017).

Sport. Tastes in sport facilitate distinction due to the association of sports with non-pecuniary and pecuniary qualities of highbrow and lowbrow culture. Sport differs in terms of intellectual complexity (e.g., chess vs. weightlifting) and in the importance of aesthetics during performance (e.g., gymnastics vs. basketball), both of which are non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. Other types of sport differ in terms of cost and exclusivity (e.g., yachting vs. soccer; Bourdieu 1978; Gemar 2020), both of which are pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. Many people both engage in sport themselves and consume it as a fan (e.g., of a football club), which means that, like tastes in music, tastes in sport have a weak-tie quality and are a ubiquitous means of signaling social identity. Finally, empirical research documents SES gradients in sport participation (Lefèvre, Routier, and Llopis-Goig, 2020; Scheerder et al. 2002) and differences in the prestige of different types of sport (e.g., tennis, golf, and arcade games; Kataoka 2017).

Literature. Literary tastes facilitate distinction due to their association with non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. Some genres, such as poetry and philosophy, are abstract and require specialized knowledge, both of which are non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture. Other genres, such as romance and comic books, are accessible to a wider audience (Kraaykamp and Dijkstra 1999). Moreover, some literary genres are highly institutionalized, for example, via organizations (e.g., poetry societies), events (comic conventions), and prizes (Verboord 2003), whereas others are not. Finally, empirical research documents SES gradients in literary tastes (Kraaykamp and Eijck 2011; Sokolov and Sokolova 2019; Torche 2007) and that literary genres preferred by high-SES groups are regarded as of greater quality than genres preferred by low-SES groups (Koolen et al. 2020).

Dimensions of Distinction

We end the theory section by considering different ways in which distinction might manifest. As argued earlier, distinction works by shaping others' perceptions of an individual's status and qualities, which in turn produces privilege. In this context, *status* refers to an individual's relative social position in society, for example, in terms of social rank, income, or respectability (Ridgeway 2014). The implicit association people make between legitimate tastes and (non-) pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture means that more legitimate tastes should elicit more positive perceptions of status.

In addition to status, distinction should shape perceptions of an individual's *qualities*. Signaling legitimate tastes is theorized to elicit positive perceptions of competence (Galos 2024; Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Thomas 2022), cultural sophistication (Bourdieu, 1984; Nichols 2023), and sociability (Brambilla et al. 2011; Schaefer et al. 2021; Thomas 2018). We address multiple types of qualities because theories of cultural taste propose that distinction manifests across a wide range of perceptions (Bourdieu 1984; Lizardo 2018).

Specifically, we argue that legitimate tastes create favorable perceptions of social rank, earnings, respectability, and cultural sophistication. These arguments fit empirical evidence that legitimate tastes elicit positive perceptions of social class position (Thomas 2022), economic qualities (Galos 2024; Thomas 2018, 2022), and cultural sophistication (Nichols 2023; Thomas 2018). We are not familiar with research that links legitimate tastes to perceived respectability, such as perceptions of esteem, honor, and dignity. Yet, based on Weber (1978), we would expect legitimate tastes to create positive perceptions of respectability.

The relationship between tastes and perceptions of sociability is more ambiguous. Based on Bourdieu (1984), we might expect more legitimate tastes to create favorable perceptions of sociability, such as being socially intelligent, charming, and likeable. Yet, research in social psychology suggests that the opposite scenario is more plausible. This research consistently finds that high-status characteristics (e.g., having high SES or being member of an ethnic majority group) create a positive perception of competence but a negative perception of warmth (e.g., being friendly, compassionate, and likeable; Fiske et al. 2002). Although low-status groups are regarded as less competent than high-SES groups, they are also regarded as friendlier and more likeable, both dimensions of sociability. The same mechanism likely applies to taste distinction: more legitimate tastes elicit negative perceptions of sociability because these tastes, linked to high status, are seen as a means for high-SES groups to assert dominance over lower-status groups (Correll and Ridgeway 2003) and conceal privilege (Reeves and Friedman 2024).

The Danish Context

We study taste distinction in Denmark, a country characterized by a low level of income inequality, a comprehensive welfare state, and a state-supported cultural policy model (Esping-Andersen 2015; Leth-Petersen and Sæverud 2024). Low-income inequality means that, compared to elsewhere, we expect tastes, such as highbrow or lowbrow tastes, to be strong signals of individuals' status and qualities,

alongside income and wealth. Moreover, although the Danish state nominally supports both lowbrow and highbrow culture (Duelund 2003), Denmark features the "architect" cultural policy model in which the state organizes and funds major cultural institutions; a model that typically favors more institutionalized, highbrow culture (Chartrand and McCaughey 1989). Finally, SES gradients in cultural tastes and participation in Denmark are similar to those found in other countries (Jæger and Katz-Gerro 2015; Prieur, Rosenlund, and Skjøtt-Larsen 2008). For these reasons, we expect tastes to be clear signals of status and qualities in Denmark.

Hypotheses

We now present five hypotheses that describe the expected effect of more (vs. less) legitimate tastes on perceptions of individuals' status and qualities. Within each taste domain, we expect more legitimate tastes to elicit favorable perceptions of social rank and all types of qualities except sociability, in which we expect less favorable perceptions. We have no theoretical reason for assuming *ex ante* that some taste domains are more important than others. Nonetheless, one of our research objectives is to determine if some taste domains are more important than others. In line with standards of open science, we have pre-registered our hypotheses on the Open Science Framework prior to collecting the data for the survey experiment. We pre-register hypotheses to strengthen validity and reliability and to eliminate hypothesizing after results are known and selective reporting of results (Nosek et al. 2015).

Our first hypothesis (*H1*) is that more legitimate tastes in each of the six taste domains have a positive effect on perceptions of *social rank.* For example, we expect a taste for opera/classical music (high legitimacy) rather than for heavy metal/hip-hop (low legitimacy) or rock/pop or jazz (medium legitimacy) to create a more favorable perception of an individual's social rank. Similarly, hypotheses 2–4 are that more (vs. less) legitimate tastes have a positive effect on perceptions of an individual's *earnings* (*H2*), *respectability* (*H3*), and *cultural sophistication* (*H4*). Our final hypothesis (*H5*) is that more (vs. less) legitimate tastes have a negative effect on perceptions of an individual's *sociability*. As explained earlier, we motivate *H5* from arguments that high-status characteristics, such as legitimate tastes, elicit negative perceptions of warmth.

H1–H5 pertain to the effect of tastes on perceptions in each taste domain. In addition to these disaggregated (or "dissected") effects, we estimate the *aggregate* effect of tastes on perceptions of status and qualities, that is, the effect of having an *overall* taste profile with more (vs. fewer) legitimate tastes *irrespective of domain*. We do this as most existing research estimates the aggregate effect of tastes on perceptions (Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Thomas 2018, 2022). Building on theory and empirical evidence, we propose that an individual whose taste profile includes more (vs. fewer) legitimate tastes *across all six domains* elicits more favorable perceptions of status, earnings, respectability, and cultural sophistication but less favorable perceptions of sociability.

Data and Methods

Experimental Design

We designed a survey experiment to test the five hypotheses outlined in the previous section. This experiment, a paired vignette design, dissects the effect of the taste profile of a vignette (comprised of one taste per taste domain) into the disaggregated effect of each domain. Because we randomize specific tastes within each domain, the six domains are orthogonal by design. Existing experimental research cannot do this because it uses vignettes with fixed taste profiles (e.g., a highbrow or a lowbrow profile; Galos 2024; Nichols 2023; Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Thomas 2018, 2022).

In our experiment, participants $i \in \{1, \ldots, N\}$ rate the perceived social rank, earnings, respectability, cultural sophistication, and sociability of two randomly assigned vignettes j presented side-by-side. We use a paired design to double statistical power and because research shows that paired (vs. single) vignettes raise engagement and reduce satisficing (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015). Each vignette describes a 38-year-old individual with a specific set of tastes in music, food, performing arts, leisure, sport, and literature. We randomly assign one taste with either high, medium, or low legitimacy in each domain, as inferred from our survey data. For example, a vignette might have the following taste profile: opera (music), cheeseburger (food), standup comedy (performing arts), wine tasting (leisure), soccer (sport), and crime (literature).

In addition to tastes, we present information on socio-demographic characteristics in the vignettes, including occupation, ethnic background, and gender. As explained earlier, we include this information to provide a rich description of the hypothetical individual in the vignette and to compare the substantive effects of tastes on perceptions with those of other individual characteristics. Each participant in the experiment rates two vignettes side-by-side three times, meaning that we have six observations per participant (online supplement A presents the template we use in the vignette experiment).

Variables

Indicators of legitimate tastes. We use two strategies for selecting which taste domains and specific tastes to include in the vignettes. First, the six taste domains (music, food, performing arts, leisure, sport, and literature) are relevant because, as explained earlier, tastes in each domain are socially stratified (Bryson 1996; Gemar 2020; Johnston and Baumann 2009; Katz-Gerro 1999; Katz-Gerro and Jæger 2013; Kraaykamp and Dijkstra 1999) and have different legitimacy (Childress et al. 2021; Domanski 2022; Jæger and Larsen 2024; Jæger et al. 2023; Kataoka 2017). For these reasons, we expect tastes in each domain to be socially salient, differ in terms of legitimacy, and to signal status and qualities to a different extent.

Second, we selected specific tastes in each domain based on a nationally representative survey we carried out as part of this project. In the survey (N = 2,998), we asked respondents to rate, on a 1–10 scale, the extent to which they associate 10 tastes in each domain (i.e., activities/genres/objects) with people placed at the top (10) or at the bottom (1) of society (see details in online supplement B). The

Table 1: Experimental attributes: taste domains and socio-demographic characteristics.

Attributes	Legitimacy Levels
Taste domains	
Music	High (opera and classical) Medium (rock and pop and jazz) Low (rap and hip-hop and heavy metal)
Food	High (caviar and oysters) Medium (oven-baked salmon and sourdough bread) Low (cheeseburgers and chicken nuggets)
Performing arts	High (ballet and classical concert) Medium (musical and play) Low (circus and standup comedy)
Leisure	High (wine tasting and art museum) Medium (cinema and amusement park) Low (flea market and camping holiday)
Sport	High (golf and tennis) Medium (football [soccer] and handball) Low (weightlifting and boxing)
Literature	High (philosophy and poetry) Medium (biographies and crime novels) Low (science fiction and cartoons)
Socio-demographic characteristics	
Name	Nordic-sounding masculine name Nordic-sounding feminine name Arabic-sounding masculine name Arabic-sounding feminine name
Occupation	High (doctor and lawyer) Medium (school teacher and journalist) Low (cashier and cleaning assistant)
Father's occupation	High (doctor and lawyer) Medium (school teacher and journalist) Low (cashier and cleaning assistant)
Municipality of residence (income)	High (Gentofte and Klampenborg) Medium (Gladsaxe and Ballerup) Low (Albertslund and Brøndby)

survey data are important because they provide a direct measure of legitimacy, as inferred from the implied social rank of tastes (see Table B1; Childress et al. 2021; Robette and Roueff 2014). We note that results from our survey, which rely on implied social rank to capture legitimacy, match those of research that uses others measures to capture cultural legitimacy (Childress et al. 2021; Domanski 2022; Jæger et al. 2023; Kataoka 2017). We select six specific tastes from each domain, two rated high (e.g., opera and classical music), medium (e.g., rock/pop and jazz), and low (e.g., heavy metal and rap/hip-hop) and use these tastes to capture tastes with different legitimacy in each domain. In addition, we construct three variables that count the total number of tastes (out of six) with, respectively, high, medium, and

low legitimacy in each vignette. We use these variables to capture the legitimacy of the *overall taste profile* in each vignette, irrespective of domain. Table 1 summarizes the specific tastes we include in each taste domain.

As explained earlier, we include information on other socio-demographic characteristics than tastes in the vignettes. Online supplement B provides information on the operationalization of these characteristics. Specifically, we randomize information on name to signal gender (masculine or feminine name) and ethnic background (Nordic or Arabic-sounding name) and randomize information on occupation, family background (father's occupation), and municipality of residence (based on average personal income in the municipality).

Indicators of status and qualities. We include five indicators to capture perceived status and qualities. First, we adapt a question from the International Social Survey Programme "Social Inequality" module to capture *perceived status* (ISSP Research Group 2022). We ask participants to rate, on a 1–11 scale, whether they think the hypothetical individual described in the vignette belongs to the "top" (11) or "bottom" (1) of society. The item is like the one we use in the survey to measure the implied social rank of tastes; however, it now refers to the specific individual described in the vignette rather than to people in general.

Second, to supplement the global rank measure of perceived status, we use four items to capture specific dimensions of *perceived status and qualities*. We ask participants to rate, on a 1–11 scale, whether each of four statements either "do not apply at all" (1) or "apply a lot" (11) to the hypothetical individual described in the vignette. The four statements refer to whether the individual "makes a lot of money" (earnings), "is respected by others" (respectability), "is cultured" (cultural sophistication), and "would be fun to talk to at a party" (sociability). These indicators resemble those used in existing research to capture different dimensions of status and qualities (Galos 2024; Nichols 2023; Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Thomas 2018, 2022). We randomize the order in which we present each statement to participants to prevent order effects.

Sample

We commissioned a large Danish survey company to collect data for the survey experiment. This company recruited a quota-based sample of 5,162 participants from its online panel, representative of the adult Danish population in terms of age, gender, education, and region of residence. To incentivize participation, respondents received points as reimbursement, which they could convert into gift cards. Before collecting the data, we conducted a power analysis showing that, with a sample size of 5,162, we can detect main effects with an effect size of 0.05 and interaction effects with an effect size of 0.1 at a power above 90 (see online supplement A). Data collection took place between October 5 and October 31, 2023.

Estimation Strategy

We use ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression to estimate the effect of more versus less legitimate tastes in each taste domain on perceptions of an individual's status and qualities, as hypothesized in *H1*–*H5*. Our parameter of interest is the *average*

marginal component effect (AMCE), that is, the marginal effect of tastes with different legitimacy (high, medium, or low) in each domain averaged over all possible combinations of tastes in the other domains and over the socio-demographic characteristics (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). In the OLS models, we use tastes with low legitimacy (e.g., heavy metal or rap/hip-hop) as the reference group and estimate the effect of tastes with medium (e.g., rock/pop or jazz) or high legitimacy (e.g., opera or classical music) relative to this group.

We estimate OLS regressions in two steps. In the first step, we regress perceived status and qualities on the indicators of *the total number of tastes* with, respectively, high, medium, and low legitimacy in the vignettes (i.e., 0–6 count variables). These OLS models identify the *aggregate effect* of a taste profile with more (vs. fewer) legitimate tastes, irrespective of domain. We estimate this aggregate effect as a benchmark for the disaggregated analyses that follow and to compare our results with those from existing research. In the second step, we regress perceived status and qualities on the indicators of tastes with different legitimacy in each domain, thereby estimating the *disaggregated* (or dissected) AMCEs of tastes.

We include post-stratification weights in all OLS models and because weighting introduces heteroscedasticity, we report heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors (Winship and Radbill 1994). Finally, we cluster all standard errors at the individual level because each participant rates multiple vignettes. Online supplement C reports results from balance tests on pre-treatment covariates in the data, showing that randomization worked as intended.

Results

We now present results from the analysis. First, we present results from OLS models in which we regress perceived status and qualities on the total number of tastes with, respectively, high, medium, and low legitimacy. Second, we present results from OLS regressions in which we estimate the AMCEs of tastes with high or medium (vs. low) legitimacy in each domain on perceptions. Third, we compare the substantive effect of tastes with those of other socio-demographic characteristics.

Aggregate Effect of Taste Profiles on Perceptions of Status and Qualities

Figure 1 summarizes results from OLS regressions in which we regress perceptions of status and qualities on the variables that count the total number of tastes with high, medium, and low legitimacy in each vignette. We expect a positive effect of more (vs. fewer) legitimate tastes, except in the case of perceived sociability, in which we expect a negative effect.

The horizontal axis in Figure 1 shows estimated effects (and 95 percent confidence intervals). Effects sizes are unstandardized, that is, scaled relative to the 1–11 scale used in all indicators of perceived status and qualities. As expected, a taste profile with (one) more taste(s) with high legitimacy elicits a more favorable perception of social rank (effect size: 0.06), earnings (0.04), respectability (0.07), and cultural sophistication (0.14). Moreover, a taste profile with (one) more legitimate

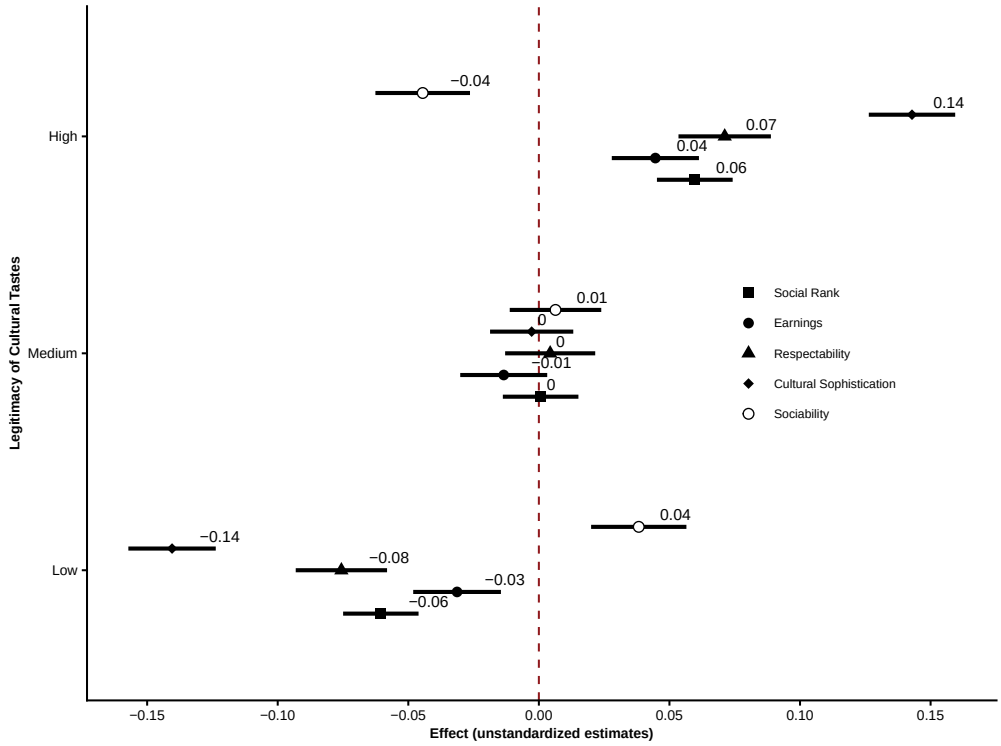

Figure 1: Effect of number of legitimate tastes on perceptions of status and qualities. *Notes:* The figure shows unstandardized regression estimates from OLS regressions with associated 95 percent confidence intervals. All models use individual-level cluster-robust standard errors. See online supplement D, Table D1, for the same results in table format.

taste(s) elicits a negative perception of sociability (-0.04). We observe the same pattern, but reversed, when estimating the effect of (one) more taste(s) with low legitimacy. This reversed pattern suggests that we succeed in capturing tastes whose legitimacy varies along a single dimension. Finally, we find no effect of the number of tastes with medium legitimacy on perceptions of status and qualities. This result suggests that, in the aggregate, these "middlebrow" tastes do not communicate any meaningful information on the perceived status and qualities of the hypothetical individual described in the vignette.

Results reported in Figure 1 show that a taste profile with more (vs. fewer) legitimate tastes elicit more favorable perceptions of all studied dimensions of an individual's status and qualities except sociability. These results are in line with those reported in existing research (Galos 2024; Nichols 2023; Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Thomas 2018, 2022) but have a clearer interpretation because we use survey data to measure the legitimacy of tastes rather than assume *ex ante* that some tastes are more legitimate than others. In the case of sociability, our results show that more legitimate tastes create a negative perception of sociability, a result consistent with research in social psychology finding that many other status characteristics (e.g., ethnic background, gender, and occupation) incur a tradeoff between being perceived as competent and warm (Fiske et al. 2002).

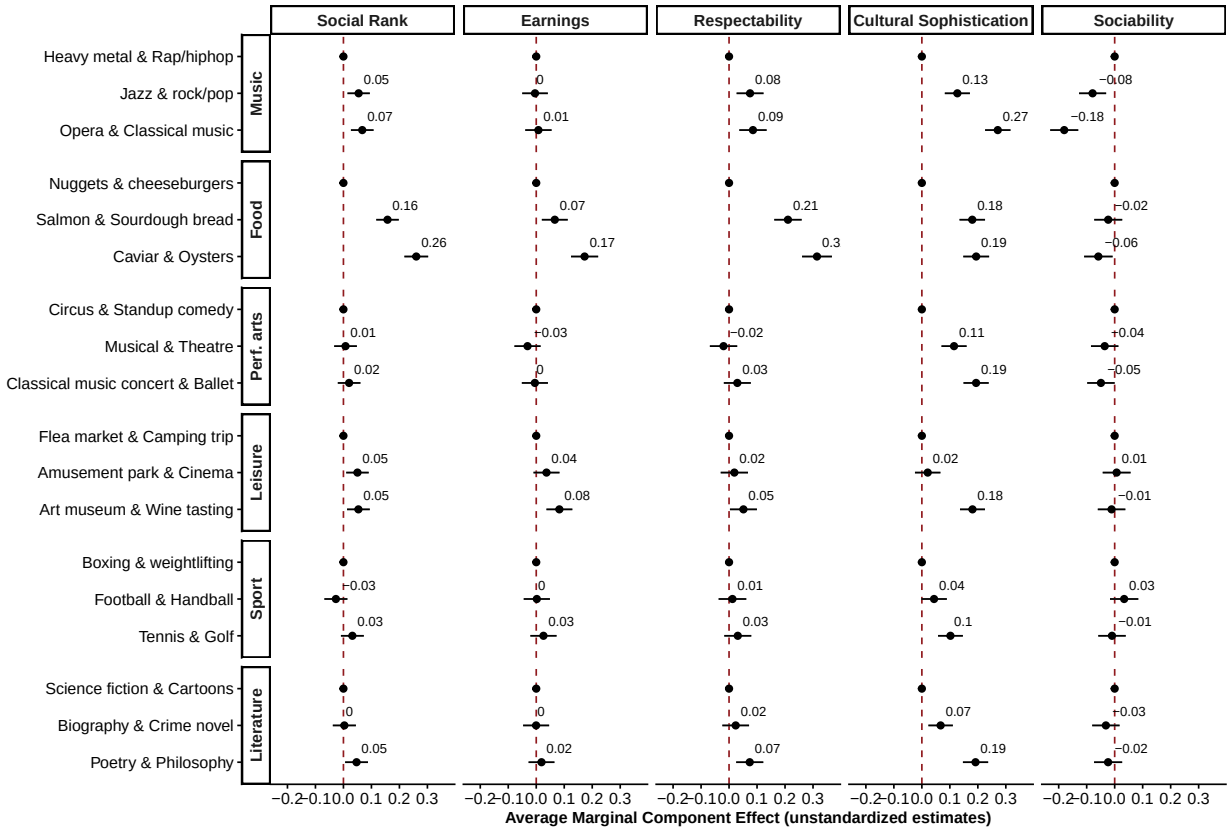

Figure 2: AMCEs of legitimate tastes on perceptions of status and qualities by taste domain. *Notes:* The figure shows unstandardized AMCE estimates from OLS regressions with associated 95 percent confidence intervals. All models use individual-level cluster-robust standard errors. See online supplement D, Table D2, for the same results in table format including point and inference estimates for the socio-demographic characteristics. In online supplement C, we report a series of robustness checks that validate the main results shown in Figure 2.

Taste Domains and Perceptions of Status and Qualities

Figure 2 summarizes results from OLS regressions in which we estimate the effect of tastes with different legitimacy (low, medium, and high) in each domain on perceptions of status and qualities. The horizontal axis shows AMCEs (and associated 95 percent confidence intervals). As shown in Figure 1, effect sizes are unstandardized and scaled relative to the 1–11 scales we use in all indicators of status and qualities. The vertical axis shows tastes in each domain, grouped into tastes with, respectively, low (e.g., heavy metal and rap/hip-hop), medium (e.g., jazz and rock-pop), and high (e.g., opera and classical music) legitimacy. In all analyses, tastes with low legitimacy are the reference group.

Beginning with perceived status, Figure 2 shows that more legitimate tastes in the domains of music and food have statistically significant, positive effects on perceptions of social rank, whereas tastes in the other domains have little (leisure, literature) or no (performing arts, sport) effect. For example, a taste for opera or classical music (high legitimacy) rather than for heavy metal or rap/hip-hop (low

legitimacy) increases the perceived social rank of the hypothetical individual by 0.07 units on the 1–11 scale. Similarly, a taste for caviar or oysters (high legitimacy) rather than for nuggets or cheeseburgers (low legitimacy) increases perceived social rank by 0.26. In the domain of food, we also find a difference in perceived social rank when comparing a taste for caviar or oysters (high legitimacy) with a taste for salmon or sourdough bread (medium legitimacy). Accordingly, in the domain of food, we find an ordinal effect of more legitimate tastes on perceived social rank.

We offer a preliminary interpretation of our results for perceived social rank before presenting results for the other dimensions of perceived status and qualities. Theoretically, we argue that taste domains differ in the extent to which tastes reflect associations with (non-) pecuniary aspects of highbrow and lowbrow culture. Music is widely accessible via, for example, radio or digital streaming, which means that the positive effect of more legitimate music tastes likely reflects an association of these tastes with non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture (e.g., opera and classical music being more sophisticated and abstract than heavy metal and rap/hip-hop). In contrast, as food can be expensive, the positive effect of more legitimate food tastes likely reflects an association of these tastes with the pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture (e.g., caviar and oysters being more expensive and harder to get than nuggets and cheeseburgers). Even though tastes in music and food both affect perceptions of social rank, they likely do so via different associations with highbrow and lowbrow culture. We later return to this point.

Regarding perceived qualities, Figure 2 shows that the overall pattern of results for perceived earnings (agreeing with statement: "makes a lot of money") and respectability ("is respected by others") resembles what we find for perceived social rank. However, tastes in music have no effect on perceived earnings, whereas tastes in food (and, to some extent, tastes in leisure) have a positive effect. A possible explanation is that more legitimate tastes in music likely reflect non-pecuniary qualities of highbrow culture and therefore do not carry any meaningful information about an individual's earnings, whereas tastes in food likely reflect pecuniary qualities (e.g., wealth) and therefore carry meaningful information. We back this interpretation with results for perceived respectability, which are very similar to what we find for perceived social rank. The similarity in results might be due to social rank and respectability both being highly abstract dimensions of status, which means that perceptions in these dimensions depend on the same types of non-pecuniary (music) and pecuniary (food) associations of tastes with highbrow culture. In other words, the same types of associations determine whether someone considers you high status and respectable, and these associations are different from whether someone considers you wealthy.

Results for perceived cultural sophistication (statement: "is cultured") differ from those of the other dimensions of qualities in that all six taste domains have independent, positive effects on perceived cultural sophistication, with more (vs. less) legitimate tastes in each domain eliciting more favorable perceptions. These results illuminate that although some taste domains (performing arts, leisure, sport, and literature) have little or no independent effect in the other dimensions of status and qualities we consider, this is not because these domains are universally irrelevant. Rather, the relevance of each taste domain is related to the outcome being evaluated. In the case of perceived cultural sophistication, all six taste domains

matter because perceived cultural sophistication likely draws on a broad repertoire of taste signals. Thus, more legitimate tastes across all evaluated taste domains reflect greater cultural sophistication than less legitimate tastes. This would also explain why, as shown in Figure 1, the aggregate effect of tastes is much larger for perceived cultural sophistication than for the other dimensions of status and qualities.

Finally, and as expected, results for perceived sociability (statement: "would be fun to talk to at a party") are in the opposite direction of what we find for the other dimensions of qualities. More legitimate tastes in music, and to some extent in food and performing arts (but not in leisure, sport, or literature), elicit more negative perceptions of sociability. Traditionally highbrow tastes (e.g., opera/classical music, caviar/oysters, and classical music concert/ballet) elicit negative perceptions of sociability, whereas this is not the case to the same extent for middlebrow tastes in these domains. In the domain of music, the negative effect of more legitimate tastes might be due to the "weak tie" quality of music tastes and their signaling value as markers of social identity. If true, a taste for opera and classical music (rather than for heavy metal and rap/hip-hop) might signal that an individual is a snob and not worth interacting with.

In summary, our analysis of the disaggregated or dissected effect of taste domains partially supports *H1*–*H5*. Tastes in music and food stand out as the strongest signals across all dimensions of status and qualities. In contrast, tastes in performing arts, sport, and literature have little effect, except in the case of perceived cultural sophistication. These results mean that the only pre-registered hypothesis for which we find unequivocal support is *H4*. Consistent with research in social psychology, our results suggest that more legitimate tastes create a tradeoff between being perceived, on the one hand, as high-status and culturally sophisticated and, on the other hand, as sociable. We consider the theoretical implications of these results in the final discussion.

How Much Do Tastes Matter?

So far, our analysis sheds light on *which* tastes affect *what* perceptions. What remains to be addressed is by *how much*. To address this question, we compare the substantive effect of the six taste domains with those of the socio-demographic characteristics we also include in the experiment. As explained earlier (and summarized in Table 1), we include information on the occupation, ethnic background, gender, family background (father's occupation), and municipality of residence of the hypothetical individual described in the vignette. We estimate the effect of each socio-demographic characteristic and compare this effect with that of tastes.

Figure 3 summarizes the relative contribution of tastes (both aggregated across all six domains and disaggregated by domain) and socio-demographic characteristics to the explained variance in perceptions of status and qualities. Accordingly, Figure 3 shows how much of the variance in perceptions *that we can explain* is attributable to tastes and socio-demographic characteristics, respectively. Figure 1 shows that, for the three status dimensions (social rank, earnings, and respectability), occupation (e.g., lawyer vs. cashier) has by far the largest effect on perceptions, accounting for more than 90 percent of the explained variance. This result is not

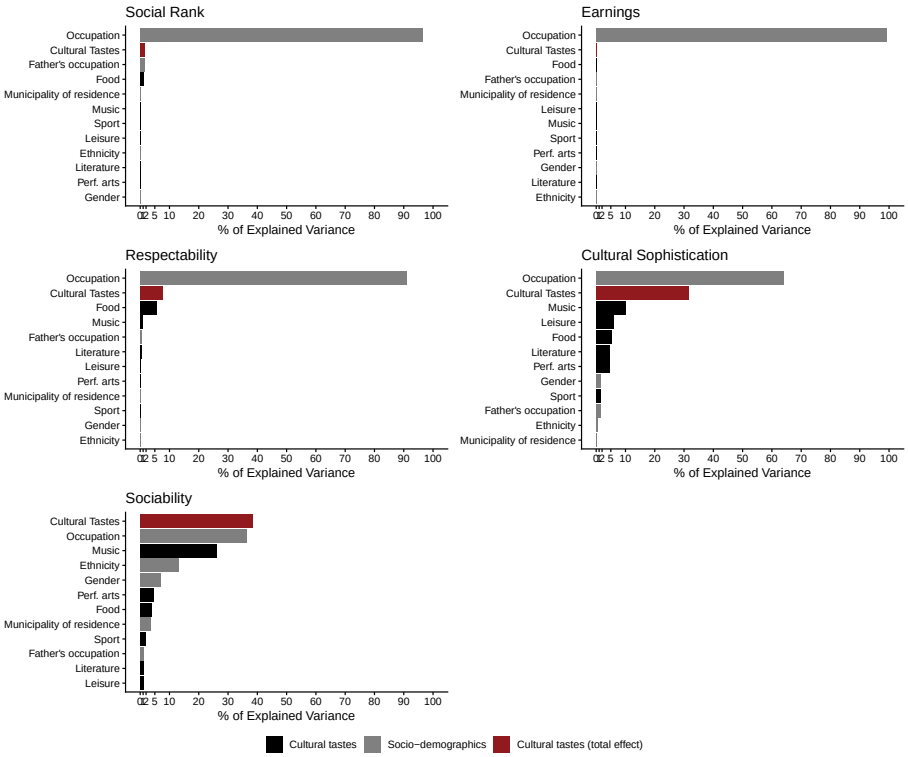

Figure 3: Summary of the relative contribution of tastes and socio-demographic characteristics to the explained variance in perceptions of status and qualities. *Notes:* The figure shows the relative contribution of tastes (both disaggregated by domain and aggregated across domains) and the socio-demographic characteristics to the total variance explained in perceptions of status and qualities. The dark red bar summarizes the cumulative contribution of all six taste domains.

surprising, as research shows that occupation (or social class position) is a ubiquitous signal of status and "hard" qualities (Galos 2024; Jackson 2009; Kraus, Park, and Tan 2017; Nichols 2023; Thomas 2018). Nonetheless, tastes account for a non-trivial share of the explained variance in perceptions of cultural sophistication (31 percent) and sociability (38 percent), a larger share than that explained by family background, gender, and ethnicity. Regarding differences between taste domains, results in Figure 3 mirror findings reported in Figure 2, that is, tastes in music and food account for a larger share of the explained variance in perceptions of status and qualities than the other taste domains (performing arts, leisure, sport, and literature). In summary, our results indicate that tastes are substantively powerful signals of cultural sophistication and sociability but not of status (measured as social rank, respectability, and earnings).

Robustness Tests

We conducted a series of supplementary analyses to assess the robustness of our results. First, in the main analysis we group tastes in each domain into three groups with low, medium, and high legitimacy. This design simplifies our analysis but

could mask differences in the signaling value of specific tastes within each group. In supplementary analyses reported in online supplement D, we disaggregate tastes in each domain completely and estimate their separate effect on perceptions of status and qualities (i.e., we treat jazz and rock/pop as separate tastes rather than as a group with medium legitimacy). Results from these supplementary analyses resemble the results shown in Figure 2 but enrich the picture. For example, in the domain of music, a taste for jazz works more like a taste with high legitimacy (opera and classical music) than like a taste with medium legitimacy (rock/pop). Moreover, in the domain of sport, a taste for boxing is a stronger signal of high social rank than a taste for weightlifting, handball, and football.

Second, our analysis captures the AMCE of tastes on perceptions of status and qualities. This average effect, however, might conceal important heterogeneity, for example, if participants in the experiment with high SES perceive a taste for opera more favorably than participants with low SES (Jæger et al. 2023; Kataoka 2017; Thomas 2022). We estimated Bayesian additive regression trees (BART) for each outcome to assess potential effect heterogeneity by participants' SES, socio-demographic characteristics, and cultural tastes (Robinson and Duch 2023). In essence, BART tests for interaction effects between taste signals and participants' characteristics (for a walkthrough of this method, see online supplement E). Results from the BART models, reported in online supplement E, show that the effects of the taste signals do not vary systematically across participants' characteristics, indicating little heterogeneity. We also tested potential interaction effects between the taste signals and the socio-demographic characteristics in the vignettes. For example, the positive effect of a taste for opera might be amplified if the vignette describes a lawyer rather than a cashier, as highbrow cultural tastes might be more valued for high-prestige occupations. Yet, results also reported in online supplement E provide limited support for this type of heterogeneity (see Fig. E3). Finally, it might be that cultural tastes are stronger status cues when occupational prestige, the strongest information signal in the vignettes, is tied in the two vignettes (e.g., the participant is shown two medical doctors). However, results reported in online supplement E do not indicate any extra effect of tastes on intra-task differences in perceptions of status and qualities when occupational prestige is tied (see Fig. E4).

Third, our experiment includes vignettes that cover all possible combinations of tastes with different legitimacy (low, medium, and high) across the six taste domains we consider. Although this design makes it possible to disaggregate the effect of each taste signal (cf. Fig. 2), it also creates vignettes whose taste profiles might come across as cognitively dissonant or unrealistic by combining, say, opera (high legitimacy, music), nuggets (low legitimacy, food), golf (high legitimacy, sport), and circus (low legitimacy, performing arts). To assess realism, in online supplement F, we calculate the mean realism rating (measured by a 1–11 rating of whether the vignette describes an individual participant could meet in real life) and estimate the effect of each taste signal on the perceived realism of a vignette. Mean realism is 7.99, which suggests that the vignettes come across as realistic *in general*. Also, most taste signals do not affect realism ratings. A few highbrow tastes, especially in food (oysters and caviar) and performing arts (classical music concert and ballet), have a negative effect on realism ratings compared to lowbrow tastes (heavy metal and nuggets). Yet, substantive differences are not large.

Discussion

Although sociologists argue that legitimate tastes create favorable perceptions of individuals, we know little about *which* tastes shape *what* perceptions by *how much*. Answering these questions is important for understanding the nature of taste distinction and how tastes create privilege and inequality. To address these important questions, we collected survey data to measure the legitimacy of tastes and conducted a survey experiment to estimate the effect of tastes in six domains on perceptions of an individual's status and qualities. The key results that emerge from our data are that tastes signal status and qualities, tastes in music and food stand out as particularly clear signals, and tastes have a substantive effect on perceptions.

In this final section, we consider the broader implications of our experiment and highlight limitations. A key takeaway from our research is that taste distinction is pervasive, that is, we do not find any dimension of perceived status and qualities in which tastes do not matter. For instance, all taste domains matter for perceived cultural sophistication and, cumulatively, tastes are one of the strongest predictors of perceived cultural sophistication and sociability. These results are noteworthy because our experimental design, which controls for a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics, is designed to be a conservative test of whether tastes affect perceptions. Moreover, we estimate the *marginal* effect of tastes in one domain *conditional on* the effect of tastes in all other domains. For these reasons, our results provide robust support for theoretical arguments that cultural tastes shape perceptions.

One central feature of our research is that, in the spirit of Coleman (1990), it attempts to link the cultural hierarchy at the macro level, measured in a survey via the hierarchy of tastes in terms of implied social rank, with its effect at the micro level, measured via the effect of tastes on perceptions of an individual's status and qualities. Our results show that the structure of the cultural hierarchy at the macro level is consistent with how tastes shape perceptions at the micro level. These findings support claims that a cultural hierarchy is a necessary condition for taste distinction, that is, for tastes to signal status and qualities, which in turn create privilege and reproduce inequality (Bourdieu 1984; Jæger et al. 2023; Mohr et al. 2020).

Another key result is that more legitimate tastes do not always translate into favorable perceptions. Legitimate tastes, especially in music, elicit negative perceptions of sociability. Although this result fits evidence that legitimate tastes incur a tradeoff between being perceived as competent versus being perceived as warm, it addresses a type of distinction neglected in existing research. We can think of two possible interpretations of this result. One interpretation is that being perceived as less sociable (e.g., snobbish) is a deliberate strategy for high-SES individuals to signal distance to the "masses" (Daloz 2009; Reeves and Friedman 2024). If true, the observed negative effect of legitimate tastes on perceived sociability indicates that this strategy works as intended. A second interpretation is that the value of legitimate tastes, in terms of signaling *social* qualities, has diminished to a point where these tastes are a liability rather than an asset (de Vries and Reeves 2021; Peterson and Kern 1996). If true, other taste profiles, such as omnivorous tastes,

might be a superior strategy for signaling sociability (Jarness and Flemmen 2019; Reeves and Friedman 2024).

A limitation in our research is that we cannot explain why more legitimate tastes lead to more favorable perceptions of status and qualities. We argue theoretically that legitimate tastes affect perceptions because they reflect non-pecuniary (e.g., sophistication) and pecuniary (e.g., cost) qualities of highbrow and lowbrow culture. Although we show that tastes differ in terms of implied social rank, and other research shows the same regarding perceived status (Jæger et al. 2023), prestige (Kataoka 2017), and respectability (Childress et al. 2021), we do not (yet) know exactly which characteristics make some tastes more legitimate than others. Although legitimate tastes in food, a taste domain in which associations with pecuniary aspects of highbrow culture likely matter the most, has a positive effect on perceptions of earnings, we cannot directly infer what explains this result. Thus, we encourage research that identifies which characteristics of cultural tastes (do not) produce legitimacy.

A second limitation is that we do not examine the effect of omnivorous tastes, that is, having a taste profile that spans high-, middle-, and lowbrow culture, on perceptions of status and qualities. Although several of the taste profiles in the data can be categorized as omnivores, we have not expanded our analysis to this axis of distinction for three reasons. First, to properly examine the effect of omnivorous (vs. univorous) tastes, we would need a slightly different experimental design that randomizes the number of tastes one sees in the vignette, rather than each profile having six tastes. Second, research on omnivorousness typically focuses on one taste domain (e.g., music). Third, we have not pre-registered hypotheses pertaining to the effect of omnivorous tastes on perceptions of status and qualities. For these reasons, this analysis falls outside the article's scope. However, addressing the signaling power of omnivorousness is substantively important for enriching our knowledge about taste distinction, and we encourage future research to take up this endeavor.

A third limitation is that our research design is cross-sectional and does not enable us to address changes over time in the legitimacy of tastes and how this might affect perceptions of status and qualities (Kozlowski, Taddy, and Evans 2019). That said, across all six taste domains, we find no evidence that younger participants in our experiment link tastes to perceptions in a different way than older participants (see online supplement E). Still, we encourage future research to investigate temporality in the legitimacy of taste.

A fourth limitation is that our findings do not necessarily translate to countries with greater economic inequality or other cultural policy models. Yet, research on the United States, a country with much greater economic inequality than Denmark, reports similar results to what we find (Galos 2024; Nichols 2023; Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Thomas 2018, 2022).

A fifth limitation is that we do not measure taste distinction "in action," only the translation between tastes and perceptions. Ideally, we want to understand how individuals mobilize tastes to shape others' perceptions of them, that is, the "how" and not just the "what" of taste distinction (Jarness 2015; Lamont 2000). We believe our research provides some important clues on which types of tastes

might be particularly effective in shaping others' perceptions. Our results also highlight different dimensions of status and qualities along which tastes "in action" might work differently. For example, signaling highbrow tastes in music during social interaction might create an impression of being high-class, respectable, and sophisticated, but the same tastes might also give an impression of lacking social skills and being snobby. We need more research to uncover how people utilize tastes in different social settings.

Finally, we need field experiments to test the implications of our results for real-life economic and social outcomes. Does signaling more legitimate tastes create favorable outcomes in key markets, such as the labor, housing, or dating market? Some field experiments, mostly from the United States and focusing on the labor market, find a positive effect of more legitimate tastes on callback rates to job interviews (Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Thomas 2018). This research also shows that legitimate tastes produce favorable real-life outcomes via upwardly biased perceptions of status and qualities. We add to this research by showing that tastes serve as signals of status and qualities, not all taste domains carry equal weight, and that legitimate tastes produce negative perceptions of sociability. These findings provide a foundation for future work aimed at uncovering the real-life consequences of taste distinction.

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