Disputing about taste: Practices and perceptions of cultural hierarchy in the Netherlands

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Chapter 2

How to research cultural hierarchies: Methodological considerations

Most research on cultural taste and participation is based on survey material, often derived from existing databases such as the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts in the US and time spending research in the Netherlands. Although these studies have greatly broadened our knowledge of the determining factors of taste and participation, they have failed to fully grasp the (whether or not distinctive) meaning of taste differences. The previous chapter showed that the a priori classification of highbrow and lowbrow activities limit the interpretation of results, which led Lahire to conclude that the concept of the ‘cultural omnivore’ is only a statistical artefact (quoted in Bennett et al. 2009: 19).

In the last few years more qualitative studies emerged that either try to understand and/or downplay the cultural omnivore (Bellavance 2008; Ollivier 2008a; Atkinson 2011), or that focus on a specific cultural field (Friedman 2012, on comedy) or on a specific aspect of taste (Rimmer 2011, on habitus formation). These studies show, among others, that omnivores are not a homogeneous group, that the broadness of tastes can be downplayed, that distinctive practices have not disappeared, and that taste formation is still to a high degree related to parental upbringing and school education. Most of these studies, however, are limited, either in the number of respondents and the exploratory nature (Bellavance, Ollivier), or in the scope of research (Friedman, Rimmer). Furthermore, neither of them explicitly question practices and perceptions of cultural hierarchy. Nor do Bennett et al. (2009), who were the first to combine qualitative and quantitative methods (surveys, household and elite interviews, focus groups) in a large study on present-day cultural tastes in the UK. Only Vander Stichele (2007) comes close to these questions, with his comprehensive mixed methods research on omnivores in Flanders, Belgium, but the qualitative part of his dissertation has to date never been published.

In order to grasp the multiple aspects of cultural hierarchy, I developed a research design, consisting of both in-depth interviews and a statistically analysable ranking assignment. This triangulation of methods enables me to benefit from the advantages of both research techniques. The interviews provide me with detailed knowledge on cultural taste, both distinctive and anti-hierarchical narratives, and the actual perceptions of and opinions on cultural hierarchy. The card ranking question at the end of each interview allows me to quantify tastes and hierarchical perceptions, and therefore to measure
differences between the two rankings and to determine explanatory factors. Not only does
this mixed methods design allow me to use different analysing techniques, it also enables
me to answer the research questions from different perspectives. If I only asked open
questions, I would not find hierarchical perceptions that do not play an important role in
people’s daily lives, or that they want to hide because of social desirability. Similarly, if I
only asked people to rank items, I would find neat hierarchies, without knowing whether
they are actually relevant for people. With mixed methods I am able to fully fathom the
complexity of cultural hierarchy and the variation in the ways people speak about this (cf.
Bryman 2012: 635-7).

This chapter will explain the rationale behind the methodological choices, both on
the questionnaire and the sample, focusing on aspects that distinguish my research from
other’s studies. First, I explain the design of the questionnaire – from open and flexible to
more closed and structured – and the broadness of its scope. Second, I explicate the
reasoning behind the card ranking question, in particular the actual selection of items. The
questionnaire itself and the thirty items are placed in boxes separate from the main text.
Third, I explain the choice for a quota sample combined with a random selection process.
The technical details of the selection process are discussed in a third box. I also reflect on
the potential shortcomings of the composition of the eventual sample of respondents.
Finally, I discuss some intricacies of the practice of interviewing, such as the self-
presentations people give and the answers they construct on the spot, that are often ignored
in qualitative research.

**Which questions to ask, and why: The interview design**

In order not to influence respondents with my actual object of interest, perceptions of
cultural hierarchy, I avoided using the terms ‘high culture’ and ‘low culture’ in advance. I
developed a semi-structured questionnaire, which enabled each interview to gradually shift
from open to closed questions, and from a flexible to a fixed structure. After some
introductory questions on people’s lives and social networks, I asked open questions on
people’s tastes and dislikes and on its dynamic and social aspects. The order in which
these different aspects of people’s taste were discussed varied between interviews, but I
tried to keep the same order of cultural disciplines: first music, then film, television,
theatre and the visual arts. I presumed that in this part of the interview some respondents
would already speak in socially distinctive ways, or use a hierarchical narrative. Others
would not, but that would not necessarily imply they did not perceive hierarchical
relations (cf. Payne & Grew 2005 on sequence effects).
I continued with several open questions that were always asked in the same way and in the same order. Some of these questions dealt explicitly with ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture and with ‘good’ and ‘bad’ taste. After this more structured part I asked respondents to rank several cultural objects according to their taste as well as in the hierarchical order they think exists in society. In this way I wanted to find out whether they have a perception of cultural hierarchy, and if so, how it is related to their personal taste.

I tested the questionnaire by means of five pilot interviews with acquaintances from different backgrounds. This test stage helped me improve the interview structure and the actual phrasings of the questions. Furthermore, I learned which questions were too extensive and fatiguing or too little informative. In the first stage of the research period I still changed some details and added some questions. Also, I gradually allowed the structure to become more flexible.

In the following subsections I will explain several aspects of the questionnaire (see box 1) in more detail, both the reasoning behind the questions and how it worked in practice. I will focus on the dynamic and social aspects of taste and on some of the more concrete questions. The questionnaire itself is included in the frame on the next pages.

**Taste or participation?**

Cultural sociologists have debated which is the most valid indicator of cultural preferences: reported taste (e.g. Peterson et al. 1992; 1996) or reported participation (e.g. Van Eijck 1998). Some scholars firmly defend research on participation, because one can deal with hard facts on social action rather than subjective tastes. They suspect respondents of giving socially desirable answers when asked about their taste, whereas they will be more honest on factual questions on numbers of visits to certain institutions or time spent on certain activities (Chan & Goldthorpe 2007b). Finally, participation is more interesting to policy makers and cultural institutions, who often commission this specific type of research.

Opponents argue that cultural participation – particularly outdoors – is influenced by many factors external to taste: place of residence, age, household composition, health, availability of time. In most studies on cultural participation the great majority of people is a non-participant or an occasional participant. Furthermore, self-report can be invalid and unreliable due to bad memory and – again – social desirability. In these scholars’ view, expressions of taste are a much better indicator of cultural preferences (Peterson 2007). Social desirable answers as such might even be a pro, if one is most interested in (unconscious) distinctive practices and hence in self-presentations (cf. Holstein et al. 1995).
As I concur with the latter arguments, I focused the interviews on tastes, i.e. both likes and dislikes in several cultural fields, as well as dynamics in taste and differences with others. However, while emphasising these issues, actual participation remained part of the conversation too.69

The scope of research: Five cultural disciplines

The range of cultural fields to be included in research is also a much debated issue. Many taste studies limit themselves to one field, mostly music (e.g. Peterson et al., 1992; 1996; Bryson 1996; Van Eijck 2001; Rimmer 2011). Bourdieu (1984: 18, 76-80) calls music the ideal status marker as this is a broad field in which almost everyone participates. However, people might make different distinctions and even perceive different hierarchies in different disciplines. Therefore, only one discipline would be too narrow. Some qualitative studies on omnivores followed an opposite approach by leaving it entirely open to the respondents. They can talk about the lifestyle subjects that are most relevant to them, whether it is literature, home decorating, or folk songs (Ollivier 2008a, Bellavance 2008; Atkinson 2011). This gives perhaps the richest information, but it would also be very hard to focus during the interviews and to compare between respondents in the analysis. Therefore, I took an intermediate position. My interviews dealt with five cultural fields: music, film, fictional television series, theatre70, and the visual arts. These fields share the attribute that they contain symbolic objects that are produced with the single purpose of watching and/or listening. It excludes tastes for more functional objects (fashion, food, furniture) and lifestyle attributes (sports, gardening).

The main cultural activity that I did not include, in order to reduce the duration of interviews, is reading. In hindsight, I regret this decision somewhat. Reading seems a more relevant discipline than for instance theatre. First, several respondents displayed many books in their living rooms; some of them expressed their disappointment about the omission of this topic. As a gift in return for their time, more than half of the respondents preferred a book voucher over a CD/DVD, cinema, or theatre/concert voucher.71 Second, the perceived distinction between ‘literature’ and other fiction books (bestsellers, thrillers, romance novels) has recently become a much debated issue in the Netherlands (e.g. Vaessens 2009). However, except for the first series of interviews, I did not avoid

69 Bennett et al. (2009) also combine taste and participation, complemented with a third aspect: knowledge. The latter I included implicitly in the card ranking assignment. Bourdieu (1984) also paid attention to both.

70 Theatre was understood by many in a broader way than I initially intended. Not only stage plays were discussed, but many other cultural forms that take place in a theatre as well, such as musicals, comedy shows, operas, and dance performances.

71 I let my respondents choose between these four vouchers, all worth ten euros. The book voucher was preferred by people from all age and education groups; only the older academics were more diverse in their choices. Six respondents declined a gift.
literature completely. Whenever relevant to a respondent, I encouraged him/her to elaborate. Also home furnishing, clothing, sports, and food were sometimes briefly discussed. Hence, in the empirical chapters some examples from other disciplines than the five main ones are also included.

**Box 1. Questionnaire**

**Explanation before the interview**
- This interview will be about your cultural preferences in the fields of music, film, TV fiction, theatre, and the visual arts; both what you like and what you dislike. I will also ask for possible changes in your taste during your lifetime. Furthermore, I will ask for the differences and similarities with other people’s tastes, both in your proximity and beyond.
- It is an interview, not a survey; therefore you have the opportunity to answer in your own words and to take the time you need.
- You will remain anonymous. In my dissertation and possible articles you will get a pseudonym. I would like to record the interview with a voice recorder. The recording will only be heard by me and my research assistants.

_This introduction was a summary of the information in the letter that I sent the respondents. I did not want them to know beforehand that the actual topic would be cultural hierarchies, in order not to influence them on this matter._

**Biography**
Before we discuss your cultural taste, I would like to ask some more general questions, just to get a glimpse of who you are. Could you please start by telling where and when you were born?

_Probing on: family/milieu in which one was raised, parents’ occupations, brothers and sisters, educational and professional career, geographical movements, partners and (grand)children._

**Network**
_Questions (not phrased in a structured way) on siblings, children and two best friends (m/f); particularly on their (educational and) professional career._

**Likes, dislikes, and taste biography**
_This section of the interview was not structured. Questions I often asked, but not always in the same order, are:_
- Do you like listening to music? Do you often listen to music?
- What kind of music do you like? Why? What else?
- Do you listen to CDs and/or the radio, do you attend concerts?
- What music don’t you like? Why not?
- Do you know people who like what you dislike, or who dislike what you like? Do you ever discuss these differences? What happens? Do you know what (s)he thinks of your taste?
- What music did you hear when you were young, e.g. what your parents liked?
• Did your taste change during your lifetime? Are there things that you like now that you did not like before? And the other way round: are there things that you used to like, that you left behind? Why?

After these questions on music were discussed, I turned to the other cultural disciplines: films, television, theatre, and the visual arts respectively. I asked roughly the same set of questions, but often not as elaborately as in the part about music.

Comparisons with significant others
As many differences with significant others had already been discussed in the previous section, this section was meant to fill the gaps in a systematic way. I did not aim for a complete picture: knowing everyone’s taste in each cultural discipline was unnecessary in order to get an image of the ways in which people describe and interpret differences. Questions I asked include:
• Do you know what [cultural discipline] your [relation] likes? Could you focus on the differences to your own taste?
• Do you ever discuss these differences? What happens?
• Do you know what (s)he thinks of your taste?

Comparisons with distant others
• Do you sometimes read about culture, such as reviews in newspapers or on the internet? What do you think of these reviews? Do you often agree or don’t you?
• Are there cultural items that you like of which you do not speak to others, that you prefer to hide? (and/or: do you know people who do not understand (part of) your taste, or find it strange?) [indicating embarrassment]
• Do you have an idea about the tastes of the following persons, who have different occupations – although of course there might be many internal differences: (1) a bank manager, (2) a bricklayer, (3) a female writer?

Cultural hierarchy
• What image do you have of the concept ‘high culture’? What image do you have of the concept ‘low culture’? What are the differences between the two, according to you? Do you think this distinction plays an important role in (Dutch) society?
• What do you think is ‘good taste’? And ‘bad taste’? Why?

Government policy
• Do you think it is good that the arts and culture are often subsidised? What do you think should or should not be subsidised?
• Do you think it is good that schools pay attention to the arts and culture? What do you think should or should not be taught?

Ranking cards
• I have here thirty cards, alphabetically ordered, with the names of, among others, composers, singers, and bands. I want to ask you to rank these cards in a row, according to your own taste, i.e. on top what you like most, through to the bottom, what you like least. When you don’t know an item, or don’t know well enough to judge, you can put it aside.
Could you now rank the items from high to low culture, as you think is perceived in society? *Half of the respondents, randomly chosen, were asked these two questions in the opposite order. I often probed for the reasons for some top and bottom positions, but many people already explained their choices while ranking. See box 2 for the items.*

**The dynamic aspects of taste: Taste biographies**

Most studies focus on people’s present taste, or on their cultural participation during the last year. However, people change. Although several scholars studied the influence of parental milieu and school education on cultural participation (Bourdieu 1984, Nagel 2004) or the individual development of taste (Parsons 1987; Van Meel-Jansen 1998; both psychologists), recent in which people are interviewed retrospectively about the development of their cultural taste is relatively new.72 That is why I explicitly studied the dynamic aspects of taste. This can supply answers to such questions as ‘what influence do new friends, partners, and colleagues have on people’s taste?’, ‘do people now look down on the music they liked in their youth?’, and ‘do upwardly mobile people – because of their trajectory – have an extra sense for distinctions and hierarchies?’ I studied these ‘taste biographies’ by asking some simple questions (see box 1), but many respondents already started speaking about changes by themselves, for instance when they explained how they got to know the cultural items they like.

I am aware that people’s stories about their past do not necessarily correspond with their ‘real’ past. First, people often remember things differently, for instance because they remember certain stages in life more than other stages (cf. Draaisma 2007), or they only remember the events most relevant to them (Thompson 1981: 131-2). Second, stories about the past are influenced by knowledge of the present. People keep reinterpreting the past; they constantly rewrite their autobiography, a more or less coherent story full of causal relations (Giddens 1991: 76). However, these interpretations of the past are interesting in themselves, as will be shown in the section on the presentation of self in the last section after this chapter.

**The social aspects of taste: Comparisons with others**

Despite Bourdieu’s focus on cultural distinction and hence people’s ‘aversion to different life-styles’ (1984: 56), most sociological research on cultural taste is limited to preferences rather than dislikes. Bryson (1996) was the first scholar who analysed dislikes in a survey.

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on musical genres, but her example was not often followed. I want to observe Bourdieu’s logic by asking about both likes and dislikes in the fields discussed. Furthermore, I often probed on these dislikes by asking whether people knew someone who does like the particular item, and if so, whether they ever discussed these taste differences. In a later stage of the interview I filled the gaps, when necessary, by systematically asking about the taste differences with several significant others: the persons who were mentioned during the biographical part of the interview. This set of questions shed light on the rigidity, the character and the hierarchical aspects of the ‘symbolic boundaries’ that people draw vis-à-vis each other (Lamont 1992; Lamont & Molnár 2002), without making it too explicit.

Next, I turned to the tastes of people whom most respondents do not know personally, such as professional reviewers and people from other social backgrounds. The opinion on people from other backgrounds was operationalised as the opinion on three occupations from different corners of Bourdieu’s social space (Bourdieu 1984: 128–9): bank managers (indicating economic capital), bricklayers (working class, low capital), and female writers \(^{73}\) (cultural capital). Although most respondents understood these hidden references, some only made associations with the nature of the occupations themselves \(^{74}\) (‘a writer must concentrate, so she likes quiet music’, ‘a bricklayer builds things, so he likes constructive art’), whereas others only thought about people they knew personally. Because many people objected generalisations – the ‘average’ bank manager does not exist – I soon structurally included a downplaying remark myself. Some persisted in their refusal to answer, but most respondents had no problems with thinking in – as many called it – ‘stereotypes’ or ‘prejudices’.

**Specific questions on hierarchies and policies**

After these open questions that implicitly try to uncover hierarchical perceptions without people being aware of my actual research question, I eventually asked a number of open questions that explicitly deal with this matter. This enabled me to unravel this concept from different angles. The first question was the most specific: ‘What image do you have of the concept ‘high culture’?\(^{75}\), followed by the same question about ‘low culture’. Depending on the elaborateness of the answers, I probed on the nature of this distinction, its perceived significance in the Netherlands, and people’s opinion. Second, I asked a similar question on the concepts ‘good taste’ and ‘bad taste’, which partially elicited quite

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\(^{73}\) In Dutch ‘female writer’ is referred to in one word: *schrijfster* (literally translated: ‘writress’). Thus, the writer’s gender was not stressed as it would seem in English, but in hindsight I reject the variation in gender.

\(^{74}\) The bank manager (in Dutch: *bankdirecteur*) was interpreted in different ways: from the director of the Dutch central bank (De Nederlandsche Bank) to the manager of a local branch.

\(^{75}\) Several respondents already used this concept or a similar one (‘highbrow’) earlier in the interview, so that I could phrase the question in a different way. More on this in chapter 4.
different responses, such as on undisputable tastes (see chapter 4) and on food and clothes.\textsuperscript{76}

Since in the first series of interviews cultural subsidies and cultural education appeared to be relevant topics, from the fifteenth interview on I included some specific questions on these issues. As I was not interested in the opinions on these matters as such, I omitted these questions when there was lack of time and/or when I already had sufficient data. During the research period, the topic of subsidies became more and more prominent in the Dutch political debate and the media, due to the economic crisis. In the campaign for the national elections in June 2010 and the subsequent coalition negotiations, the populist party PVV heavily rejected cultural subsidies. They phrased it as ‘left-wing hobbies’\textsuperscript{77}, with the only intention to subsidise the elites, thereby ignoring the common people. Elements from this discussion came up during the interviews, which shows that a changing societal context can affect opinions on concrete matters.

### Ranking the cards: Unravelling tastes and hierarchies

In addition to the qualitative interviews I included an assignment that can be analysed quantitatively: the ranking of thirty cards with specific examples. In order to reduce complexity, this assignment solely covered music. I printed the names of composers, musicians, singers and bands on thirty small cards, which I piled in alphabetical order. I asked my respondents to rank these cards twice: (1) according to their own taste preference, and (2) according to their perception of cultural hierarchy. With this method I wanted to find out whether people perceive their taste and hierarchical perception as one and the same – ‘high culture is what I like’ – or whether they see severe differences. What logics do people use when ranking the items, and are the hierarchies that different people perceive similar? Therefore, I did not limit myself to a quantitative analysis of this question, but I also included people’s arguments and doubts in the analysis.

Although ranking questions are not unique in sociological research, particularly with a limited number of items, they have never been used in studies on cultural taste. The hierarchy ranking is inspired by research on the ranking of occupational prestige (for the Netherlands: see Van Heek & Vercruijsse 1958; Sixma & Ultee 1983), although I did not intend to use it in order to determine ‘the’ hierarchy that exists in society.

At the start of my research I phrased the hierarchy question as ‘Could you rank the items in the order of the status you think they have in society?’, comparable to both Van

\textsuperscript{76} Vander Stichele (2007) asked the same questions in his interviews with Flemish participants of culture. I was not aware of this at the time of the questionnaire design.

\textsuperscript{77} Other ‘left-wing hobbies’ include ‘multiculturalism’, challenging the climate change, and aids for developing countries. Many left-wing people adopted the term as an honorary nickname.
Heek’s and Sixma’s phrasings on occupations. Soon this question appeared to be too difficult for people. Both the concepts ‘status’ and ‘society’ were interpreted in different ways. People were aware that in certain milieus one does not get much status by saying one likes Bach, while in others one does. Therefore I soon rephrased the question into ‘Could you rank the items from high to low culture?’, still often followed by ‘as you think is perceived in society’. Because of the preceding interview question about the concepts ‘high’ and ‘low culture’, it was easy to refer to these terms again. When someone did not know a certain name, (s)he could put this card aside. I asked half of the respondents – randomly chosen – to begin with taste, the other half with hierarchy, in order to control for the influence the two rankings could have on each other. The order in which the two questions were asked did not influence the rankings.

The selection of items

In many studies on cultural taste people are asked to give their opinion on a selection of (musical) genres. However, genre as a category is often too broad. Classical music is frequently categorised as one genre, whereas popular music comprises many different genres. But, even the popular genres can be very broad: when one likes ‘authentic’ country music but dislikes contemporary ‘commercial’ country, what to think of country as a whole? The broader a genre is, the higher the chance that people express mixed feelings (Holt 1997; cf. Savage 2006; Atkinson 2011). This can explain the high percentage of people who fill in the box ‘mixed feelings’ on five-point scales. Furthermore, the meaning of genres can change quickly; new subgenres emerge and others disappear (cf. Lena & Peterson 2008).

Other researchers, such as Bourdieu (1984), tried to solve this problem by referring to specific musical pieces or songs, which allow no misunderstandings. Bennett et al. (2009) asked people’s opinion on both genres and specific works, such as Mahler’s Fifth Symphony and Frank Sinatra’s song Chicago. However, if one does know Sinatra but his specific song Chicago does not ring a bell, or if one cannot distinguish between Mahler’s

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78 While ranking, respondents were not aware yet of the nature of the next question.
79 There was a significant difference that could not be attributed to other causes only with two items: rapper 50 Cent was liked more when the taste ranking was asked first, and modern composer Arnold Schönberg was placed higher in the hierarchy when hierarchy was asked first (both with \( p < .05 \)). The order of questioning did not significantly influence the mean deviance between people’s taste and hierarchy ranking.
80 In the 1993 General Social Survey that was used by Bryson (1996) and Tampubolon (2008), the category ‘mixed feelings’ was the second most filled in box, a fact both scholars ignored. Because the odds to give this answer increased with educational level, it cannot easily be explained by lack of knowledge. Besides, the answer category ‘don’t know much about it’ was offered as well, and there is no clear correlation between this answer and ‘mixed feelings’. These are my observations from a table offered by Bryson (1996: 893) and a figure by Tampubolon (2008: 250); I did not see the original survey data. However, Sonnett (2004) – referring to the same survey – calls people with many mixed feelings ‘indecisives’, which in my opinion misses the point.
symphonies, one cannot give his/her opinion.\textsuperscript{81} Therefore, I chose an intermediate position, by asking for composers, musicians, singers, and bands (cf. Nagel et al. 2011). These could still be too broad – some for example hesitated about Mozart because of the distinction between his ‘frivolous’ work and his \textit{Requiem} – but overall it appeared to be easy to judge.

**Box 2. Items in the ranking assignment**

The items are grouped by genre, but in the interviews they were ordered alphabetically. Included in this box are years of birth and death (for bands: years active) and country of origin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical music: composers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J.S. Bach</td>
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<td>W.A. Mozart</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Schönberg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Johann Strauss Jr</td>
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<td>A. Vivaldi</td>
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<th>Classical music: musicians</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Gould (pianist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>André Rieu (violinist, conductor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wibi Soerjadi (pianist)</td>
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<th>Jazz: singers and musicians</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Coltrane</td>
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<td>Ella Fitzgerald</td>
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<td>Norah Jones</td>
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<th>Popular music: pop/rock bands</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Beatles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink Floyd</td>
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<td>Radiohead</td>
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<td>Rolling Stones</td>
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\*plus some reunions after 1994, such as at Live 8 in 2005.

<table>
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<th>Popular music: (female) singers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tori Amos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Céline Dion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Britney Spears</td>
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\textsuperscript{81} Savage (2006), who is part of the same research project, systematically compared the valuations of genres and specific works. However, he ignores the high percentages of the answer ‘unknown’ when asking for works. Furthermore, comparison is difficult, as the genres and musical works in his study do not match 100%.
Chapter 2

Popular music: exponents of several genres
Jacques Brel (French chanson)  1929-1978  Belgium
50 Cent* (hip hop)  1975-  US
Aretha Franklin (soul)  1942-  US
Metallica (heavy metal)  1981-  US
Dolly Parton (country)  1946-  US
Tiësto  1969-  NL
* alphabetically he was ordered under the F of Fifty.

Dutch language music: (male) singers
Frans Bauer  1973-  NL
Marco Borsato  1966-  NL
André Hazes  1951-2004  NL
Ramses Shaffy  1933-2009  NL

Fictitious item
J. Pirakovich  ---  ‘Russia’

Notes on the Dutch items
Many Dutch language singers and bands – though not all – are often considered as the ultimate example of ‘low culture’ in the Netherlands (e.g. Hitters & Van de Kamp 2010). Their music is characterised by simple lyrics and melodies, is either cheerful or very sad, and is often sung out loud by the audience. It is more or less similar to German and Austrian Schlagers and Italian sentimental songs.

I chose two typical exponents of this music. First, the cheerful Frans Bauer from the southern province of Brabant. Partly due to his reality TV show he is widely perceived as a nice guy, also by people who do not like his music.

The second is the Amsterdam singer André Hazes. Hazes attracted a broader audience than Bauer, partly because of camp value, and partly because he was perceived as more ‘authentic’, writing his own lyrics about his troublesome life. A 1999 documentary film about him, Zij gelooft in mij, was seen by many – including higher educated – people. His untimely death in 2004, at 53, sparked off many emotional reactions; his funeral was broadcast live on national television and attracted six million viewers.

A third singer, Marco Borsato, is sometimes seen as an exponent of this genre as well, but he is also more pop oriented. He sings both ballads and cheerful songs, with less simple lyrics (not written by himself). With fourteen number 1 hits in the Dutch Top 40 between 1994 and 2008 he is the most successful singer in the Dutch charts ever.

A Dutch language singer who is generally not associated with this genre is Ramses Shaffy. His songs, mainly from the 1960s and ‘70s, are inspired by French chansons. The bohemian artist died during my research period, to be exact on the day before the 34th interview (his death did not influence the rankings of my respondents).

The three other Dutch items are more well-known internationally, particularly violinist and conductor André Rieu, who tours around the world with his Johann Strauss Orchestra and huge stage sets, and Tiësto, who is one of the most popular trance DJs worldwide. Although the
third one, pianist Wibi Soerjadi, performed in Carnegie Hall in New York, his fame mainly stayed within the Netherlands. In his teenage years he won many prizes, but more recently he has been criticised for popularising classical music too much. He is widely known for his media appearances on his private life too, such as TV interviews in his home filled with Disney toys.

The names on the cards were chosen to cover a broad range of music styles and to test several criteria of distinction that people might use. First, I selected four important musical domains: classical music, jazz, popular music (subdivided in several genres), and local (Dutch language) music. This first classification already sketches a cultural hierarchy in broad strokes as it is featured in most literature.

Second, within the different domains and genres I tried to achieve a wide diversity: originating from different countries, of different ethnicities, and both men and women. The popular music items originated from several decades, because of the age diversity among my respondents. Within some time periods I selected ‘rivalling’ acts, whose audiences were often separated, such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones in the 1960s.

Third, in order to reduce the number of missing values, it was important to include names that are well-known among a high diversity of people. However, I also included some items that I expected to be known only among smaller groups, such as young people (contemporary pop artists), or connoisseurs in certain genres (e.g., Schönberg in classical music, Tori Amos in popular music). The latter examples are not only less known, but also less popular, and thus deviant from the mainstream.82

Fourth, I took into account several possible distinction criteria, based on the colliding criteria that developed in different time periods (see chapter 1). The most important one is perceived complexity, which forms an important foundation for both logics of cultural hierarchy. Within classical music Schönberg (who invented the formative atonal music) and Bach are often regarded as more complex than Mozart and Vivaldi. Johann Strauss is seen as less complex than the latter two, and violinist André Rieu simplifies his waltzes even more in order to reach a wider and less educated audience. The same continuum can be recognised in jazz and in popular music. Two criteria are derived from the classic logic of hierarchy: craftsmanship and morality. Perceived (technical) craftsmanship is represented by Wibi Soerjadi (excellent pianist) and Céline Dion (strong voice and wide vocal range), who are both not always valued highly because of a perceived lack of originality or authenticity (second principle). One of the reasons to include rapper 50 Cent is his perceived immorality, in the form of a violent past and sexist music videos. The ‘modern’ criteria ‘authenticity’ and ‘originality’ can be compared to the above-mentioned deviation from the mainstream.

---

82 For some genres I chose only one example, often the best-known one, and thus ‘mainstream’ – which is unfortunately not representative. However, selecting less known items would increase missing values, whereas including more items per genre would make the pile of cards too large.
Fifth, I included examples that are sometimes mentioned as gradually rising or falling on the cultural ladder. Vivaldi’s *Four seasons* has been popularised to a broader audience and has thus lost much of its distinction value for elites: it has ‘trickled down’ (De Swaan 1985: 87; cf. Bourdieu 1984: 104). Jazz and pop music on the other hand have partially risen in the hierarchy (e.g. Lopes 2002). I included some items that might have risen within pop music in more recent days, such as ABBA.

Finally, I included one fictitious item, in order to test people’s honesty or attentiveness. People might want to hide their ignorance of a certain ‘high cultural’ name out of embarrassment towards the interviewer. Bourdieu (1984: 89) for instance found that unskilled and semi-skilled workers are, more than people from other classes, likely to say that they like the painter Rousseau (who *does* exist, but is not very well-known), possibly confusing him with the better known philosopher with the same name. Conversely, higher educated people might more often bluff about their knowledge. Therefore, I invented a Russian sounding name, presuming that people would think him to be a classical composer: J. Pirakovich.83 If many people included him in their rankings, this would mean that they probably faked their knowledge for several other items as well.

### Which respondents to search, and how: Questions of sampling

*Comparing status and age groups: Defining the quotas*

Rather than striving for a representative sample of the Dutch population, which would – if carried out well – give information on the ‘average’ Dutchman, I wanted to compare different groups. In the introduction I showed that age, level of education and parents’ education are the most important variables to be researched, next to gender. Therefore, I designed a cross-tabulation of three status groups and three birth cohorts, resulting in nine quotas of ten people each (see table 2.1). In each quota I searched for five men and five women.

The three education groups are defined by respondents’ own and their parents’ educational level, hence with upwardly mobile people as the intermediary group. Education is operationalised as ‘high’ when one has a university or higher vocational education (HBO). A low education means at most medium vocational education (MBO), although in most research MBO itself is considered medium rather than low.84 Because of the stratified education system in the Netherlands, it is common in Dutch to speak of

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83 In order to check whether I really invented this name myself, I did a Google search. There were no matches. After finishing my research, a new Google search did find one person with the same name: a Frenchman with a Facebook profile.

84 See appendix for explanations of the abbreviations in the Dutch education system.
How to research cultural hierarchies: Methodological considerations

highly/higher and lowly/lower educated people. Although this is not usual in English – ‘lowly educated’ might even sound derogatory – in this dissertation I use these terms to distinguish the two groups. Note that two thirds of the sample are higher educated, whereas of the Dutch working population this is only one third (CBS numbers on 2009). In reality, the birth cohorts are not equally distributed over the status groups either. However, representativeness was not something I aimed for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>education / parents’ education</th>
<th>birth cohorts</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high / high</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high / low</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low / low</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I could have used several more independent variables to classify respondents and to compare groups, such as ethnicity and religion. However, I did not include these factors in the research, in order not to complicate matters any further. Although highly interesting in itself because of possible cultural differences and blends, I did not search for immigrants from non-Western countries and their children. In the end, I did interview six people who were born outside the Netherlands (though two of them with Dutch parents), but they did not come from the most common immigrant countries Morocco and Turkey.

Finally, place of residence might be of importance (see De Wijs-Mulkens 1999), but will not be a focus in itself either. For practical reasons the respondents were mainly selected in and around Amsterdam, both in urban, suburban, and rural areas. I realise that there might be differences in cultural taste between different regions in the Netherlands, but assume that this does not imply large differences in hierarchical perceptions. Furthermore, many regional differences might be caused by differences in educational level: in the densely populated west of the country people have an, on average, higher educational level than in the more rural north, east, and south. In my sample, 26 out of 27 people living in Amsterdam received higher education; the lower educated respondents live in suburban and rural areas.

85 In the Netherlands, religious people and immigrants are less culturally active than secular and Dutch born people (De Haan & Knulst 2000). On the tastes of Dutch immigrants and their descendants, see for instance Van Wel et al. (2006) and Trienekens (2002). There is not much literature on the tastes of certain religious groups, except maybe Halle (1993) on catholic art in the US and Brinkgreve & Van Stolk (1997) on the taste of reformed people in the Netherlands.
The sampling procedure: Randomly filling the quotas

With the creation of eighteen quota of five people each (the nine mentioned quota, each equally divided by men and women), I wanted to be able to systematically compare the different groups, without running the risk that certain groups are underrepresented. However, I did not simply apply a traditional quota sample (as described by Bryman 2012: 203-4), in which respondents are chosen primarily by the interviewer himself. This would lead to biases and exclude less accessible people (ibid.). Instead, I partly used random samples in order to fill the quota, and I persevered with less accessible people. So, despite predefining characteristics of respondents, I wanted chance to decide which people to select.86

I sent letters to randomly selected addresses in which I asked the residents to cooperate with my research. In these letters, printed on university paper, I introduced my research, gave an approximate duration of the interview (sixty to ninety minutes), and promised a book or CD voucher worth ten euro in return. In a two page appendix I answered some possible questions, e.g. on anonymity, and referred to my UvA web page and my supervisors. I tried to persuade people in a language that was not too complex nor too simple, in order to interest a wide range of respondents.

After a few days I telephoned the households and asked the person who took up the phone whether someone in his/her household wanted to participate in my research. If no one answered the call, I tried again later on different dates and different times of day, up to a maximum of ten times. Upon reading the letter, most people had already made up their mind about their cooperation, so I could hardly ever persuade non-willing people, however sympathetic, over the telephone.

The people who did want to cooperate, an average of about 25% (see table 3), often became enthusiastic after reading my letter; some of them said they never participate in research but made an exception for this one. I asked these willing people three initial questions about their birth year, educational level and parents’ educational level in order to determine whether they fit any of the quotas.87 Because certain quotas filled up very quickly while others remained empty, in a later stage I randomly selected households in deliberately selected neighbourhoods. This may have caused certain biases, but chance remained the main selection criterion. In the final stage I left the random selection behind and used my personal network instead. In this way I found the last fifteen respondents. A complete overview of the different sampling stages, technical procedures and ways to avoid biases, can be found in box 3.

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86 This procedure – a random sample in pre-selected neighbourhoods in order to fill certain quota – was partly inspired by Lamont (1992: 217-220).

87 This sometimes led to quite absurd situations. Once I turned down a higher educated woman with lower educated parents who was born in 1945, because this quota had already been filled. However, I did accept her partner, who was also a higher educated woman with lower educated parents, but born in 1944.
By means of the different sampling techniques I was eventually able to interview ninety respondents, in the period from April 2009 to December 2010. They are distributed over the quotas as planned, except for some minor differences: in three quotas the gender division is not 5:5 but 4:6 or 6:4. On several other points I decided along the way to be not as strict as planned: first, a high education can also mean the highest secondary school level (VWO; before 1968 HBS or gymnasium); and second, people born before 1925 were included too. The oldest respondent was born in 1915.

**Box 3. The sampling procedure in three stages**

**Stage 1: random selection**
I started the sample with the collection of a large file of postal codes (CBS 2006)\(^{88}\) in roughly the province of North-Holland.\(^{89}\) I first made some pre-selections for both practical and theoretical reasons: I excluded the areas roughly north of Alkmaar which were too far from Amsterdam, postal codes with fewer than ten inhabitants, and postal codes with 20% or more non-Western migrants. This resulted in a sample frame of 40,195 postal codes, from which I randomly selected 90.\(^{90}\) Within each of these 90 postal codes I randomly selected one address that is included in phone directories.\(^{91}\)

This first sample resulted in 24 people willing to cooperate, of whom 22 fit one of the quotas. Middle-aged and higher educated people were severely overrepresented. Some of the non-willing people were very kind on the phone, explained why they did not want to participate, and wished me good luck; others just hung up the phone or said they did not want to be bothered with ‘this kind of nonsense’. For the second round I did not draw a new sample of postal codes, but randomly selected a second address in the remaining 68 postal codes. Hence, I gave these postal codes a ‘second chance’. This led to fourteen more interviews, after which I repeated the process a third time for the remaining 54 postal codes. After three sample rounds in these ninety postal codes, the total response was 47 people. This is 52% of all postal codes, and 22% of all households that were approached (see also table 3).

**Biases after stage 1**
After these three rounds the quotas for middle-aged people were almost filled, but most older and younger respondents were yet to be found. Hence, a new random sample would not have been useful: I would have found more middle-aged people whom I did not need anymore, whereas the number of older and younger respondents would only slowly increase.

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\(^{88}\) CBS = Central Bureau of Statistics. The file, ‘Postcodegebieden 2004’, gave information on many characteristics of all postal codes in the Netherlands, such as number of inhabitants, grade of urbanity, household composition, mean income, the distribution of genders and age groups, and the percentage of non-Western migrants, as of 1 January 2004.

\(^{89}\) The range of the postal codes was 1011 AC up to 2015 AJ, as this was the maximum number that could be included in an Excel file (practical considerations). This resulted in the exclusion of the largest part of Haarlem and surroundings and the inclusion of some towns just outside North-Holland (Almere, Abcoude).

\(^{90}\) I used the website www.random.org for this procedure.

\(^{91}\) I used a website that gives all addresses that are included in the phone book per postal code (www.gevonden.cc/postcode.php), and I checked the results of the sample with the regular phone directories on the internet, which are more up-to-date. I only selected household addresses, and hence excluded stores and businesses.
The causes for the absence of these groups were diverse. Young people were probably missing because many of them are not listed in phone directories, due to the growing importance of mobile phones among this group. Others explained to me they were too busy with their work and/or their children: lack of time was the most frequently mentioned reason people gave for their unwillingness, next to ‘no interest’ or ‘just don’t feel like it’. Older people considered themselves ‘too old’ for an interview or thought they were not interesting to me, as their cultural participation had declined dramatically: ‘I hardly go out anymore’. My attempts to downplay their objections (‘anyone can be interesting to my research’) could persuade only a few elderly people.

Finally, I noticed that among the lower educated group especially the people with an MBO education, people with ‘white collar’ jobs, and people who were ‘upwardly mobile’ in the working sphere responded. People with manual jobs were underrepresented, as well as people who liked cultural items that are often defined as ‘low culture’, such as Dutch language music. Soon after the start of my research I deleted the word ‘cultural’ from my letters, because I had noticed that many lower educated people define this word in a more exclusive (‘high’) way than I do as a social scientist. However, the remaining list of five fields (including the theatre and visual arts) still triggered some non-response.

Table 2.2 presents some characteristics of the postal codes where I did and did not find someone willing to cooperate. The ‘willing’ column includes six postal codes where someone wanted to cooperate who did not fit any quota. The table clearly shows that the response was lower in postal codes with many older people and in postal codes with many people with lower incomes.92

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Willing (n = 53)</th>
<th>Not Willing / Not Reached (n = 37)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urbanity (addresses per km²)</td>
<td>2621.21</td>
<td>1950.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 0-15 years old</td>
<td>17.60</td>
<td>12.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 15-25 years old</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>10.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 25-45 years old</td>
<td>32.92</td>
<td>26.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 45-65 years old</td>
<td>27.85</td>
<td>25.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% over 65 years old</td>
<td>12.43</td>
<td>26.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal income per month (euros)</td>
<td>2526.53</td>
<td>2038.89**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01 (t-test; right column compared to left column).

Among the willing people, the higher educated respondents live in more well-to-do neighbourhoods (a mean income of € 2757.14) than the lower educated ones (€ 2219.05), which

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92 The underrepresentation of younger people however is not visible. This might have two causes: 1) the age groups have shifted since 1 January 2004, when the birth cohort 1965-’85 was between 18 and 38 years old; 2) I could not reach people without a phone book entry who are included in the CBS data.
verifies my expectation that a person’s educational level and neighbourhood’s mean income correlate. More interestingly, table 2.2 shows that the people who did not want to cooperate even live in poorer neighbourhoods (€ 2038.89) than these lower educated respondents. This confirms my impression that people with the lowest incomes and hence the least education were underrepresented in my sample.

**Stage 2: random selection in deliberately selected neighbourhoods**

This analysis gave me a tool to proceed. In order to find specific groups, I could now draw random samples from pre-selected postal codes with certain characteristics. I drew three of those samples:

1. In order to find older, higher educated people, I first selected the postal codes with the 10% highest incomes (€ 3200 and higher), and then selected within this group the 79 postal codes where more than 50% of the residents was over 65 years old (1-1-2004). In the letter I explicitly wrote that I was looking for people over 65, in order to reduce the excuses of being too old for an interview. After randomly selecting addresses in 54 of these postal codes, I found 15 new respondents. They were all but one over 65 years old, and all but two higher educated. These quotas were now almost filled. Examples of the people I found are some higher managers, a full professor, a GP, an engineer and an architect, all retired. A disadvantage of this sampling method is that economic capital now plays a more important role in this group than in the other age groups. We must keep in mind that people living in the green villa suburbs of ‘Het Gooi’ and in the well-to-do neighbourhoods of Amsterdam-South are overrepresented.

2. In order to find people with a lower education than MBO, possibly occupying manual jobs, I randomly selected 50 postal codes (and then one address in each) from the postal codes with the 10% lowest incomes (€ 1500 and lower). I adapted my letter somewhat, by simplifying the text. I also deleted words that scared many lower educated people off, such as ‘theatre’ and ‘visual arts’. This resulted in six new respondents, three of them indeed with a lower education than MBO. They included a driver, a factory worker, and a shop assistant, all three born in the 1980s.

3. Because the quotas for the youngest age group (born between 1965 and ’85) were still relatively empty after these two additional samples, I selected all postal codes where more than 60% of the residents were between 25 and 45 years old (on 1-1-2004). From this selection I excluded the postal codes where more than half of the other 40% (i.e., 20%) was between 45 and 65 years old, in order to reach families with young children. From the remaining 1608 postal codes I randomly selected 50, and again one address in each. Six out of seven respondents that this sample generated indeed belonged to the youngest age group.

**Stage 3: network sample**

By now, I had found 75 respondents and most quotas were filled. New samples in order to find specific people would not be productive, as most willing people would not fit an open quota anymore. Furthermore, of the fifteen people I was still looking for, nine were young upwardly mobile people, who cannot be retrieved via specific postal code selections. This group is not very prominent, as upward mobility nowadays does not accelerate as much as in the period from the 1940s until the 1970s (Buis 2010: 69-87): people with lower educated parents now often receive low education themselves (except perhaps for migrants).
Despite their near non-existence, I was still eager to find them, in order to complete all predefined quotas. Therefore, in the last stage of my research I asked people I know whether they would know someone fulfilling my requirements. Via colleagues, friends, and family members – sometimes in more than one step, such as a friend’s friend’s daughter – I found the final fifteen respondents. Despite the relative homogeneity in this group of acquaintances, the people they supplied me with were very diverse.

Summary
To sum it all up, table 2.3 provides an overview of the response rates in the different sample stages.

Table 2.3. Overview of the sample results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sample</th>
<th>number of approached addresses</th>
<th>number of respondents</th>
<th>willing, but not in quota</th>
<th>willing people, total (%)</th>
<th>not willing</th>
<th>not reached</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stage 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st round</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd round</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd round</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'rich &amp; old'</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low incomes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-45 y.o.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>via friends</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25.6%*</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The total percentage does not include the respondents found via friends.

The increased role of education: Some consequences for the research

The rigid division in age and education groups in my sample design ignores the growing importance of education as a status indicator during the twentieth century. This means that both educational differences and parents’ education are more important for the younger respondents than they are for the older ones.\(^93\) In this section I will show that this shift causes diverging degrees of representativeness within the different quotas as well as a

\(^93\) Of course all research in which age and education are included as independent variables must face this change, but in my sample design it becomes more visible.
diverging significance of upward mobility for different age groups. I will conclude with an explanation why I exclude parents’ education in the quantitative analysis of this research.

In the course of the twentieth century people’s educational level became increasingly influenced by their father’s educational level and occupational status (De Graaf & Ganzeboom 1993; Buis 2010), and more by their own intellectual capabilities. The significance of class decreased. Higher secondary school levels – and as a consequence universities – became more and more accessible to the children of people with lower incomes, which stimulated upward mobility. This process was partially influenced by major educational reforms in the 1960s, but already accelerated before\(^\text{94}\) (Buis 2010: 69-87). Previously, children who had the intellectual potential to follow a higher education but whose parents could not afford it (or did not stimulate learning) were more often excluded. Furthermore, diplomas became more important to achieve jobs with a higher function level and occupational status (De Graaf 1996). This means that (young) lower educated people nowadays occupy on average lower functions than some decades ago (ibid.: 109).

This credential inflation downplays the importance of social mobility somewhat. Many of my lower educated respondents did rise on the occupational ladder, and therefore might be interpreted as upwardly mobile too. They for instance made a career in the company where they worked. Some of them said that they ‘only’ had a certain education, ‘but’ they now worked on, e.g., ‘HBO level’.\(^\text{95}\) Others followed courses later in life or read many books in order to ‘inform’\(^\text{96}\) themselves. Jan (LOM3) for example was born in 1939 and followed technical school, like his father (a ‘simple civil servant’). Later he did some other technical courses, and he ended up as a computer specialist in a large hardware company. When talking about ‘high culture’, he says:

> I did not attend HBS or grammar school of course, I had to catch up all by myself. Look, someone else learns it in a time period of four or five years, but I’ve been learning for forty years now to... And maybe I know even more than many grammar school students, because I travel and I know much and I’m interested in tribes and peoples.

Like Jan, 85-year-old Marianne (LOF2) is also credited as a respondent with a low education. However, she resembles the elite in many ways. She was married to an academically trained businessman who did well, and she now lives in one of the most affluent areas in the Netherlands. She even owns original paintings by well-known

\(^{94}\) The largest acceleration was for 12-year-old boys between 1941 and 1960 (i.e. birth cohort 1929-48); for 12-year-old girls between 1952 and 1977 (birth cohort 1940-65) (Buis: 2010).

\(^{95}\) In the course of a working career, the direct effect of educational level on occupational status decreases. However, this intragenerational mobility has not decreased in the second half of the twentieth century (De Graaf & Luijx 1995).

\(^{96}\) The best translation of the Dutch word ‘ontwikkeld’ (literally ‘developed’) is ‘educated’, but this translation would be confusing, as these people ‘educated’ themselves, without formal higher education.
nineteenth century Dutch artists. Hence, marriage can also be a means to rise on the social ladder. Furthermore, the MMS school (intermediate girls’ school) that she attended in the 1930s was a respectable educational level in a time in which only few women attended university. These alternative types of upward mobility – by professional career, self-education and marriage – were not taken into account in my research design.

This neglect influences the composition of the quotas of lower educated people. Within the middle-aged and older age groups, I interviewed several of these lower educated people had ‘informed’ themselves. As they were more eager to participate in my research than for example manual workers, they are overrepresented in these two quotas. Hence, self-selection led to sample biases in these quotas. Most of the younger respondents with a low educational level, on the other hand, work in occupations with less status and in lower functions. They did not make a career in the working sphere. In this quota, the sample is probably less biased than among the older groups. Hence, the possible taste differences that I will find between the lower educated respondents of different age groups are not only caused by age or birth cohort, but also by the higher degree of ‘informed’ people in the older age groups. If I had defined upward mobility by means of occupational status, many of the middle-aged and older lower educated respondents would have been classified as such.

A second group whose composition is influenced by credential inflation is the older (and in a lesser extent middle-aged) upwardly mobile people. They are classified as upwardly mobile because their parents have a lower educational level, but many of these parents made a career in the working sphere. Many respondents told me that their parents were rather intelligent or ‘informed’, but just did not receive a higher education because of their parents’ low incomes. The large families they were born in and the interference of World War II also played a role for some (cf. Matthys 2010: 75-86). Two examples:

My father never got the chance to educate himself, because he had to work very hard all of his life. (...) He was fourteen years old when his father died (...) and then he had to take over his father’s fuel business. (...) We always say: ‘If dad would have had the chance to go on to higher education, he would probably have become a teacher, in geography or something.’
(Trudy, LMF1)

My father was born in 1908 and at age 7 he became an orphan. (...) He attended seminary for one year. He was a very intelligent man, during that year he learned to speak French, and he could still manage in France with this one year of French lessons, I find that very special. He had an enormous interest in history, he always wanted to know everything. So, he’d just been born in the wrong time. And I once said to him: ‘you just should have finished that seminary’, but that was so costly for this family, so he felt troubled.

**But what did your father do for a living, later in life?**

He became a bus driver.

**A bus driver.**
Another respondent, university educated, has a father who only went to elementary school but who later in life worked himself up to the position of mayor in a provincial town. Although this respondent’s parents undoubtedly belonged to the local elite, in my sample he is classified as upwardly mobile. However, he closely resembles my educated respondents with educated parents. Other examples of people who might be ‘misclassified’ as upwardly mobile are HBO educated respondents with MBO educated parents. They only rose slightly on the educational ladder.

Because of these diverging ways to define upward mobility, the significance of educational upward mobility in my research is not as large as I expected it to be. In the quantitative analysis of the ranking question, to be discussed in chapter 3, no differences appeared between the educated respondents with educated parents and the upwardly mobile respondents. These differences did exist between the higher educated (both groups taken together) on the one hand and the lower educated on the other, despite the sampling biases in the latter group.

Therefore, I do not use this distinction in the statistical analyses, but turn to the actual educational level instead: HBO or university. There are hardly any significant differences between these two groups either, but educational level is easier to calculate with: it can be turned into an ordinal variable with four values (see table 2.4). Coincidentally, the numbers of HBO and university educated people in my sample are exactly the same. Moreover, both groups are almost equally distributed over the upwardly mobile people and the educated with educated parents, and over the birth cohorts. Only on gender the distribution is now distorted: I interviewed more HBO educated women and more university educated men.

Table 2.4 shows the distribution of respondents according to the new variables that I will use in the dissertation. The lower education group has been split too, although in some analyses they will remain one category. The Dutch education system, including all abbreviations and acronyms, is explained in appendix 1. However, upward mobility did play an important role in some individual narratives on ambivalent feelings about cultural hierarchy, caused by internal struggles between parental and destination milieu. Chapter 5 will deal with these interesting qualitative data in more detail.
Chapter 2

Table 2.4. Eventual distribution of respondents over educational levels and birth cohorts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>educational level</th>
<th>birth cohorts</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>before 1945</td>
<td>1945-1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. lower than MBO</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. MBO, HAVO, MMS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. HBO, VWO, HBS</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. university</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the practice of interviewing

Most interviews took place at people’s homes, which I preferred because of the privacy and quietness. Furthermore, I was able to get an impression of how people live: I made field notes about, for instance, the paintings and photographs on the walls and the content of the bookcases. However, some people preferred to be interviewed at their working place or in a café, and three respondents came to my office. The interviews took 84 minutes on average, ranging from 43 to 142 minutes. The duration of the interviews increased with age.99 During several interviews the respondents’ partners were present in the background, sometimes adding some factual information, sometimes denying claims (‘No, we never go to the cinema, only twice a year or so’). Once I interviewed a married couple, although the husband remained the main respondent. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed as verbatim as possible. Due to a mistake, one interview, with Hanneke (HMF4), was not recorded, but I worked out my notes shortly after it took place. Some further recordings are disturbed by background noises (see appendix 2).

The practice of the sociological interview has some specific characteristics that are often ignored in qualitative research, which I discuss in this section. Respondents do not give an account of the objective facts, but give a presentation of self, which partly depends on the image they have of the interviewer. Sometimes people do not even have an opinion, but construct one on the spot. They might have a different view of the concepts that the interviewer uses, which influences their answers. Although qualitative sociologists often distinguish themselves from quantitative studies because of the meanings and nuances they can look for, they often still strive for ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’. However, a sociological interview is a social interaction in which the respondent and interviewer together construct a reality (Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 1-6).100 This process in itself is

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99 Pearson’s correlation is 0.37, significant with p < .001. Regression analysis shows that level of education plays an indirect role, too. There is no relation to gender.

100 Anthropologists tend to be more aware of such matters.
highly interesting to study and is not necessarily ‘distorting’. In this section I will reflect on several of these issues.

**The presentation of self**

It is important to keep in mind that people do not necessarily tell ‘the truth’ in interviews. By means of different interview techniques and specific questions on several aspects of taste I tried to come close to ‘objective’ facts and ‘sincere’ opinions as much as possible, but we must realise that people often give socially desirable answers. In an interview they give a ‘presentation of self’; they play the role of the ideal respondent and they want to present themselves in the most positive way (Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 1-13).

One might expect that everyone wants to present him/herself as a knowledgeable person with a ‘good’ cultural taste and a high frequency of cultural participation, hence causing biases towards highly cultured narratives. However, this is not true. For one person the ideal self-image is being ‘high cultural’, for another one having an original and individual taste, for a third one an anti-elitist view. People have different reference points for their ideal self, and these are interesting in itself (cf. Eliasoph 1990; Ollivier 2008a: 127).

Interview research is an excellent way to unravel these ideals. In surveys people present their ideal self too, but in such quantitative research this cannot be identified. In interviews one can specifically read between the lines: the doubtful remarks, the self-justifications, the contradictions of oneself, the nervous laughs, the hesitations, and the unfinished sentences (Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 30-37). Take as an example this quote by Maria (HMF3), a 64-year-old woman from a well-to-do family. She is a ballet aficionado and has just elaborated on her preference for both classical (*Giselle*) and ‘modern-classical’ (*Romeo & Juliette*) ballet. When asked what she likes less in the field of ballet, she replies:

> Yes, well, what I like less, yes, I hardly dare to say it, the, er, the less well-trained groups – I don’t have any problems with experimental, not at all – but er, yes, there are some less well-known groups which are greatly admired and often written about, but where physical control is actually lacking. And then I think: well guys, yes, I don’t know. It cannot grip my attention.

When one only looks at the factual information in this quote, one simply finds that Maria prefers ballets that demonstrate a good education and physical control (craftsmanship) over experimental dances (innovativeness), although she does not particularly dislike the latter. However, this quote reveals so much more. First, she observes a contradiction...
between craftsmanship and experiments: implicitly she says that experimental groups are often, though not necessarily, less well-trained and lack physical control. Second, and for this point more important, she expresses a hesitancy to give her opinion (‘I hardly dare to say this’). Apparently, she perceives a dislike for lack of craftsmanship as socially undesirable; she is afraid that I, the interviewer, would disapprove. She hastily adds that this dislike does not imply a dislike for experimental ballet (stressed once again with ‘not at all’), which she probably perceives as having a high cultural value; as something a woman of her stature should like. The downplaying of her critique (‘actually’) adds to this hesitance. Third, by referring to the great admiration and the texts (perhaps reviews) written about experimental, less well-known, groups, she shows both her knowledgeability of this different discourse and her relation to it. She shows her awareness of her position in a wider field, rather than presenting her opinion as isolated.

This focus on ‘phrases in between’ is not only possible in the analysis of transcripts afterwards, but also during the interview itself. I observed many of them on the spot and often asked my respondents to reflect on them.

**Perceptions of the interviewer**

The presentation of self that people give partly depends on the perceptions they have of the person they are talking to: me. They see a thirty-something, casually dressed, spectacled man from the university who is doing research on cultural taste. These separate elements of my identity – gender, age, education, appearance, interest – feed their expectations about my own cultural taste and my knowledge.\(^{101}\) My young age for example leads many older respondents to explain the culture from their youth more elaborately, even with well-known names such as Cliff Richard. Helma (UOF3), who is 71, says she adores Dutch singer Herman van Veen\(^*\), who ‘you will probably abhor, at least my children do’.

While age differences do not cause any significant problems, my academic background might. Respondents might feel they have to pronounce a ‘high cultural’ taste as they presume me to expect that. Although I never observed any ‘dishonest’ or ‘insincere’ answers – it is hard to ‘fake’ a taste in a field that one does not know much about; people can at most exaggerate or conceal certain things – I did notice several moments of embarrassment, such as in Maria’s example above. On cultural subsidies, for instance, some respondents initially feel that they should be a proponent: ‘a tricky question’\(^{102}\), as Elly (UYF1) calls it. Furthermore, people apologise for not liking art or

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\(^{101}\) Several respondents explicitly asked me for my taste or opinion, but I always postponed a reply until the interview was finished.

\(^{102}\) In Dutch: ‘gewetensvraag’, which literally translates to ‘question of conscience’.
classical music or for frequenting theatres too rarely.\textsuperscript{103} When I ask for their reasons, they might feel they have to justify themselves.\textsuperscript{104} However, I always asked for reasons, even when it appeared self-evident and I felt a little embarrassed to seemingly ask for the sake of asking.

Some respondents hesitate to express their dislikes, as they are afraid to hurt my feelings. When I keep probing on the reasons for her dislike for U2, which she qualifies as ‘whinge rock’ with ‘whiney voices’\textsuperscript{105}, Carmen (UYF6) asks me: ‘Do I insult you now?’ And when I laugh because of Anneke’s (UMF1) story on ‘irritating’ Dutch language music, to which she is ‘allergic’, she continues: ‘Yes, you have to react neutrally, don’t you? Because maybe this is really what you think is great!’ In order to take away these hesitations, I initially encouraged people in my introduction to be completely frank and not to think about what I might find. Because many respondents replied that this was self-evident, I soon stopped with these encouragements.

Of course people often make negative remarks about cultural items that I personally like, but I never showed my opinion and just asked neutrally for a reason for their dislikes. Conversely, when a respondents and I share a certain taste or dislike, this neutral pose is harder. It is very tempting to speak along with someone about something that we both like, or to immediately understand a dislike. Most of the times I could suppress this inclination, but it undoubtedly influenced the way in which I probed for more details.

My knowledge, or the lack of it, is even harder to conceal. When someone talks about a subject that I know much about, such as art house films or contemporary popular music, it is easy to forget asking for further details. Conversely, I did probe a lot on such divergent genres as ballet, jazz, and hardcore house, of which I am an outsider. Sometimes my lack of knowledge led to embarrassing moments. When Peter (LMM1) explains the need of a good sound system in his living room. I ask him:

\begin{quote}
This sound system you have, can you describe that? Dolby surround, or...?
No, no, the contrary!

The contrary, oh well, I indeed don’t know much about technique.
Er, it’s not about the technology, it’s about trying to create a true-to-life\textsuperscript{106} sound.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{103}Another possible explanation for these apologies is that people feel they disappoint me when they cannot answer all my questions.
\textsuperscript{104}These ‘observations’ could also be my perceptions: how I think people see me – which is not necessarily correct – can influence my interviewer behaviour.
\textsuperscript{105}In Dutch: \textit{zoekrock}, \textit{zeurstemmen}.
\textsuperscript{106}In Dutch he said ‘natuurgetrouw’, which should be translated with ‘high fidelity’ when music is concerned. This English term is common in Dutch as well, but as he did not say that, I chose a more literal translation.
He then gives me a lecture on the purpose and quality of different hi-fi systems, after which he concludes:

Music for me is emotion. (...) Look, I find it important that the sound system can bring across that emotion. Dolby surround doesn’t do that. That only puts across effects. It’s effects, not emotion. … Nice, eh? Conducting interviews!

Peter explicitly distinguishes himself from people who merely listen to music on the background, who do not invest in a good sound quality. That this clearly includes me makes it somewhat embarrassing, but also highly informative. My lack of knowledge provokes him to elaborate more on the details of hi-fi and to distinguish himself more.

**Constructing an answer**

Despite these (well-considered or unconscious) self-presentations, many respondents have never thought about their cultural taste, let alone cultural hierarchies, in such an explicit and detailed way. They do not have a ready-made story that they can tell me as soon as I have pushed the button of particular questions (cf. Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 14-16; Eliasoph 1990). They did not polish a story over the years in order to give a nice and coherent narrative about themselves (cf. Giddens 1991: 76). On their general biography, they often do have such a story; it is striking how many respondents can answer my introductory questions eloquently, but start stammering as soon as the questions on cultural taste come up.

Several respondents state that the interview gives them the opportunity to think about things they never thought about before. Some of them even mention this to be their main reason to cooperate, such as Paul (HMM1). Reflecting on his lack of time since he has children, he says:

They are scarce, the moments that you start thinking at all. Maybe that’s why I immediately said ‘yes’ to your request, I thought: yes, I like to talk about these things again. What actually remains... do I still have a taste, am I still engaged in...? I just take what comes along.

Others started realising things about themselves while talking. Marsha (HYF2) for instance told about the large differences in musical taste she used to have with her brother: he liked synthesizer pop, she preferred soul, and their tastes only met in bands such as Earth, Wind & Fire. She concluded this memory with:

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107 In oral history, Lummis (1998: 274) speaks about the difference between ‘memory’ – people’s standard life story – and ‘recall’ – the recollections that come up when an interviewer asks specific questions.
That’s funny, because now that I’m talking about it, I actually realise it for the first time, that I think: god, yes, that was indeed the way it was. Yes. Yeah, it never occurred to me, no. Nice, to deal with these things so consciously!

When opinions are concerned, it becomes even more evident that many people do not have clear-cut views. Holstein & Gubrium (1995: 27-29) state that the ‘improvisational narrative combines aspects of experience, emotion, opinion, and expectation, connecting disparate parts into a coherent, meaningful whole’. Some respondents for instance have never thought about cultural subsidies. Sander (HYM2) tries to formulate an opinion, but has difficulties with unravelling the threads in his mind and with the presentation of his political self:

**Do you think it is good that the arts and culture are being subsidised?**
Oh, difficult question [silence, 16 sec.]. Err, phew, is really a difficult question.

**I know, it’s complicated.**
Err... [silence, 19 sec.] Actually, I just don’t know. Look, I must say I am rather a supporter of some free market system, without, I guess I’m really, to just put myself in a box, but I’m really not that right-wing, I think I’m really very much for the environment, but also, arts and culture, that turns out, I think is really important and nice, although I don’t collect it [reference to previous part of the interview]. Only the question if you then should say: yes, it has a special position so we should subsidise it... Look, the fact that so many people find it special, or say they find this... Look, I do find, for example the music industry of course is being, by the internet and such, all a bit... Let me put it this way: I really hate the media. Why? Well, two examples, well, the first example has nothing to do with it, but maybe the second does, but (...)

And so he goes on for a few more minutes, in which he, among others, tries to distinguish between cultural disciplines. Finally, he concludes: ‘When there is no solution, I say: yes, subsidise it. But, actually I don’t really know.’ Although his thoughts about this topic go in many directions, in which several arguments can be recognised that others use as well (free market, special position of art, number of people), in the end I am asking him for an opinion that he does not have. This is the case in many survey based opinion polls as well, but then the abovementioned hesitations and doubts would simply end up in the box ‘don’t know’, ‘neutral’, or perhaps ‘agree’ (cf. Eliasoph 1990). Interviews are an ideal method to uncover the ways in which opinions or perceptions are constructed and hence to value these opinions and perceptions.
Diverging interpretations of used concepts

In order to let respondents speak in their own words as much as possible, I postponed using the concepts ‘high culture’ and ‘low culture’ and ‘good taste’ and ‘bad taste’ myself until the final part of the interview. However, also the few specific words that I did use – both in the interview and in the letter and phone conversation in advance – can invoke diverging interpretations, influencing the course of the interview. People often interpreted the concepts ‘culture’ and ‘art’ in either a narrower or a broader way. The same counts for specific cultural fields, such as ‘the visual arts’.

The narrowing down of the concept ‘culture’ already has its onset in the telephone conversations with potential respondents who have received my letter. Several people do not want to be interviewed, because they say they do not like culture. In response to my question whether this means they never listen to music nor watch TV, though, most of them say they do. In their view, culture is something ‘high’ in itself, something serious or sacred, in which they do not participate themselves. A similar reasoning becomes clear among people who did agree to be interviewed, when asking about their definition of ‘high culture’ or for their card ranking. Some reject the concept because ‘culture is culture’ (Jacobus, UOM4; Yvonne, LOF3; Pauline, UMF3), often implying that it is high in itself. Others do not understand the question and therefore rank items from ‘culture’ to ‘no culture’ (‘Mozart is culture of course’, Cora, LYF5; ‘the piano is more like culture’, Noortje, UYF4; ‘a DJ does not have much to do with culture’, Arie, LMM2). Remarks like these are also made earlier in the interview. Respondents start speaking about something (a detective writer, a sensational TV documentary), but interrupt themselves because it is ‘no culture’ and thus no subject for the interview. The adjective ‘cultural’ is used in a narrow way too. Some call certain friends and relatives ‘more cultural’ (Noortje, UYF4; Sander, HYM2), ‘less cultural’ (Inge, UYF3), or even ‘a-cultural’ (Ria, HOF1), and the same counts for certain items (‘I like the more cultural films’, Don, UYM3).

For many, the word ‘art’ even has a stronger connotation with ‘high’ artefacts.

When I wanted to discuss the visual arts, I often pointed at paintings or sculptures in the living room or garden in order to get people talking. Several respondents, however, refuse to call their own possessions art.

[I point at a painting of a Mediterranean landscape, about which Elly starts a discussion with her husband, Ko, on the couch]

Was it art, this painting, Ko, or not? Haha, well, actually I don’t know.

Ko: No, it’s machine made.

It’s machine made. Well, it does have... it could’ve been...

Ko: You can order it and then it’s being painted. So not a real painting.

No, it’s not really art. (Elly, UYF1)
Apparently, art is something hand-made or authentic, to be found in a museum. Machine-made paintings, photographs and garden-gnomes are not perceived as art. The production of an object, however, can be *kunstig*, which could literally be translated as ‘artful’, but which, in the true sense of the word, means skilfully or ingeniously made.

Both in Dutch and English, the word *kunst* (art) can refer to different things: a specific field within the cultural domain (the visual arts, opposed to music or film); something of high value or something beautiful (opposed to low culture or kitsch); and a certain skill (opposed to something easily done or made). The latter meaning implies a different way of narrowing down the definition of art: for several respondents, a painting or sculpture can only be called art when it is skilfully made. These – often lower educated or upwardly mobile – people stress the third meaning of the word and thereby exclude certain abstract and conceptual art, or wonder why other people do label it as art (cf. Newman et al. 2013):

But certainly modern paintings, it’s not for me. I mean, Mondrian, those squares, I think: yeah, nicely invented, it’s great all these squares, but it has *nothing* to do with art. Absolutely not. No. (Michiel, UMM1)

Just like Mondrian with all these squares, well, I don’t see the art in it. (...) My brother (...) once drew a very large horse on his bedroom wall. Wonderful! So beautiful! A horse at a gallop, gee! Now *that* was art! My goodness! I liked it *so* much! Yes, I mean: that was art, but what they sometimes make these days, I think: what on earth are they doing? (Brecht, LOF4)

Well, maybe you like it, that doesn’t matter to me, but (...) such lines, that I think: yes, very beautiful, but if *I* would draw a line over here and such, then I also have these lines. My husband sometimes draws things as well, and then I think: well, *kunstig*, you know, that’s what I find art. My mother always embroidered, [points at the wall], well, don’t you think that’s a piece of art? There’s another one over there, and one upstairs, and the one behind the door: well, *you* try it! And that’s what I understand as art, and not what they sell for millions. (Truus, LMF2)
Besides a narrower meaning, the concept ‘art’ can also be interpreted in a broader way than I intend in my research (or than people think I intend). Several higher educated respondents claim that art can also include fashion (Ria, HOF1), cuisine (Rodney, HMM2), design (Deirdre, HYF6), or the work of a carpenter or furniture maker (Inge, UYF3; Rodney, HMM2). Louis (UMM4) even discusses sports as potential branch of art: ‘Actually you could wonder: why isn’t sport within the domain of art?’

The word ‘culture’ has a broader meaning than intended in this research, too, yet in a different, ‘anthropological’, way (cf. Ollivier 2008a: 137-8). This comes to the fore when asking about high and low culture. ‘Culture is very broad, it’s life actually’, according to Nel (LYF4). Others refer to scientific discoveries (Helma, UOF3), national and religious customs (Pauline, UMF3), and ‘a reflection of society’ (Patrick, HYM3). 94-year-old Henricus (HOM1) even goes back to the etymology of the word:

> The word ‘culture’ always strikes me. It comes from *colere* I think, yes, it’s the Latin word, it’s cultivating actually, isn’t it? To care, but really, to cultivate: what one does with the soil what an animal cannot do. (...) So, with material things, think of architecture or painting or sculpture or whatever. Or, and that’s maybe at least as important, with non-material things, so to speak, being occupied. In which man in one way or the other actually becomes man, accomplishes the whole *humanitas*, so to speak.

Therefore, he has problems with the terms high and low culture. On the latter he says:

> No, I don’t think that low culture exists. (...) Culture is always a contribution to the reality as man meets, namely nature. In a certain way. *That* is culture. (...) Each attempt to do something with the natural in which a human being has emerged, is born, raised, occupied, means that you should strive for higher things. And also the simplest cultivation of soil, throwing some seeds for instance, is already a concept of culture.

Some of the specific cultural fields were also interpreted in a different way than I expected. With music it works in the same way as with ‘art’ or ‘culture’: some people exclude genres they dislike (e.g. dance, hip hop, experimental jazz) from the domain of music. Natasha (HOF2), for instance, comments on the Eurovision Song Contest: ‘It’s just not music. It’s not music! It’s something different. (...) For me, music is broader, deeper.’ Maria (HMF3) presumes that some bricklayers ‘might like music too’, implying that music is limited to the classical music she likes herself.

On a more practical level, also ‘visual arts’ and ‘television series’ were often interpreted in a different way than intended. The Dutch term for visual arts, *beeldende kunst*, closely resembles the word *beeldhouwkunst*, which means sculptural art. A *beeld* can both refer to an image and a sculpture. Thus, many initially omitted their taste for
paintings, which they only included after further probing. Even television series could be interpreted in a broader or narrower way than the fictional series that I meant. Some people wanted to include all kinds of TV programmes that contain more than one episode, such as news shows, quizzes and reality TV; others initially restricted themselves to fictional series that are told in a continuing format, thus excluding sitcoms and whodunits.

With these important notes on the nature of the sociological interview in general and the use of certain cultural concepts in particular, we are ready to enter the empirical results. I begin, however, with a chapter on the quantitative data, but will continue the character of this last section by first describing the actual practice of the card ranking assignment.