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CULTURE AND COMPETITION: HOMOPHILY AND DISTANCING EXPLANATIONS FOR CULTURAL NICHES

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Why do different kinds of people like different kinds of culture? Two answers to this question are formally analyzed and empirically tested: the homophily model and the distancing model. Computer simulation demonstrates that these models are alternative explanations for the finding that different cultural tastes and practices are concentrated within different sociodemographic segments of society. Conflicting implications of the two models are identified. Although both models predict that cultural forms compete for people (i.e., people are a scarce resource on which cultural forms depend), the distancing model differs from the homophily model in that the distancing model predicts a dual ecology: Not only do cultural forms compete for people, but people compete for cultural forms. According to the distancing model, the larger the segment of society in which a cultural form is liked, the smaller is the proportion of people in that segment of society who like that cultural form. The homophily model predicts that people do not compete for cultural forms. Instead, it predicts a local bandwagon effect: The larger the segment of society in which a cultural form is liked, the larger is the proportion of people in that segment of society who like that cultural form. An empirical test using 1993 General Social Survey data supports the prediction of both models that cultural forms compete for people. The analysis also reveals a local bandwagon effect, yielding further empirical support for the homophily model and disconfirming the distancing model's prediction of a dual ecology.

WHY DO DIFFERENT kinds of people like different kinds of culture? A large body of empirical research shows that different cultural tastes are concentrated within segments of society that differ with respect to a variety of socio-demographic variables including age

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(Hughes and Peterson 1983; Peterson and DiMaggio 1975; Smith 1994), region (Marsden et al. 1982), education (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Hughes and Peterson 1983; Lynd and Lynd 1929; Marsden et al. 1982; Veblen 1899; Warner and Lunt 1941), and race (DiMaggio and Ostrower 1990). Because this pattern is essential to sociological understandings of how culture can reduce social contact between groups (Carley 1991) and perpetuate economic inequality (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Levine 1988), a substantial literature attempts to explain this covariation (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Bryson 1996; DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b, 1987; Gans 1974; Peterson and Kern 1996). I develop, formally analyze, and empirically test two answers to this question.

It is useful to restate the question using the concepts of sociodemographic space and the niche. Sociodemographic variables define a multidimensional social space (P. Blau 1977a, 1977b, 1993; Mark 1998a; McPherson 1983), and people's sociodemographic characteristics define their positions in this space. For example, age and years of education define a two-dimensional social space.¹ People who are about the same age and who have similar levels of education are located near each other within this social space; people of different ages and with different levels of education are far from each other. Thus, the similarity between two people with respect to a set of sociodemographic variables is a negative function of the distance between them in a social space defined by those variables. The finding that different cultural tastes are concentrated within different sociodemographic segments describes localization of different cultural tastes in different regions of social space. The niche of a cultural form is the region of social space in which liking for the cultural form is concentrated (Mark 1998a; McPherson 1983).

The concepts of social space and the niche allow translation of my research question into theoretical language: Why do different cultural tastes occupy different niches in social space? Or, more simply, why are there niches?

PREVIOUSLY OFFERED ANSWERS

INHERENT DIFFERENCES AMONG CULTURAL FORMS

Traditionally, students of culture have focused on the qualities of cultural forms themselves—for example, how a piece of

¹ Of course, many other sociodemographic variables are also salient in the contemporary United States. Because it is not possible to include all salient dimensions in an empirical analysis, a tradeoff is made between keeping the analysis sufficiently simple to be manageable and including enough of the most salient variables so that patterns in cultural variation can be observed. I choose age and education because they have high salience and because continuous variables facilitate the analysis.

music sounds, how a painting looks—and have argued that there are inherent differences in content among cultural forms that make different kinds of culture more appealing to different kinds of people (Lieberson and Bell 1992; MacDonald [1953] 1957). One strength of this approach is that it would not only explain the finding that different kinds of people like different kinds of culture, but it would also predict which people would like which cultural forms. Unfortunately, if this approach is to offer more than post hoc accounts, a theory of cultural forms is needed that could make sense of the richness and diversity within and across genres and predict which cultural forms would be liked by which people. Another shortcoming is that research on the social construction of cultural hierarchy suggests that which niche a cultural form will occupy is malleable and may be determined more by social processes than by the qualities of the cultural form itself (DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Levine 1988). For these reasons, and given practical limitations on what can be considered in any single analysis, I do not explore how inherent qualities of cultural forms could help explain why different kinds of people like different kinds of culture.²

CULTURAL HOMOPHILY

One idea that is essential to a full understanding of patterns of cultural taste and practice is that cultural similarities and differences among people provide bases for cohesion and exclusion (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Bryson 1996; Carley 1991; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Mark 1998b; Weber [1922] 1978). Empirical research shows that individuals who are culturally similar are more likely to be associates than are individuals who are culturally different (Byrne 1971; Kandel 1978). Although cultural homophily certainly contributes to the formation and persistence of cultural niches, it is lacking as an explanation for cultural niches because it does not tell us how taste or social contact is related to sociodemographic variables.

² See DiMaggio (1987:442) for a discussion of why "starting with the structure rather than the content of cultural systems" is a promising approach.

graphic characteristics (see Carley 1991; Mark 1998b).

MEANING

A number of explanations for patterns of cultural taste employ the concept of meaning in that they focus on connections between symbols (Carley 1986a, 1986b; Stryker 1981). Examples include connections of meaning between the names chosen for children and gender identities or racial identities (Lieberson and Bell 1992), between style and messages of resistance (Hebdige 1979: 18), and between the general interests of individuals and the specific content of cultural forms such as soap operas, Star Trek serials, and game shows (Harrington and Bielby 1995). Meaning helps explain sociodemographic patterns of cultural taste because people are more receptive to new cultural tastes that have connections (of meaning) to cultural tastes, beliefs, values, interests, and identities that they already hold. Given that different established tastes, beliefs, values, interests, and identities are concentrated within different sociodemographic segments of society, newly acquired tastes will also be concentrated within different sociodemographic segments of society. Nevertheless, the concept of meaning alone is not an adequate explanation for niches because it begs the question of how different interests and identities initially became concentrated within different segments of society. Furthermore, employing the concept of meaning adds complexity that my analysis shows is not essential to answering this paper's research question.

EDUCATION, HIGH-STATUS EXCLUSIVENESS, AND CULTURAL OMNIVOROUSNESS

While there is wide agreement that people's education affects their cultural tastes, scholars do not agree on what this effect is. Bryson (1996) and Peterson and Kern (1996) clarify two opposing views that focus respectively on high-status exclusiveness and cultural omnivorousness. One body of research suggests a pattern of high status exclusiveness in which people with high levels of education, occupational prestige, and in-

come reject cultural forms that are popular among people of lower status (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Gans 1974). High-status exclusiveness limits the number of cultural forms high-status people like, producing no relationship or a negative relationship between education and the number of cultural forms people like.

More recent research suggests that education may positively affect the number of cultural forms people like (DiMaggio 1987; Erickson 1996; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992) and negatively affect the number of forms people dislike (Bryson 1996). The reason may be that people with high levels of education may be more tolerant of cultural forms disproportionately liked by members of ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups (Bryson 1996; Peterson and Kern 1996).

Despite the obvious importance of education in determining the number of types of culture people like as well as patterns of cultural tolerance (Bryson 1996), these arguments about these effects of education presuppose that different cultural forms are disproportionately liked by different categories of people. For example, for a person with a high level of education to reject a cultural form that is disproportionately liked by people with lower levels of education (Bourdieu [1979] 1984), there must be a cultural form that is disproportionately liked by people with lower levels of education. Likewise, for high-status people to develop tolerance and liking for cultural forms disproportionately liked by members of ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups (Bryson 1996; Peterson and Kern 1996), there must be cultural forms disproportionately liked by members of ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups. This concentration of different cultural tastes within different segments of society is the pattern I seek to explain. Thus, I postpone incorporation of these arguments until a more thorough understanding of simpler explanations for cultural niches is achieved.

VARIATION IN THE VARIETY OF INDIVIDUALS' NETWORK ALTERS

Research indicates that variety in an individual's set of network alters helps ac-

count for the number of cultural forms an individual likes (Erickson 1996; also see DiMaggio 1987). Because different kinds of people like different kinds of culture, exposure to different kinds of people exposes one to different kinds of culture, and liking many different kinds of culture brings one into contact with a wide variety of people. Although attention to network variety is essential to a full understanding of sociodemographic patterns of cultural taste and practice, considering network variety is not the best starting place for an explanation for the niche pattern because the network-variety argument presupposes cultural niches. If different cultural tastes were not concentrated within different sociodemographic segments of society (i.e., if tastes for each cultural form were evenly distributed across social space), then connections to individuals from many different sociodemographic segments would tend to bring one into contact with the same number of cultural forms as would connections to the same number of individuals within a single narrow sociodemographic segment.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Historical changes in social structure are essential to a full understanding of how present patterns of cultural taste have emerged (Beisel 1990; DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Levine 1988; Peterson and Kern 1996). However, because structural change alone does not tell us how individuals acquire, lose, or reject cultural tastes, it must be combined with other arguments to account for cultural niches. Given the complexity of such an explanation, I explore explanations for niches under the simpler condition of stable social structures.

SUMMARY

There is tremendous complexity in sociodemographic patterns of cultural taste and practice and in the forces that generate these patterns. The arguments identified above reflect only a small portion of this complexity. Still, there is more complexity in the above set of arguments than can be formally analyzed in an illuminating way here. Although each is essential to a full understanding of

sociodemographic patterns of cultural taste, arguments based on homophily and aesthetic distancing are promising starting places for formally exploring explanations for cultural niches.

HOMOPHILY AND DISTANCING

Two models, homophily and distancing, constitute alternative answers to the research question. These models are my attempt to construct the simplest models based, respectively, on the ideas of homophily and aesthetic distancing that constitute answers to the research question. Homophily and aesthetic distancing are two of the most basic and broadly consequential facts of social life, and of all previously offered explanations for niches, homophily and aesthetic distancing appear to be the simplest and most general.

THE HOMOPHILY MODEL

The saying "birds of a feather flock together" summarizes one of the most enduring and consequential facts of social life. People who are similar in sociodemographic characteristics are more likely to interact with each other than are people who are dissimilar—this is the *principle of homophily*. A substantial body of research documents that people who are similar with respect to age, education, race, occupation, social status, or other variables are more likely to be friends, associates, or spouses than are dissimilar people (P. Blau, Blum, and Schwartz 1982; Galton 1883; Marsden 1987, 1988; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; Schiller 1932; Verbrugge 1977).

This tendency for social connections to occur disproportionately between similar individuals has wide significance. Sociologists argue that homophily helps explain inequality across labor market outcomes (Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn 1981), the perpetuation of class inequality more generally (P. Blau 1994), and the sociodemographic composition of occupations (Rotolo and McPherson 2001) and voluntary associations (McPherson 1983).

Given the wide significance of homophilous network structures, my earlier work (Mark 1998a) borrowed heavily from McPherson's (1983) ecological theory of

voluntary associations and combined the principle of homophily with assumptions about network influence, cultural innovation, time constraints, and inactive taste loss to explain cultural niches (also see McPherson, Popielarz, and Drobnić 1992; McPherson and Ranger-Moore 1991; McPherson and Rotolo 1996). I identify my earlier explanation as the homophily model.

CULTURAL TASTES AND NETWORK TIES. Many students of culture argue that individuals acquire cultural tastes through social interaction with other people who hold those tastes (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Carley 1986a, 1986b, 1991; DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Erickson 1996; Fine and Kleinman 1979; Mark 1998a). People learn about types of music, as well as particular musicians, bands, songs, and albums, from friends and family. People's friends and family also influence the leisure activities they participate in. For example, some avid campers learned this activity while on family camping trips from an early age; others did not begin camping until they did so with adult friends. Participation in various sports, visiting art museums, and gardening are other leisure activities that people often learn from parents, siblings, and/or friends.

Empirical research indicates the importance of network ties in determining individuals' cultural tastes and practices (Erickson 1996; Kandel 1978). Jones (1963) argues that different styles of blues music spread through the South as black agricultural laborers interacted with each other and other blacks as they traveled in search of work. Students of subcultures argue that musical tastes and styles of dress and speech spread rapidly through the dense networks that link members of a subculture (Fischer 1984; Grinder, cited in Smith 1985:144). Several students of culture focus on the role of family socialization in the transmission of cultural tastes and practices (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1982; DiMaggio and Useem 1978). Researchers argue that the folk music tradition of central Appalachia (Artis 1975) as well as a wide variety of cultural differences between the South and other regions of the United States (Marsden et al. 1982) are maintained through the process of socialization.

CULTURAL INNOVATION. In addition to acquiring, maintaining, and transmitting tastes for established cultural forms, people change, revive, and create cultural forms. Three sociological approaches to cultural innovation are notable. Some students of culture conceptualize cultural innovation as a "bottom-up" process. Symbolic interactionists argue that people create meaning through social interaction (Blumer 1962; Mark 1998b; Stryker 1981). In contrast to this view, mass culture theorists (MacDonald [1953] 1957) argue that innovation occurs in a unified culture industry; consumers accept the innovations they are offered because the innovation was a response to their taste or because their taste is shaped by the innovations of the industry (DiMaggio 1977; Peterson and DiMaggio 1975). A third view, the production-of-culture approach, focuses on the organizational and market settings in which cultural innovation, filtering, and dissemination occur (DiMaggio 1977; Hirsch [1972] 1991; Peterson and Berger 1975). According to this view, the "bottom-up" and "top-down" processes are special cases of a wide variety of potential market structures. Production-of-culture theorists focus on the relationships between creative personnel, such as artists and writers, and culture-producing organizations, such as record companies and publishers, and on relationships between culture-producing organizations and consumers.

From the perspective of the homophily model, the important differences among these approaches are the social location of innovation and the structure of transmission of innovation from its source. Each of these innovation structures is compatible with the homophily model, but they are not equally useful for my analysis. The structure outlined by the production-of-culture approach is complex, and we have yet to fully explore what cultural patterns simpler innovation structures can account for. Adopting the mass culture approach to innovation is problematic because it increases the complexity of the analysis by imposing an additional structural assumption (in the form of an exogenously determined distinction between producers and consumers of culture) and because mass culture theory's predic-

tion that cultural homogeneity will emerge (MacDonald [1953] 1957) is empirically disconfirmed (DiMaggio 1977; Peterson and Berger 1975; Peterson and DiMaggio 1975). Therefore, I adopt the "bottom-up" assumption suggested by symbolic interactionists: Any person can engage in cultural innovation and communicate that innovation to her or his network alters.

TIME CONSTRAINTS AND INACTIVE TASTE LOSS. A wide variety of social activities produce and reinforce cultural tastes. People attend concerts, visit museums, watch movies, play sports, sing in church, buy paintings, and take music lessons. A person must engage in some activity associated with a particular cultural form, at least occasionally, if that person is to maintain a taste for that cultural form (Mark 1998a). Therefore, because participation in taste-reinforcing activities takes time, time constraints bear on the maintenance of cultural tastes. If a person holds so many tastes that he or she does not have time to participate in activities associated with all of them, he or she will lose those tastes that remain inactive.

Sociologists recognize that time constraints limit the number of cultural tastes that a person can maintain. DiMaggio (1982c) argues that a person who participates in two forms of high culture is unlikely to actually practice both forms. Because practicing a cultural form takes a large amount of time, at least one of the forms of participation is likely to remain at a less time-consuming level of interest. Similarly, I have argued (Mark 1998b) that a cultural taste that a person does not express in social interaction for a sufficiently long period of time will be forgotten.³

³ Psychological research showing that passage of time since regular rehearsal of information negatively affects recall is consistent with the time constraints/inactive taste loss assumption (Bahrick, Bahrick, and Wittlinger 1975; Spear and Riccio 1994). But to my knowledge, no direct empirical test of this assumption as it pertains to cultural taste has been conducted. Although the assumption seems plausible, future research should empirically test and refine this assumption. An appendix, available from the author on request, outlines some ways this assumption could be tested.

THE DISTANCING MODEL⁴

Many students of culture argue that people make cultural choices that distinguish themselves from members of other social categories (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Bryson 1996; DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Gans 1974; Goffman 1951; Levine 1988). According to Bourdieu ([1979] 1984), in a process called *aesthetic distancing*, people reject cultural forms that are liked by members of other social groups. Accordingly, Bryson (1996) argues that people with high levels of education tend to dislike types of music whose audiences have lower-than-average levels of education more than they dislike other types of music. Goffman's (1951) discussion of moral restrictions on the misrepresentative use of status symbols also describes the process of aesthetic distancing. According to Goffman, people refrain from displaying symbols associated with an economic class or a religious or ethnic group different from their own.

DiMaggio (1982a, 1982b) describes a process whereby a cultural form may be elevated to the level of high culture. Aesthetic distancing plays a central role in this process in that the high-status people laying claim to a genre purge it of those elements most appealing to low-status people. Levine's (1988) study of Shakespearean theater in America illustrates this argument. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, high-status people distanced themselves (and Shakespearean theater) from low-status people by eliminating forms of low culture that traditionally accompanied performances

⁴ The distancing model borrows core assumptions from Bourdieu's ([1979] 1984) social reproduction theory. However, most of Bourdieu's arguments are not incorporated into this model, and the model is not intended to be a formal representation of Bourdieu's theory. The goal of constructing and analyzing the distancing model is not to draw conclusions about Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, but to determine whether a minimal model constructed around aesthetic distancing can account for cultural niches. Given present limits on knowledge of minimal explanations for niches, excluding many important arguments from the distancing model is necessary to determine whether a minimal aesthetic distancing model alone can account for niches.

of Shakespeare's plays. Without farces, singers, jugglers, dancers, and acrobats, low-status people were no longer drawn to performances of Shakespeare's plays. Eventually, Shakespearean theater came to be associated with the upper class, and low-status people rejected the genre.

In his description of the mass culture critique, Gans (1974) elaborates on the aesthetic distancing argument. He claims that the strength of the attack that intellectuals levy against popular culture is negatively related to the status of intellectuals. According to Gans, intellectuals seek to maintain a certain social distance between themselves and common people. When the actual distance becomes less than the distance they desire, intellectuals respond by criticizing popular culture more vehemently.

Although Bourdieu's ([1979] 1984) emphasis on aesthetic distancing is asymmetric, focusing more on high-status people distancing themselves from low-status people than vice versa, I adopt a more general and less restrictive assumption of aesthetic distancing. Such an assumption is an appropriate first step in formal model construction given the symmetric nature of the question I seek to answer, the questionable applicability of Bourdieu's assumption of a unified sociocultural hegemony to a heterogeneous society like the United States (DiMaggio and Ostrower 1990; Lamont and Lareau 1988), and evidence that people of lower status distance themselves from elites by rejecting forms of high culture (Levine 1988).

I choose aesthetic distancing as the central concept for a minimal explanation for cultural niches because of the emphasis it receives in the sociological literature on culture and because of its explanatory power. No process is more widely invoked to explain what prevents certain individuals from acquiring certain tastes or what causes certain individuals to lose certain tastes. Scholars argue that aesthetic distancing is essential to establishing a context in which social exclusion based on differences in cultural taste can occur (Beisel 1990; Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Bryson 1996; DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Levine 1988). Clearly, processes by which individuals come to like cultural forms associated with their social categories are also crucial. However, there

must be a process by which cultural tastes are rejected or lost if cultural hierarchy is to be the dynamic social construction that empirical evidence indicates (Beisel 1990; DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Levine 1988). Scholars' attention to aesthetic distancing reflects this explanatory need as well as empirical evidence suggesting the process (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Bryson 1996).

UNBIASED SOCIAL STRUCTURE. Demonstrating the power of aesthetic distancing to explain cultural niches requires deriving predictions from a minimal model based on aesthetic distancing. Therefore, the distancing model assumes an unbiased social structure: All pairs of individuals are equally likely to interact. Analysis of the homophily model will indicate whether a homophilous social structure can explain the presence of niches. In constructing the distancing model, I seek to show that aesthetic distancing, in combination with the assumptions that follow, can account for niches—even in the absence of a homophilous social structure. Including the assumption of homophily in the distancing model would make it impossible to fully demonstrate the explanatory power of the aesthetic distancing argument.

Although no student of culture argues that all pairs of individuals are equally likely to interact, there are two substantive reasons an unbiased social structure is an appropriate assumption for the distancing model. First, many students of culture argue that social structure does not limit people's exposure to cultural forms as severely as the homophily model suggests (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Bryson 1996; DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Levine 1988). According to these scholars, something other than homophily accounts for cultural niches—and that something is aesthetic distancing. Formally demonstrating that aesthetic distancing can generate niches in the absence of homophily is a compelling way to validate the logical basis for these scholars' argument about the sources of niches in societies with relatively open network structures.

Second, as an explanation for cultural niches, aesthetic distancing and an unbiased social structure are highly compatible in a way that aesthetic distancing and homophily are not. In a homophilous social structure, individuals have few if any opportunities to

practice aesthetic distancing because individuals rarely encounter people different from themselves. Only when there is communication between people who differ from each other, an outcome that is much more common in an unbiased social structure than in a homophilous social structure, does aesthetic distancing occur.

SELECTIVE TASTE RECEPTION. Aesthetic distancing tells us why people tend not to hold tastes associated with social categories to which they do not belong. The question remains: How do people acquire the tastes associated with their own social position? The answer offered by the distancing model is that positive social influence comes from similar network alters. Bourdieu ([1979] 1984) and DiMaggio and Useem (1978) emphasize the socialization that occurs within the family and the educational system. Bourdieu ([1979] 1984) also notes that different sites of socialization are most important in shaping certain cultural tastes and practices. Although the family may be more important in determining participation in fine arts and athletics, peers are likely to be more important in shaping taste for music and style of dress (Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1982; Hebdige 1979; Smith 1985).

The implicit argument in these discussions of socialization is made explicit by Strang and Meyer (1993): A cultural taste is more likely to diffuse from one person to another if both individuals belong to the same socially defined category. This phenomenon of selective taste reception is the complement of aesthetic distancing and is central to the distancing model: A person is more likely to positively receive and acquire a taste held by a similar interaction partner than a taste held by a dissimilar interaction partner. The arguments that parents and peers are especially influential network alters are special cases of the selective taste reception argument in that individuals' parents and peers tend to be similar to them on a number of social dimensions.

CULTURAL INNOVATION. Bourdieu ([1979] 1984) recognizes processes of cultural innovation that occur inside and outside of market and formal organizational contexts. In fields of cultural production, commercial artists innovate to achieve distinction among those in their field of pro-

duction. Cultural consumers seeking distinction purchase cultural goods reflecting these innovations of artists (Bourdieu [1979] 1984:230–44). However, people outside the field of cultural production also innovate. This innovation involves cultural forms that are not bought or sold. For example, people occasionally adopt new grammatical rules or patterns of breaking grammatical rules. These new cultural forms can spread and increase in popularity (Bourdieu [1979] 1984:255). As discussed in my presentation of the homophily model, the important difference between these processes is the social location of innovation and the structure through which an innovation is transmitted from its source. The fact that much innovation occurs in fields of cultural production could be incorporated into the distancing model. However, because it is simpler to avoid assumptions about markets and fields of production and assumptions that only artists or high-status individuals can innovate, I assume that any person can engage in cultural innovation.

COMPARING MODELS: FIVE ANSWERS TO THREE QUESTIONS

Understanding how the homophily and distancing models are similar and how they differ is facilitated by considering the assumptions each model offers in answer to three questions

(1) How do individuals acquire tastes? Both models agree that individuals acquire tastes through social interaction with people who hold those tastes. While the distancing model explicitly emphasizes the role of network ties to agents of socialization such as parents and teachers, the importance of these ties is implicit in the homophily model. As developed in these models, the network ties and socialization arguments are essentially the same—both models assume that positive social influence operates through social network ties, at least sometimes.⁵

(2) How do individuals lose tastes? According to the homophily model, individuals

⁵ See Erickson (1996) for a discussion of Bourdieu's failure to recognize the importance of network ties to individuals outside of one's family.

lose cultural tastes that are not sufficiently reinforced through social activity. Because people's time is limited and because taste-reinforcing activities take time, the number of tastes people can maintain is limited. Acquisition of new tastes and participation in activities associated with these new tastes may crowd out previously acquired tastes which become lost to inactivity.

According to the distancing model, individuals lose cultural tastes through negative social influence. Suppose persons A and B like country music. According to the distancing model, it is possible for B to have negative influence on A with respect to country music. If this negative influence occurs, A will stop liking country music. Negative social influence is one component of the aesthetic distancing argument. The other component, a biased influence structure, answers the next question.

(3) How are patterns of taste acquisition and/or taste loss structured so that similar people tend to hold similar tastes and dissimilar people tend to hold different tastes? According to the distancing model, the structure of social influence is biased so that a similar alter is more likely to positively influence ego than is a dissimilar alter. For example, the distancing model argues that a teacher is more likely to have positive influence on a student if the student's parents have high levels of education, as the teacher does, than if the student's parents have low levels of education (Bourdieu [1973] 1977). This assumption of a biased influence structure is the second component of the aesthetic distancing argument.

According to the homophily model, the similarity between two people positively affects the probability that they will be interaction partners. Homophily implies that dissimilar people will rarely interact with each other. However, unlike the aesthetic distancing model, on those rare occasions where dissimilar people do interact, positive influence is just as likely to occur as when similar people interact.

ALTERNATIVE COMBINATIONS OF ASSUMPTIONS

The above comparison points to four assumptions that are employed by the

homophily model or by the distancing model: (1) a biased social structure (i.e., homophily); (2) a biased influence structure; (3) inactive taste loss; and (4) negative influence. I explore two complementary subsets of these assumptions—the homophily model based on a biased social structure and inactive taste loss and the distancing model based on a biased influence structure and negative influence. Other combinations of these assumptions merit exploration, but I focus on these two combinations here because I am interested in the simplest explanations for cultural niches based on the ideas of homophily and aesthetic distancing. Thus, I reserve models employing more than two of these assumptions for future analysis. Models employing only one of these assumptions (in addition to the common elements of both models) can also be tentatively ruled out. Aesthetic distancing (i.e., rejecting the cultural tastes of individuals different from oneself) is itself the combination of biased influence structure and negative influence. Dropping either of these assumptions from the model would leave a model that does not posit aesthetic distancing and does not explain the concentration of different cultural forms within different niches.⁶ While homophily itself does not embody two of the above assumptions, homophily by itself does not explain the concentration of different cultural forms within different niches. In the absence of inactive taste loss, the homophily model predicts that eventually every person will like every cultural form.⁷

⁶ In the absence of a biased influence structure, cultural tastes will become evenly spread across society because people will reject cultural tastes of similar others as often as they reject those of dissimilar others, and because people will acquire cultural tastes of dissimilar others as often as they acquire those of similar others. In the absence of negative influence, cultural tastes will become evenly spread across society because every person will eventually come to like every cultural form.

⁷ The reader may wonder if the other mechanism for taste loss—negative influence—could be combined with homophily to produce an alternative explanation for niches that does not rest on inactive taste loss. Interestingly, informal consideration of this model suggests that it would not explain cultural niches. If negative influence

Table 1. Hypothetical Distribution of Tastes in a Society of 10 People

Cultural Form	Person (Position)									
	A (1)	B (2)	C (3)	D (4)	E (5)	F (6)	G (7)	H (8)	I (9)	J (10)
Rap music	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Classical music	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Auto races	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gardening	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Watch TV news	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0

FORMAL MODELS

My formalizations of the homophily and distancing models borrow heavily from Carley's (1991) formalization of her constructural model. A person's position in sociodemographic space is indicated by a numerical value on each of one or more sociodemographic dimensions.⁸ For example, in a one-dimensional social space, one person could be located at position 1, one person at position 2, and so on, up to position 10. This distribution of persons across positions is illustrated in Table 1.

The relations between a person and a cultural form⁹ can take one of two values: 1 if

is as likely to occur between individuals who are similar as between individuals who are different, tastes can spread through chains of acquaintances to distant regions of social space and persist evenly distributed across social space. Indeed, because negative influence involves rejecting a cultural form that another person likes, in the presence of homophily a cultural taste will tend to spread out of regions where it is highly concentrated and into regions where the taste is relatively rare (i.e., into regions where a person who likes a given cultural form is less likely to encounter another person who also likes that cultural form).

⁸ In an N-dimensional social space, a person's position is indicated by the value on each of the N dimensions. For simplicity, the illustration is based on a one-dimensional social space. The simulation analysis and the empirical analysis consider a social space defined by two dimensions—age and education.

⁹ For simplicity, cultural forms are conceptualized as discrete entities that do not change with

the person likes the cultural form, otherwise 0.¹⁰ Conceptualizing taste in this way allows me to represent the distribution of tastes across a society as a cultural forms-by-persons matrix (Carley 1991). Table 1 is an example of a cultural forms-by-persons matrix. Person A likes to attend auto races; person D likes rap music, gardening, and watching television news. For simplicity, the dimensions of the cultural forms-by-persons matrix remains constant for a given society through time.

THE SOCIAL INTERACTION ROUND

Social interaction occurs in successive rounds. In each round, each person picks one other person and initiates interaction with that person. Each initiation of interaction results in one instance of social interaction. Therefore, individuals picked by multiple people interact more than once in a given round. I assume all interactions that occur in a round are dyadic and simultaneous. A round of interaction is composed of five steps.

STEP 1: PARTNER SELECTION. Each person in the system selects an interaction partner. The probability that the *i*th person will initiate interaction with the *j*th person, denoted by Pr_{ij} , is the similarity of *j* to *i*, de-

time. Future research should relax this assumption.

¹⁰ For simplicity, I combine indifference, ignorance, and active disliking into a single category of non-liking. See Bryson (1996) for an analysis that distinguishes between active disliking and other types of non-liking.

Table 2. Social Structure under Distancing Model

Initiator	Person Chosen									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
A	0	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11
B	.11	0	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11
C	.11	.11	0	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11
D	.11	.11	.11	0	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11
E	.11	.11	.11	.11	0	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11
F	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	0	.11	.11	.11	.11
G	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	0	.11	.11	.11
H	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	0	.11	.11
I	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	0	.11
J	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11	0

Note: Each cell value is the probability that the row person initiates interaction with the column person.

noted S_{ji} , raised to a parameter governing the strength of homophily, h , divided by the sum of every person's similarity to i raised to the homophily parameter.

$$\Pr_{ij} = \frac{(S_{ji})^h}{\sum_{k=1}^N (S_{ki})^h}, \quad i \neq j, \quad i \neq k, \quad (1)$$

and where N is the number of people in the society. This formula is a generalization of Carley's (1991:335). For Carley, similarity is the number of facts held in common. I argue that this formula can be applied to other forms of similarity as well. A second difference is my introduction of the homophily parameter. In Carley's formula, the homophily parameter equals 1; however, to compare the homophily and distancing models, the homophily parameter must vary.¹¹

I define the similarity of one person to another in terms of distances in social space.

$$S_{ji} = D_i^{\max} - D_{ij}, \quad (2)$$

where D_{ij} is the distance between the i th person and the j th person, which is the absolute value of the difference between their positions on the sociodemographic dimension,

$$D_{ij} = |P_i - P_j|, \quad (3)$$

and where D_i^{\max} is the distance between the i th person and the person farthest from the i th person,

$$D_i^{\max} = \max_{k=1}^N |P_i - P_k|. \quad (4)$$

For the distancing model, the homophily parameter is set to zero, making all pairs of individuals equally likely to interact. Table 2 illustrates the social structure corresponding to the 10-person society described in Table 1 according to the distancing model. The value in a cell of Table 2 is the probability that the person corresponding to the row of that cell will initiate interaction with the person corresponding to the column of that cell.

For the homophily model, the homophily parameter is greater than zero. The larger the homophily parameter, the stronger is the bias toward similar interaction partners. Table 3 illustrates the social structure corresponding to the 10-person society described in Table 1 when the homophily parameter equals 10. The value in a cell of Table 3 is the probability that the person in the row of that cell will initiate interaction with the person in the column of that cell. That the interaction pattern is biased is seen in the larger values near the diagonal and smaller values far from the

¹¹ An additional difference between my formula and Carley's is that mine includes the restriction that $i \neq j$.

Table 3. Social Structure under Homophily Model when Homophily = 10

Initiator	Person Chosen									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
A	0	.75	.20	.04	.01	.00	.00	.00	.00	0
B	.44	0	.44	.10	.02	.00	.00	.00	.00	0
C	.07	.43	0	.43	.07	.01	.00	.00	.00	0
D	.00	.05	.45	0	.45	.05	.00	.00	.00	0
E	.00	.00	.03	.47	0	.47	.03	.00	.00	0
F	0	.00	.00	.03	.47	0	.47	.03	.00	.00
G	0	.00	.00	.00	.05	.45	0	.45	.05	.00
H	0	.00	.00	.00	.01	.07	.43	0	.43	.07
I	0	.00	.00	.00	.00	.02	.10	.44	0	.44
J	0	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01	.04	.20	.75	0

Note: Each cell value is the probability that the row person initiates interaction with the column person.

diagonal; similar people are more likely to interact with each other than are dissimilar people.

STEP 2: INITIATION OF INTERACTION BY TASTE EXPRESSION. Each person initiates interaction with the person she or he selected by telling that person a cultural taste. Usually, the taste the initiator expresses is randomly selected from the set of tastes he/she already holds. Each of the tastes the initiator holds has the same probability of being selected. Each time a person expresses a cultural taste, there is a small probability that cultural innovation will occur—the person will express a taste that she does not currently hold. This taste is selected from a finite pool of potential cultural forms. When cultural innovation occurs, each of the potential tastes the initiator does not hold has the same probability of being acquired and expressed by the initiator. Thus, an innovator can introduce a taste that no other person holds (i.e., "true innovation") or independently reintroduce or reinvent a taste that other people concurrently hold. This step is the same for each of the models.

STEP 3: INFLUENCE DETERMINATION. Whether positive social influence, negative social influence, or no social influence occurs is determined for each interacting

dyad.¹² Given that the i th person has initiated interaction with the j th person, the probability that the i th person will positively influence the j th person, I_{ij} , is given by a formula that parallels equation 1.

$$I_{ij} = \frac{(S_{ij})^b \times (N-1) \times p}{\sum_{k=1}^N (S_{kj})}, \quad i \neq j, k \neq j, \quad (5)$$

and where b is the influence bias parameter, and p , the positive influence parameter, governs the average tendency to be positively influenced, $0 \leq p \leq 1$.¹³ Similarity is defined according to equations 2, 3, and 4.

In the homophily model, the influence bias parameter equals zero. If two people interact, the probability that positive influence occurs is p and is unrelated to the similarity of the interactants. In the distancing model, the influence bias parameter is greater than zero. Thus, in the distancing model, positive

¹² Definitions of positive social influence, negative social influence, and no influence are provided in the description of Step 4.

¹³ Together, inclusion of the factors $N - 1$ and p elevate probabilities of positive influence to reasonable levels. In some cases, equation 5 gives probabilities greater than 1 for some pairs of individuals. For such pairs, the probability of positive influence is set to 1.

Table 4. New Hypothetical Distribution of Tastes in a Society of 10 People

Cultural Form	Person (Position)									
	A (1)	B (2)	C (3)	D (4)	E (5)	F (6)	G (7)	H (8)	I (9)	J (10)
Rap music	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Classical music	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Auto races	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gardening	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Watch TV news	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0

influence is more likely to occur between similar interactants than between dissimilar interactants.

In the distancing model, if positive social influence does not occur, negative social influence occurs. In the homophily model, if positive influence does not occur, no influence occurs.

STEP 4: TASTE RECEPTION. Individuals receive the tastes expressed by the individuals who have initiated social interaction with them. If positive influence occurs, the initiate acquires the taste if she or he did not already hold it and keeps the taste if she or he already held it. If no influence occurs, the initiate continues to not hold the taste if he or she did not already hold the taste and continues to hold the taste if she or he already held the taste. If negative influence occurs, the initiate continues not to hold the taste if she or he did not already hold the taste and loses the taste if she or he already held the taste. In the distancing model, if multiple initiators express the same taste to a given person, the probability that the person positively receives the taste is equal to the proportion of such initiators exerting positive influence, and the probability that the person negatively receives the taste is equal to the proportion of such initiators exerting negative influence. In the homophily model, if multiple initiators express the same taste to a given person, that person positively receives the taste if at least one of the initiators exerts positive social influence.

STEP 5: INACTIVE TASTE LOSS. Inactive taste loss occurs in the homophily model: A taste that a person holds but has not ex-

pressed or positively received for a certain number of consecutive rounds is lost.

CULTURAL DYNAMICS

The steps outlined above provide mechanisms by which change in the distribution of tastes across a society occurs. An example based on Table 1 illustrates these mechanisms. Suppose person E initiates interaction with person F and tells F about rap music and how great it is. Assuming positive influence occurs, person F will acquire a taste for rap music. If person J initiates interaction with person B under the distancing model, negative influence is likely to occur. If J tells B that classical music is good, B will stop liking classical music. Table 4 shows the resulting distribution of tastes. Now, person F likes rap and person B no longer likes classical music.

SIMULATING NICHES

I use computer simulation to demonstrate that the homophily and distancing models both imply that cultural forms occupy niches in social space.¹⁴

PARAMETER SETTINGS AND INITIAL CONDITIONS

In selecting parameter settings, my strategy is to construct the simulation to mirror soci-

¹⁴ The computer program used to simulate the model is written in GAUSS (1992) and is available from the author on request.

ety as reflected in the 1993 General Social Survey (GSS) where possible. (Below, I use data from the 1993 GSS to empirically test the models.) A sensitivity analysis, available from the author on request, demonstrates that the results described below are robust across a wide range of parameter values.

I simulate societies with 156 individuals who are distributed across two continuous variables in approximately the same way individuals are distributed across age and education in the 1993 GSS.¹⁵ For each society, the total number of potential cultural forms is 35.¹⁶ In the initial condition for each society, every person in the society likes each cultural form. Thus, in the initial condition, cultural forms do not occupy niches in social space. Adopting an initial condition in which there are no niches ensures that any niche pattern detected in the simulated data is generated by the dynamics of the model and is not an artifact of the initial condition.

In the homophily model, the homophily parameter is set to 10. In the distancing model, the influence bias parameter is set to 10. The positive influence parameter is set at .3. In the homophily model, inactive taste loss occurs if a person holds a taste and does not express it or positively receive it for 16 consecutive rounds.¹⁷ When a person tells a taste to his or her interaction partner, the probability that he or she will select a taste he or she currently holds is .99. The probability of cultural innovation—that this person will acquire and express a taste she or he does not currently hold—is .01.¹⁸

¹⁵ I draw a random sample of observations in the GSS. Each of the 1,542 observations (with no missing values on relevant variables) in the GSS had a .1 probability of being included in the sample. The resulting sample contained 156 observations. The paired values for age and education in the sample are the positions of individuals in the simulated societies.

¹⁶ The GSS has data for 35 cultural forms.

¹⁷ The positive influence and inactive taste loss parameters determine the mean number of tastes individuals hold. I choose values for these parameters that result in a mean number of tastes held that is about the same as that observed in the GSS—8.7 tastes per person.

¹⁸ The results of this analysis (presented below) are robust across all reasonable values of the probability of innovation—0 to .5, a range that certainly includes some unreasonable values

SIMULATION-GENERATED DATA

For each model, I simulate a society through 500 rounds of social interaction. For each society, the simulation program creates a data set after the 500th round of interaction. For each person in a society, the data set indicates the person's position in social space (i.e., the person's age and education) and the cultural forms the person likes.

TESTING FOR NICHES

METHODS. Simulated data are analyzed to determine whether the models predict that cultural taste varies with sociodemographic characteristics (i.e., that cultural forms occupy niches). Below, I employ the same method to empirically test for niches using GSS data. For each model, I want to see if people with different sociodemographic characteristics tend to like different types of culture. To test for this, I estimate a polytomous-response logistic regression model (Hosmer and Lemeshow 1989). The unit of analysis is the taste for a cultural form. For each person, there is one observation for each cultural form the person likes. The independent variables are the age and education of the person corresponding to the observation. The dependent variable is the cultural form that the taste is for. For example, if person A likes three cultural forms—oldies rock, attending sports events, and going to the movies—then there are three observations corresponding to person A. Each observation has the same values for the sociodemographic variables of age and education. For the variable of cultural form, one observation has the value “oldies rock”;

as well. Still, limitations on the results presented below are worth noting. At very high probabilities of innovation (e.g., .9) neither model predicts niches because the tendency to reintroduce a cultural form outside its current niche reduces the degree to which cultural forms are concentrated within niches. If the probability of innovation is zero and the simulation is run for much longer than 500 rounds, niches eventually disappear because cultural forms that become extinct are not replaced and tastes for the remaining cultural forms become widespread. A more developed discussion of this analysis is available from the author on request.

another has the value "attending sports events"; and the third has the value "going to the movies." Because there are 35 cultural forms in the system, there are 35 unordered values that the variable cultural form can take. Thus, the regression model has the following form:

$$\log\left(\frac{\Pr(C=i)}{\Pr(C=35)}\right) = a_i + b_{Age,i}(Age) + b_{Education,i}(Education), \quad (6)$$

where i takes integer values from 1 to 34 corresponding to the 34 cultural forms that are not the comparison category. Thus, equation 6 results in 34 equations. The intercept and the independent variables can take different values for each of the 34 equations. If the estimated effects of the independent variables are different from each other for the different equations, then the log-odds of liking one cultural form rather than another is different for people in different regions of sociodemographic space.

The model is estimated using the CATMOD maximum-likelihood procedure in SAS. I estimate the model once with the data generated by the homophily model and once with the data generated by the distancing model. For each estimation, 102 parameters are estimated—the intercept and the effects of age and education for each of 34 log-odds. The values of these parameter estimates are not of substantive importance to the present analysis. Whether the model that includes the effects of age and education fits better than the model that includes the intercepts alone is important and indicates whether the homophily and distancing models imply that different kinds of people like different kinds of culture.

RESULTS. The G-statistic, defined as -2 times the natural logarithm of the ratio of the likelihood of the reduced model to the likelihood of the full model, follows a chi-square distribution under the null hypothesis that the effects of age and education are zero (Hosmer and Lemeshow 1989). For the data generated by the homophily model, the G-statistic is 283. With 68 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected at the $p < .001$ level. For the data generated by the distancing model, the G-statistic is 386. With 68 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is

rejected at the $p < .001$ level. These results indicate that *both the homophily model and the distancing model predict that different cultural forms occupy different niches in sociodemographic space.*

COMPETITION: IDENTIFICATION OF CONFLICTING PREDICTIONS

The above analysis demonstrates that the homophily and distancing models are alternative answers to the question of why different cultural forms occupy different niches in sociodemographic space. To improve our understanding of the differences between these explanations for niches, I identify conflicting predictions implied by the homophily and distancing models. To focus my search, I consider the topic of competition because competitive processes are widely recognized to be important in shaping cultural phenomena (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; DiMaggio 1987; Mark 1998a; Swidler 1986).

CULTURE AND COMPETITION

Viewing competition as an ecological process clarifies arguments about culture and competition. An ecology is a system in which a set of entities, such as populations of biological species (Hutchinson 1959; MacArthur 1972), populations of organizations (Hannan and Freeman 1977; McPherson 1983), or cultural forms (Mark 1998a), compete for scarce resources. It is important to recognize that although there are different views about what competition is, ecological competition does not require intentionality or agency on the part of the competing entities. Entities are said to compete if they consume the same scarce resource. Sociologists' arguments about culture and competition differ in terms of what entities compete for what resource.

CULTURAL FORMS COMPETE FOR PEOPLE. I have previously argued (Mark 1998a) that cultural forms compete because they depend on the same scarce resource—people. If nobody likes, practices, or communicates about a cultural form, that cultural form does not exist. People are a scarce resource for cultural forms because the time and energy people have to devote to the de-

velopment and maintenance of cultural tastes and practices are limited. J. Blau (1986, 1988, 1989; J. Blau, P. Blau, and Golden 1985) argues that the social structural characteristics of cities, especially population size, affect the supply of culture in those cities. In J. Blau's analysis, the people in cities are a crucial resource for cultural forms.¹⁹ Swidler (1986) addresses the issue of competition, arguing that in unsettled cultural periods, different ideologies compete for acceptance.

PEOPLE COMPETE FOR CULTURAL FORMS.

Following Bourdieu ([1979] 1984), Peterson and Kern (1996) argue that because the value of a taste for a high cultural form is the distinction it provides the holder from lower-status people, a highbrow taste that becomes widely held loses its distinctive value. Because the distinctive power of a cultural taste decreases as more people from a wider variety of social positions come to hold it, people compete for cultural forms. Peterson and Kern (1996) argue that social structural changes have made traditional highbrow cultural forms accessible to a wider range of people. Competition among a large number of people from a wide variety of social positions for traditional highbrow cultural forms has reduced their distinctive power. In response, high-status people have turned to omnivorous taste—taste for a wide variety of cultural forms—to distinguish themselves from lower status people.

DUAL ECOLOGY. Bourdieu ([1979] 1984: 230–44) and DiMaggio (1987:450,451) argue that cultural forms compete for people and that people compete for cultural forms. People compete for cultural forms because the value of a cultural taste is the distinction it provides from people who are different from oneself. As a cultural taste becomes

widespread, the taste loses its distinctive power. In other words, the value of a cultural taste, its distinction, is a limited resource that gets used up as more people acquire the taste.

Cultural forms compete for people because commercial producers of cultural goods produce only goods they can sell (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; DiMaggio 1987). According to Bourdieu, people buy cultural goods that provide distinction. Cultural forms that provide some people with the distinction they seek will increase in popularity until their popularity reduces their distinctive power. A cultural form may not successfully compete for one segment of society because it is too different from the preferred identity marker of members of that segment. Yet it may not successfully compete for members of any other segment because it is perceived as too similar to the cultural form associated with the first segment. Such a cultural form does not survive the competitive struggle for people.

These dual ecologies create a paradox (DiMaggio 1987:450). The number of people who like a cultural form is subject to opposing forces. Attempts by producers to increase sales, and the positive social influence exerted by people who like the cultural form on people who do not like the cultural form, both tend to increase the popularity of the cultural form. On the other hand, individuals' search for distinction exerts downward pressure on the popularity of the cultural form, and the strength of this downward pressure is positively related to the popularity of the cultural form. Given this paradox, what happens when dual ecologies operate simultaneously?

According to DiMaggio (1987:450), the mutual opposition between these ecologies has a novel consequence: As producers of cultural goods expand their markets and sell to larger numbers of people, the proportion of people in the targeted market who buy declines because consumers seek distinctive cultural goods. To the extent that producers are successful at increasing sales, the distinctive power of the cultural good is reduced and the probability that a targeted consumer will buy the cultural good declines. Producers attempt to expand the niches of their cultural goods because this

¹⁹ Although J. Blau (1989) reports empirical disconfirmation of her hypotheses that numbers of various types of cultural institutions in cities would be related to factors such as region and population age structure, these findings do not threaten the basic argument that people are a resource for cultural forms. Indeed, the finding (J. Blau 1986, 1989) that a city's population size is the most powerful predictor of its number of artists and cultural institutions is convincing evidence of the claim that people are a resource for cultural forms.

expansion increases total sales despite the accompanying reduction in the proportion of targeted consumers who buy the cultural good.

Bourdieu ([1979] 1984:230–44) offers a different answer: Although producers compete for consumers of their products, they are not consciously oriented toward this competition. Instead, producers are oriented toward the competition with other producers for distinction based on their product. Thus, the diversity of products demanded is harmoniously met by the diversity of products supplied without any intentionality on the part of producers (or consumers). Bourdieu's "invisible hand" argument views the dual ecology not as a paradox, but as a complex, highly orchestrated reality.

COMPETITIVE PROCESSES AND PATTERNS OF CULTURAL TASTE OBSERVABLE IN CROSS-SECTIONAL DATA

The hypothesized competitive processes arise from the dynamics of taste acquisition, inactive taste loss, active taste rejection, and cultural innovation. However, the General Social Survey data available to test the logical implications of these arguments is cross-sectional. Here I identify two patterns of cultural taste that are implied by the two types of competition identified above—among cultural forms for people, and among people for cultural forms—and that can be observed in cross-sectional data.

The concept of the niche is useful for identifying competitive processes because the niche indicates which people are most subject to forces of social influence to like certain cultural forms. According to both models, people acquire (and maintain) tastes for cultural forms that are liked by people similar to themselves. People acquire tastes for cultural forms through network ties to similar others who like those cultural forms. Therefore, in the region of social space where tastes for a cultural form are concentrated (i.e., in the niche), people (who like or do not like the cultural form) have friends who like the cultural form and are subject to forces of social influence to like the cultural form. People outside the niche of a cultural form experience much weaker forces of social influence to like the cultural form because their

similar alters also tend to be outside the niche and are less likely to like the cultural form.

COMPETITION AMONG CULTURAL FORMS FOR PEOPLE. I identify individuals as the unit of analysis to describe the observable cultural pattern that competition among cultural forms for people would produce. This pattern is described by the relationship between two variables—the number of cultural forms with niches that overlap at a person's position in social space and the proportion of those cultural forms that the person likes.

The number of niches overlapping at a person's position in social space indicates the number of cultural forms to which a person receives positive social exposure (Mark 1998a). People who are in many niches experience forces of social influence to like more cultural forms than do people who are in few niches.

A basic assumption underlying the argument that cultural forms compete for people is that people are a scarce resource for cultural forms (Mark 1998a). A person's time and energy that are involved in acquiring and maintaining cultural tastes can get used up so that it is unlikely that the person will acquire new tastes without losing previously acquired tastes. Therefore, if people are a scarce resource, the number of tastes that a person holds will not be as responsive to the number of tastes to which a person is positively exposed through social interaction as it would be if people were not a scarce resource. If cultural forms compete for people (i.e., if people are a scarce resource for cultural forms), a person who is in the niches of a small number of cultural forms will like a larger proportion of those cultural forms than will a person who is in the niches of a large number of cultural forms. In other words, if cultural forms compete for people, we will observe that the number of cultural forms with niches overlapping at a person's position in social space negatively affects the proportion of those cultural forms that the person likes (see Popielarz and McPherson 1995). Observing this relationship suggests competition among cultural forms for people. If I observe this relationship in simulated data, I conclude that the model that generated the data predicts that cultural forms compete for people. Otherwise, I conclude that that model predicts that

cultural forms do not compete for people. If I observe this relationship in empirical data, I conclude that the empirical data support the hypothesis that cultural forms compete for people. Otherwise, I conclude that I have found disconfirming evidence.

COMPETITION AMONG PEOPLE FOR CULTURAL FORMS. I identify cultural forms as the unit of analysis to describe the observable cultural pattern that competition among people for cultural forms would produce. This pattern is described by the relationship between two variables—the number of people inside the niche of a cultural form and the proportion of those people who like the cultural form.

The number of people in the niche of a cultural form is the number of people subject to forces of social influence toward liking that cultural form. Some cultural forms have a wide niche and have many people inside their niche. For these cultural forms, many people have similar alters who like that cultural form. Social influence toward liking this cultural form is exerted on a large number of people. Some cultural forms have a narrow niche and have few people inside their niche. For these cultural forms, fewer people have similar alters who like that cultural form. Social influence toward liking this cultural form is exerted on a smaller number of people.

If people compete for cultural forms, more people compete for cultural forms with niches including many people than compete for cultural forms with niches including few people. If a cultural form is a scarce resource, as the argument that people compete for cultural forms suggests, then the more individuals competing for a cultural form, the lower the probability that any given one of those individuals will like the cultural form. In other words, if people compete for cultural forms, the number of people in the niche of a cultural form negatively affects the proportion of those people who like the cultural form. Observing this relationship suggests competition among people for cultural forms.

SIMULATING COMPETITION

I analyze data generated by simulating 10 societies with the homophily model and 10 societies with the distancing model. The pa-

rameter settings, initial conditions, and data output for these societies are the same as those described earlier.

OPERATIONALIZING THE NICHE. I need a precise operational definition of the niche because detecting competition in simulated or empirical data requires knowing which individuals are inside and outside the niche of each cultural form. I adopt an operational definition that is a variant of that employed by McPherson (1983). I consider patterns of cultural taste in a two-dimensional space defined by age and education. On a single dimension, the niche of a cultural form is defined as a segment of that dimension. In a two-dimensional social space, the niche of a cultural form is defined as the intersection of the corresponding one-dimensional niches. Thus, in two-dimensional space, a niche is a rectangle. The niche of a cultural form on one dimension is centered on the weighted mean position on that dimension; each position on the dimension that is occupied by at least one person is weighted by the proportion of the people in that position who like the corresponding cultural form. The niche bounds on that dimension are set w standard deviations above and below the weighted mean.²⁰ I select a value for w that produces niches that maximally distinguish between people who like the cultural form and people who do not like the cultural form. Accordingly, I set niche bounds 1.7 standard deviations above and below the niche center when analyzing data generated by the homophily model, and I set niche bounds 1.6 standard deviations above and below the niche center when analyzing data generated by the distancing model.²¹

TESTING FOR COMPETITION. To test for competition among cultural forms for people, I identify the individual as the unit of analysis and use ordinary least squares regression to find the relationship between the following two variables. The independent variable is the number of cultural forms with niches overlapping the person's position in social space. The dependent variable is the

²⁰ The standard deviation is weighted accordingly.

²¹ An appendix describing the analysis that yields these values of w is available from the author on request.

Table 5. OLS Coefficients Testing for Competition in Simulated Data

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable			
	Proportion of Cultural Forms Person Likes ^a		Proportion of People Who Like Cultural Form ^b	
	Homophily Model	Distancing Model	Homophily Model	Distancing Model
Intercept	.564*** (.008)	.374*** (.009)	.272*** (.021)	.459*** (.014)
Number of cultural forms overlapping person's position in social space	-.008*** (.000)	-.005*** (.000)	—	—
Number of people in cultural form's niche	—	—	.001*** (.000)	-.002*** (.000)
R ²	.289	.116	.031	.410
Number of cases	1,560	1,560	349	350

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

^a Unit of analysis is the person. A negative coefficient indicates competition among cultural forms for people.

^b Unit of analysis is the cultural form. A negative coefficient indicates competition among people for cultural forms.

*** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

proportion of those forms (i.e., with niches overlapping the person's position in social space) that the person likes.

To test for competition among people for cultural forms, I identify the cultural form as the unit of analysis and use ordinary least squares regression to find the relationship between the following two variables. The independent variable is the number of people in the niche of the cultural form. The dependent variable is the proportion of the people in the niche of a cultural form who like that cultural form.

RESULTS. Table 5 presents the results of my test for competition among cultural forms for people using the simulated data. The coefficient is negative for both the homophily model ($b = -.008$) and the distancing model ($b = -.005$). These results indicate that *both the homophily model and the distancing model predict that cultural forms compete for people: The number of cultural forms with niches overlapping a person's position in social space negatively affects the proportion of those cultural forms the person likes.*²²

²² Because this prediction is logically implied by the assumptions of the homophily and distancing models, some readers may wonder if this prediction is tautological. There are at least two

Table 5 also presents the results of my test for competition among people for cultural forms using the simulated data. The coefficient for the distancing model is negative ($b = -.002$). In other words, *the distancing model predicts that people compete for cultural forms: The number of people in the niche of a cultural form negatively affects the proportion of those people who like the cultural form.* The coefficient for the homophily model is positive ($b = .001$). This result indicates that the homophily model does not predict that people compete for cultural forms. In fact, the opposite prediction is indicated: *The homophily model predicts that the number of people in the niche of a*

senses in which we can ask whether this prediction is tautological. Starting with an explicit definition of tautology is helpful. A tautology is "a compound proposition which is unconditionally true for all the truth-possibilities of its elementary propositions and by virtue of its logical form" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com). Thus, if we ask whether the prediction itself is tautological, the answer is no; it is logically possible for this prediction to be empirically false.

Another sense in which we can ask if this prediction is tautological is to ask whether the prediction in combination with the set of assump-

cultural form positively affects the proportion of those people who like the cultural form. I call this prediction the local bandwagon effect.

SUMMARY. Above, I identified three broad arguments concerning culture and competition. The simulation analysis shows that the homophily model reflects the argument that cultural processes constitute a single ecology in which people are a scarce resource for which cultural forms compete (J. Blau 1986, 1988, 1989; J. Blau et al. 1985; Mark 1998a; Swidler 1986). The distancing model reflects a dual ecology in which people compete for cultural forms and cultural forms compete for people (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; DiMaggio 1987).

DISCUSSION. The correspondence between the distancing model's prediction that people compete for cultural forms and Bourdieu's ([1979] 1984) argument about competition for cultural tastes is notable. Bourdieu argues that groups of people compete for cultural forms because a cultural taste that comes to be held by a large number of people occupying a wide range of social positions loses its distinctive power. Bourdieu also argues that individuals practice aesthetic distancing: People reject cul-

tions from which it was derived forms a tautology. Imagine that each assumption is an if-statement and the prediction is a then-statement. In other words, consider an entire theory (including assumptions and predictions) to be the compound proposition referred to in the above definition. In this sense, my formalization of the homophily model (or the distancing model) in combination with this prediction is a tautology. That is, each model is logically coherent; each model consists of a set of assumptions and a set of predictions that are logically implied by the set of assumptions.

Of course, for any sociologist interested in building a deductive theory and testing the predictions of such a theory, for the entire theory (including assumptions and predictions) to be tautological is desirable. This type of tautology does not preclude the predictions from being empirically falsifiable because the assumptions never provide a perfect and complete description of reality (i.e., the if-conditions are never met). On the other hand, it is problematic if a prediction standing alone is a tautology. Such a prediction, unlike the prediction about competition above, could not be empirically falsified.

tural tastes held by people different from themselves. The present analysis of the distancing model demonstrates that Bourdieu's argument about competition for cultural forms is the aggregate-level consequence of the micro-level assumption of aesthetic distancing. Thus, the distancing model captures and clarifies the logic of one of Bourdieu's fundamental arguments.²³

The distancing model also illustrates the consequence of Bourdieu's argument that as a cultural taste becomes widespread, it loses its distinctive power: As the niche, or market (DiMaggio 1987), of a cultural form expands to include more people, the proportion of people in that niche who like the cultural form declines.²⁴

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

I use 1993 General Social Survey (GSS) data to empirically demonstrate that cultural forms occupy niches and to test the predictions derived from the homophily and distancing models concerning competition.

DATA

The 1993 GSS was administered to a national probability sample of 1,606 noninstitutionalized, English-speaking adults living in the contiguous United States; it contained a module on culture (Marsden and Swingle

²³ Recognizing that aesthetic distancing tends to limit the total number of people who like a cultural form but does little to limit increases in the popularity of cultural forms liked by few people suggests that the distancing model may predict less variation across cultural forms in popularity than the homophily model does. Future research should explore this potential difference and empirically test these models' predictions about the popularity of cultural forms.

²⁴ Another implication of the distancing model (and of the homophily model) is consistent with DiMaggio's (1987) arguments concerning market expansion. The number of people in the niche, or market, of a cultural form positively affects the absolute number of people who like the cultural form ($b = .071$; $p < .001$). DiMaggio argues that this result is the reason cultural producers are willing to sacrifice a large portion of a small market to capture a small portion of a large market; in absolute terms, the small portion of the large market is bigger.

1994). Eighteen items report respondents' feelings about 18 types of music.²⁵ Five response choices ranged from "like very much" to "dislike very much." A sixth choice was "don't know much about it." I code the response "like very much" as liking, and I code the other five responses as non-liking.

An additional 14 items report respondents' participation in 14 leisure activities.²⁶ Respondents were asked whether they had participated in that activity within the last 12 months. Available responses were "yes," "no," and "don't know." I code "yes" as liking, "no" as non-liking, and "don't know" as missing.

Three items report television viewing habits. Respondents were asked how often they watched three different categories of television show.²⁷ Available responses were "every day," "several times a week," "several times a month," "rarely," "never," and "don't know." I code "every day" as liking, "several times a week," "several times a month," "rarely," and "never" as non-liking,

and "don't know" as missing. I use the variables age and years of education to define a two-dimensional social space.²⁸

NICHES

METHODS. GSS data document that different cultural forms occupy different niches in sociodemographic space. The homophily and distancing models are general: Neither model distinguishes among different categories of cultural forms, such as musical tastes, leisure activities, and television viewing. Therefore, I combine all 35 cultural forms into a single analysis. The empirical test for niches is the same as the test conducted with the simulated data. I estimate a polytomous-response logistic regression model with the form of equation 6. Three parameters are estimated for each of 34 logits, but their values are not important for determining whether cultural forms occupy niches. Niches are indicated if the model that includes the effects of age and education fits better than the model that includes only the intercepts.

RESULTS. Again, the statistic of interest is G , -2 times the natural logarithm of the ratio of the likelihood of the reduced model to the likelihood of the full model. The value of this statistic is 1,879.²⁹ With 68 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected at the $p < .001$ level. This result demonstrates that *different cultural forms occupy different niches in sociodemographic space*.

COMPETITION

METHODS. I analyze the GSS data for patterns implied by the two types of competition identified above—among cultural forms for people and among people for cultural forms. To test for competition among cultural forms for people, I use ordinary least squares regression to see if the number of

²⁵ The 18 types of music are: (1) big band/swing; (2) bluegrass; (3) country/western; (4) blues or rhythm and blues; (5) Broadway musicals/show tunes; (6) classical music-symphony and chamber; (7) folk music; (8) gospel music; (9) jazz; (10) Latin/mariachi/salsa; (11) mood/easy listening; (12) new age/space music; (13) opera; (14) rap music; (15) reggae; (16) contemporary pop/rock; (17) oldies rock; (18) heavy metal.

²⁶ The 14 leisure activities are: (1) Attend an amateur or professional sports event; (2) visit an art museum or gallery; (3) make art or craft objects such as pottery, woodworking, quilts, or paintings; (4) go to an auto, stock-car, or motorcycle race; (5) go camping, hiking, or canoeing; (6) grow vegetables, flowers, or shrubs in a garden; (7) go to a live ballet or dance performance, not including school performances; (8) go to a classical music or opera performance, not including school performances; (9) go hunting or fishing; (10) take part in a music, dance, or theatrical performance; (11) participate in any sports activity such as softball, basketball, swimming, golf, bowling, skiing, or tennis; (12) go out to see a movie in a theater; (13) record a TV program so you could watch it later; (14) play a musical instrument like a piano, guitar, or violin.

²⁷ The three categories of television show are: (1) prime-time drama or situation comedy programs; (2) world or national news programs; (3) programs shown on public television.

²⁸ Individuals who have a missing value for age, years of education, or any of the 35 cultural forms are eliminated from the analysis. The empirical analysis is based on the remaining 1,542 observations.

²⁹ The number of observations is 13,422—the sum of the number of cultural forms individuals like.

Table 6. OLS Coefficients Testing for Competition in 1993 GSS Data

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	
	Proportion of Cultural Forms Person Likes ^a	Proportion of People Who Like Cultural Form ^b
Intercept	.365*** (.012)	-.259 (.210)
Number of cultural forms overlapping person's position in social space	-.002*** (.000)	—
Number of people in cultural form's niche	—	.0005* (.0002)
R ²	.019	.172
Number of cases	1,539 ^c	35

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

^a Unit of analysis is the person. A negative coefficient indicates competition among cultural forms for people.

^b Unit of analysis is the cultural form. A negative coefficient indicates competition among people for cultural forms.

^c Three people are located outside the niche of each of the 35 cultural forms. Therefore, the dependent variable is undefined for these three observations ($1,542 - 3 = 1,539$).

* $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

cultural forms with niches overlapping a person's position in social space negatively affects the proportion of those cultural forms the person likes. To test for competition among people for cultural forms, I see if the number of people in the niche of a cultural form negatively affects the proportion of those people who like the cultural form.³⁰

RESULTS. Table 6 presents the results of my empirical test for competition among cultural forms for people. The coefficient is negative ($b = -.002$). This result suggests that *cultural forms compete with each other for people: The number of cultural forms with niches overlapping a person's position*

³⁰ Niches are defined as in the analysis of the simulated data. With the GSS data, the value for w is 1.4. An appendix available from the author on request describes the determination of w 's value.

in social space negatively affects the proportion of those cultural forms the person likes. This result supports the predictions of both the homophily and distancing models.³¹

Table 6 also presents the results of my empirical test for competition among people for cultural forms. The coefficient is positive ($b = .0005$). This result suggests that *people do not compete with each other for cultural forms: The number of people in the niche of a cultural form positively affects the proportion of those people who like the cultural form.* This result disconfirms the prediction of the distancing model and supports the homophily model's prediction of a local bandwagon effect.

DISCUSSION

Recent analyses show that the number of cultural forms people like is related to education, occupation, and having highbrow cultural taste (Peterson 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996). My study does not offer an explanation for this relationship; however, ideas underlying this study, especially the homophily model's time constraints assumption in combination with the fact that a day is 24 hours long regardless of a person's level of education, lead us to ask interesting questions about how this relationship could exist. How do high-status people have time to maintain more cultural tastes than do people of lower status? Do people of lower status spend more time in activities that some views exclude from the realm of "cul-

³¹ The R² from the estimation of this model is very small. Three additional facts should be kept in mind when considering the significance of the empirical support for this hypothesis. First, there are three reasons a substantial portion of the variance in the dependent variable could not be accounted for even if real-world cultural processes were completely consistent with the core arguments of the homophily model or the distancing model: (1) The models and their predictions about competition are stochastic, not deterministic; (2) many cultural forms and other entities that compete for people's time and energy have been excluded from the analysis because of data limitations; (3) sociodemographic space is a crude approximation of the real social networks through which cultural tastes and practices are transmitted, and rectangles are crude approximations of the real shapes of cultural niches.

ture" (e.g., paid employment, unpaid domestic labor, transportation) or in cultural activities that are underrepresented in surveys used to measure the number of cultural forms people like?³² Or do people of high status spread their time more thinly across a larger number of cultural forms than do people of lower status?

CONCLUSION

Six methodological and substantive goals are achieved by the project.

EXPLAINS AN IMPORTANT FINDING

The formal models that I develop are notable because of the substantive importance of the finding they explain. This finding is important on two levels. First, that different kinds of people have different cultural tastes and practices is a fundamental characteristic of the social world. Explaining this familiar fact improves our understanding of it. Second,

Second, while much prior research on cultural taste and practice has explained larger proportions of the variance in a number of variables, this study explains a very small proportion of the variance in a variable that no prior research has explored. This variable is important to examine given influential theoretical ideas about competition among cultural forms (J. Blau 1989; Bourdieu [1979] 1984; DiMaggio 1987; Mark 1998a; Swidler 1986).

Third, the purpose of this analysis is not to obtain a regression model with estimated coefficients that would predict for a given person the proportion of cultural forms with niches including that person's position in social space that the person likes. For this purpose, a regression model with a very small R^2 would be useless. The purpose of the empirical analysis is to test theory—to determine whether there is empirical evidence of competition among cultural forms for people. Finding evidence of this type of competition is difficult because of the practical reasons noted above and because there are processes that affect cultural taste and practice that operate in the natural world that are not incorporated in the homophily model or the distancing model. Finding any statistically significant evidence of such competition in a nationally representative sample is important and hopefully will encourage future research on the topic.

³²Cultural activities engaged in disproportionately by people of lower status may be under-

cultural differences perpetuate other forms of social differentiation, especially economic inequality (Bourdieu [1979] 1984).

It is also important to note two strengths common to both models' explanations for this finding. First, although the GSS data limited the analysis to a cross-sectional empirical test, the homophily and distancing models offer dynamic explanations for this finding. The location of different cultural tastes in social space changes over time. This implication is consistent with arguments about the social construction of cultural hierarchy (DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Levine 1988). Second, given that cultural niches were absent from the initial condition of the simulation analysis, the analysis demonstrated that each model offers an explanation not only for the perpetuation of a dynamic pattern of cultural niches, but for the *emergence* of cultural niches in a system where cultural tastes are initially evenly distributed across social space.

CLARIFIES ECOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS ABOUT CULTURE

Although sociologists of culture rarely discuss ecological processes explicitly, the concept of competition is frequently used to illuminate cultural processes. This project identified three different ecologies implicit in sociologists' arguments about culture and competition: (1) competition among cultural forms for people; (2) competition among people for cultural forms; (3) competition among cultural forms for people and among people for cultural forms. Clarification of these ecological arguments permits identification of corresponding sociodemographic patterns of cultural taste that can be ob-

represented in survey instruments because these instruments are developed by people of higher-than-average education and status. Even if cultural forms preferred by people of lower status are not more likely to be completely omitted from survey instruments, if people make finer distinctions between cultural forms with which they are more familiar, cultural forms preferred by people of lower status may be more likely to be grouped together in broad categories, lowering counts of number of cultural forms liked by people of lower status relative to the corresponding counts for people of higher status.

served in survey data, making empirical evaluation of these arguments possible.

IDENTIFIES CONFLICTING PREDICTIONS

Faced with two different explanations for the finding that different kinds of people like different kinds of culture, I began exploring differences between testable implications of these explanations (Mayhew 1984). Computer simulations identify conflicting predictions implied by the two models. The distancing model predicts that people compete for cultural forms: The number of people in the niche of a cultural form negatively affects the proportion of those people who like that cultural form. In contrast, the homophily model predicts a local bandwagon effect: The number of people in the niche of a cultural form positively affects the proportion of those people who like that cultural form. This difference is not obvious and is unlikely to have been revealed by an informal treatment. Identifying this difference not only permits us to empirically distinguish the two models, but pushes us to seek an explanation that accounts for and simplifies our understanding of a larger number of empirical findings.

LOGICALLY CONNECTS AESTHETIC DISTANCING AND COMPETITION FOR DISTINCTION

Discovering that the distancing model predicts that people compete for cultural forms clarifies the logical relationship between two of Bourdieu's ([1979] 1984) central arguments—that people engage in aesthetic distancing, and that people compete for cultural forms. My simulation analysis showed that the aggregate-level implication of aesthetic distancing is competition among people for cultural forms. As a larger and more diverse set of individuals comes to like a cultural form, the probability increases that a person who likes the cultural form will meet a dissimilar person who also likes the cultural form. The popularity of a cultural form is limited by the process of negative social influence, and the limiting effect of negative social influence increases with the popularity of the cultural form. Thus, people compete for cultural forms.

Bourdieu describes the same process with different terminology. A cultural form is useful because it distinguishes people who like it from people who do not. As more different kinds of people come to like a cultural form, its distinctive power is used up; the cultural form is no longer as attractive to people and its popularity levels off or begins to decline.

DISCOVERS EMPIRICAL PATTERNS

Analysis of GSS data provides new evidence of two patterns, discovery of which would have been unlikely without the aid of theory that predicted them. First, the number of cultural forms with niches overlapping at a person's position in social space negatively affects the proportion of those cultural forms that the person likes (i.e., there is competition among cultural forms for people). Second, the number of people in the niche of a cultural form positively affects the proportion of those people who like the cultural form (i.e., there is a local bandwagon effect).

EMPIRICALLY TESTS CONFLICTING PREDICTIONS

The distancing model predicts that people compete for cultural forms, but the homophily model predicts the opposite—a local bandwagon effect. The empirical finding of a local bandwagon effect supports the homophily model and disconfirms the distancing model's prediction. Thus, this study finds greater support for the homophily model than for the distancing model. However, any conclusion that the homophily model is superior to the distancing model as an explanation for sociodemographic patterns of cultural taste would be premature for at least three reasons. First, the empirical test is based on only 35 cultural forms—18 types of music and 17 leisure activities. Examining a different set of cultural forms might find greater support for the distancing model or find evidence contrary to the predictions of both models. Second, the empirical analysis is limited in time and space; the data reflect cultural patterns in one society (the United States) in one year (1993). Data collected in a different society and/or at a different time might give different results. Third, I empirically tested only one pair of

conflicting predictions from the homophily and distancing models. For other not-yet-identified pairs of conflicting predictions, the distancing model's prediction might be empirically confirmed and the homophily model's prediction might be disconfirmed. Nevertheless, given that every empirical test is particularistic in some respect, the empirical contribution made by this paper's critical test is notable.

The most important lesson to take from the results here may not be about which of the two arguments is better in isolation, but about what the best synthesis of these two arguments may need to account for. The logic of aesthetic distancing tells us that because a person cannot reject cultural tastes to which he or she has not been exposed, aesthetic distancing will occur locally and cannot extend beyond the horizon of social visibility (Friedkin 1983). My finding of a local bandwagon effect rather than competition for cultural forms suggests that exposure to cultural forms in the contemporary United States is sufficiently structured that the effects of homophily and time constraints dominate sociodemographic patterns of taste at the societal level. At a lower level of aggregation where patterns of exposure may be more homogeneous, aesthetic distancing may dominate, and competition for cultural forms may be observed. Of course, future research is needed to develop and empirically test these and other implications of homophily and aesthetic distancing. Hopefully, the results of the present study contribute to the foundation on which that future research will build.

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