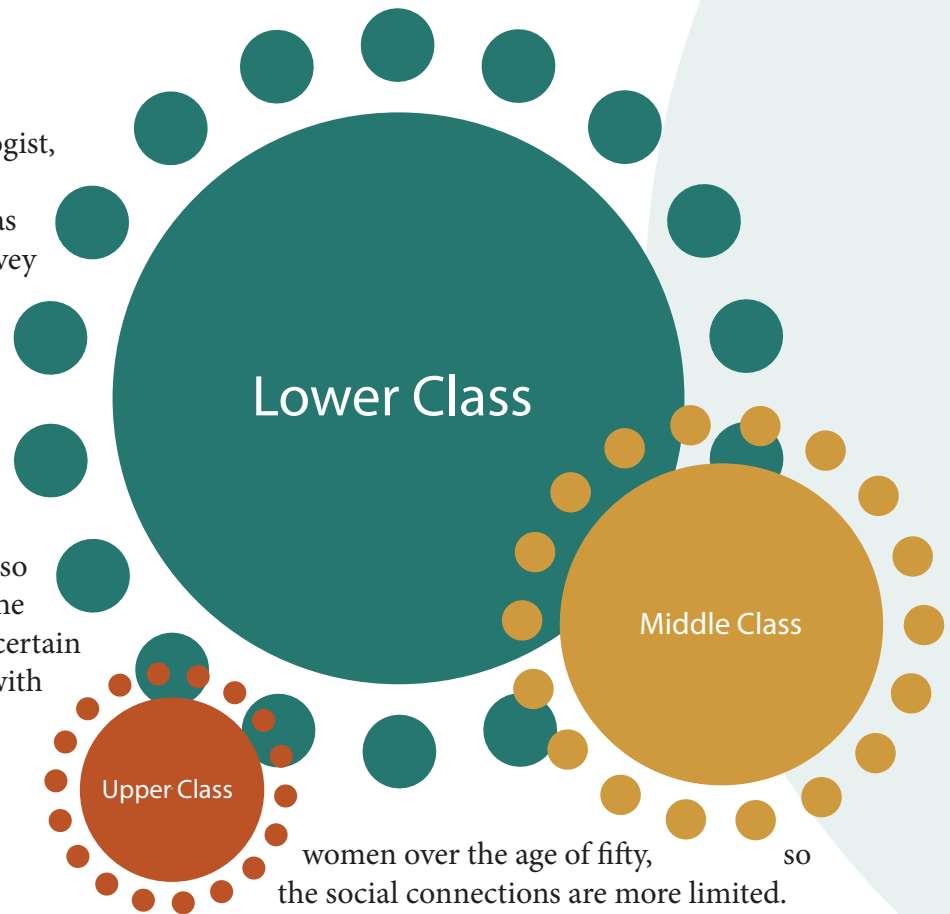


What is good taste?

Pierre Bourdieu, a sociologist, conducted a survey to better understand taste as means of distinction. In the survey people were asked to provide their cultural interests, such as hobbies, food and television programs. This data was intertwined with incomes, education levels, family backgrounds and occupations. The people were also asked to justify their answers. The study concluded that people of certain class usually have similar taste with other people in same class. The low class people are more interested in practicality whereas middle and high class people's taste is relative to their values and personalities. Distinctions can be made on sublevels of class, such as the different tastes between a surgeon and a corporate executive. Bourdieu's theory of taste as a means of distinction is demonstrated in Carl Wilson's *Let's Talk About Love*, which explores the science behind taste through the career of Celine Dion.

Class to taste

Bourdieu theorizes the structure of an individual's class and its relation to taste. He talks about the relationship between social, cultural, and economic capital. Social capital is personal connections and influence. A large portion of Celine Dion's listeners are



women over the age of fifty, so the social connections are more limited. Cultural capital is the knowledge and experience of culture, ideas and references. Dion fans are more likely to have a high school diploma and some aspect of higher education, meaning they have the potential for a greater knowledge base. Economic capital is the amount of money a person makes relative to society. The middlebrow is where you can find Dion fans, because they are most likely trying to disconnect from their working class roots. The lack of social capital, the abundance of cultural capital, and the midlevel economic capital combine to formulate the Celine Dion fan base. Value of all the social class elements are based in scarcity and knowing what others don't. The interesting fact about Celine Dion fans is the relation to the

average white pop critic. Both groups share the same general combination of social, cultural and economic capital structure. This relationship demonstrates the pursuit of distinction, because the average white pop critic wants to seem above the people who live the suburban life. People can have their own levels of knowledge, personal connections and wealth, but their class is boiled down to the individual combination of these factors.

Habitus and field

Habitus and field are the key terms that define why we are in the pursuit of distinction. The location of your upbringing and the habits of your life equate to your habitus. Based on the market research of the NPD group, the general habitus of Celine Dion's fans would be middle class service workers that have a fairly straitlaced set of morals. A field is the social institutions and networks through which we pursue our goals. There are subfields with their own rules and pecking order, such as political, medical or academic. Innovation comes from individuals that don't have secure positions. People who are not guaranteed a job have to prove themselves by producing new thoughts and ideas. Individual tastes are formed when we use our habitus as a filter for our decisions and our field as the tool to advance our status in society. Bourdieu says people are fearful of being mistaken as someone of lower taste.



Everyone wants other people to think of them highly by pretending to like or dislike culture in order to seem cool. The term, cool, refers to the symbolic power a person has related to their social and cultural capital. Being cool can yield career advancement and respect, but being uncool on purpose poses a risk. Someone has to be uncool, so that another person can be cool. While some people like Celine Dion, other people must dislike her in order for taste to function. The terms, habitus and field, are simply used to talk about how taste is socially shaped by the interaction between these two elements.



“Taste as means of distinction”

Game rules

Taste is a combination of habitus and field that is shaped by social conditions in the pursuit of distinction. Bourdieu says taste is always interested, and its purpose is to perpetuate and reproduce social class. Varying degrees of social, cultural and economic capital will continue to form personal tastes. Wilson says taste feels natural and people feel uncomfortable when others disagree. Taste functions, because there is an opposition to it. Social class is a major player in the game of taste, so it boils down to the fact that there is no such thing as “good” taste.

Created by Lindsey Filipowicz
Illustrator
8/30/2016