

# High Culture and Popular Culture

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will explore the following topics of sociology:

1. High Culture Vs. Popular Culture
2. Pierre Bourdieu

## 1. HIGH CULTURE VS. POPULAR CULTURE

**High culture** is the consumption patterns, mannerisms, beliefs, amusement, leisure activities, and tastes and preferences of a society's elite. Society's elite is defined as those with advanced education or economic success.

**Popular culture**, or low culture, is the same set of attributes, but for the mass of society--mass society's consumption patterns, mannerisms, beliefs, amusements, leisure activities, and tastes and preferences.

### IN CONTEXT

Do you listen to jazz, classical, bluegrass, R&B, hip hop, or country? Perhaps you listen to some of them and not others, or perhaps all the above.

Jazz and classical are typically considered high culture musical tastes, whereas country, hip hop and R&B are considered more popular culture. If you listen to mainstream 'top 40' popular culture radio, you're not likely to find any jazz, classical, or bluegrass. You will, however, find R&B, hip hop, country, and rock and roll, etc., because these are historically popular cultural amusements.



### THINK ABOUT IT

Have you been to an IHOP, Applebee's, Chili's, Olive Garden, Famous Dave's, or any other chain restaurant in the last year? Or do you prefer small chef-owned restaurants serving items like foie gras, escargot, oysters, bone marrow, and scallops? Which option do you think appeals to popular culture, and which appeals to high culture?

The majority of Americans tend to eat at the chain restaurants. People with high cultural capital, on the other hand, tend to prefer the smaller chef-owned restaurants serving exotic foods.

It's important to note that high culture is not inherently better than popular culture. High culture does, however, exclude the mass of society. Oftentimes in order to participate in high culture, you need to have a certain amount of economic success. Similarly, people with a high degree of economic success like to consume these things because it gives the appearance of success and power. And at the same time, high cultural pursuits exclude the rest of society who can't afford to consume these things.



#### BIG IDEA

High culture isn't necessarily better than popular culture, but it does act as a means of excluding the popular culture, and it also makes a statement about the status of people who partake in high culture. Of particular interest to sociologists is how people use high and low culture this way, to set up boundaries with other people, and to make statements about themselves--"This is who I am, this is who I'm not."



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### High Culture

The consumption patterns, mannerisms, beliefs, amusements, leisure activities, and tastes and preferences society's elite.

##### Popular Culture

The consumption patterns, mannerisms, beliefs, amusements, leisure activities, and tastes and preferences of the mass of society.

## 2. PIERRE BOURDIEU

A famous sociologist, anthropologist and social scientist named Pierre Bourdieu was known for studying how class position relates to people's tastes and consumption preferences. Bourdieu studied how a person's subjective meanings, thoughts, and beliefs relate to broad structures, such as class.

In his book *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, a noted social scientific text, Bourdieu outlines his theory of how people internalize their class positions--the one they're born into--at a very young age. This, then, structures their tastes and preferences for life. He called this a habitus.



#### SUMMARY

Today you learned about the difference between **high culture** and **popular culture**. You also learned about the theories of sociologist and anthropologist **Pierre Bourdieu**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### High Culture

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**Popular Culture**

The consumption patterns, mannerisms, beliefs, amusements, leisure activities, and tastes and preferences of the mass of society.