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# How bodies are classed: An analysis of clothing and bodily tastes in Turkey



Irmak Karademir-Hazır

Department of Sociology, Middle East Technical University, Ankara 06800, Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

This article offers a comprehensive analysis of the consumption domains in which bodies are shaped, dressed and cultivated—drawing on surveys and interviews carried out with women in Ankara, Turkey. Use of multiple correspondence analysis reveals the structuring power of cultural capital and class position and unpacks the nation-specific contents of legitimate and popular taste in embodiment practices. Integrating cluster analysis and respondents' accounts, the second part of the article identifies different forms of engagement and restraint, which pertain to varying objective conditions of respondents. By taking these relatively less explored consumption domains as its case, the analysis demonstrates the way that privilege remains embodied, even amidst the “postmodern” body culture. The discussion also contributes to our understanding of class cultures in Turkey because it avoids fitting the stratifications into a tradition–modernity duality, which, as Kandiyoti (2002) argues, has been the restraining characteristic of Turkish scholarship.

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## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, sociologists have intensely debated cultural resources' role in producing and reproducing material inequalities. Especially after the translation of Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction* to English and the “cultural turn” in class analysis (e.g., Devine and Savage, 2000, 2005; Gaynor et al., 2001; Lawler, 2005), the number of studies that empirically explored the patterning of cultural tastes and practices has increased dramatically. This growing interest has yielded fresh discussions about the current relevancy of univore legitimate taste (e.g., Bellavance, 2008; Ollivier, 2008; Peterson and Kern,

E-mail addresses: [irmakka@metu.edu.tr](mailto:irmakka@metu.edu.tr), [irmakkarademir@yahoo.com](mailto:irmakkarademir@yahoo.com).

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1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Warde et al., 2007, 2008) and about cultural distinction's explanatory power outside France (e.g., Daloz, 2009; Holt, 1998; Lamont, 1992; LiPuma, 1995). These debates have added new notions to the Bourdieusian framework—as they highlight the changing indicators of legitimate taste, variance among consumption fields' significance and coexistence of moral and cultural boundaries. Yet even the most critical evaluations of cultural capital theory have acknowledged the continuing impact of cultural resources in maintaining, expressing and reproducing class identities.

Unfortunately, these insightful discussions disproportionately draw on the empirical investigation of certain cultural fields. Although more comprehensive studies (e.g., Bennett et al., 1999, 2009; Prieur et al., 2008; Roose et al., 2012) have taken various cultural domains in their analysis of social structuring of lifestyles in particular national contexts, the more focused ones have tended to take music (Bryson, 1996; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007a; Katz-Gerro et al., 2007; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Savage, 2006; Savage and Gayo, 2011) and art (e.g., Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007b; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; Glynn et al., 1996; Silva, 2006a) as fields in which to explore the dynamics of cultural appreciation. Moreover, our knowledge about the workings of cultural capital has been limited to the dynamics in certain national contexts because there has been little contribution to these debates from the developing world.

This article aims to fill these gaps in the literature by taking Turkish consumption as a case that potentially differs in many respects from Euro-American contexts. Especially after the establishment of the new republic, the Turkish state adopted Westernisation and secularisation policies that fostered high value for what are considered as European cultural forms (see Section 3). The dissemination of new policies had its boundaries, particularly favouring the fractions that were materially and mentally closer to the agendas of modernisation. While this hierarchy continues to be effective, many factors such as globalisation, economic liberalism, rural-to-urban migration and the capital accumulation of religious fractions have turned the “cultural” domain into a much more dynamic battlefield today. Exploring the current complexity of embodied class-cultural distinctions in Turkey will require us to critically rethink some of the established tensions between the qualities that characterise cultural forms—such as local/global, traditional/modern or secular/religious. It will also generate insights into the extent to which familiar conceptual tools allow us to grasp the current class-cultural mechanisms as well as social change under such a dynamic national context. The present research is also contributive in the sense that it explores consumption domains in which bodies are shaped and cultivated, a domain that has not yet received specific interest from researchers who deploy Bourdieusian concepts. The analysis investigates to what extent and in what ways cultural capital and class structure the embodiment tastes and practices of a sample of Turkish women. In other words, it questions whether we can speak of a legitimate form of embodiment in a period when bodily appearances have come to be seen as the main sites of reflexive “identity projects”. The analysis draws on detailed quantitative and qualitative data gathered for this specific purpose and employs multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) and cluster analysis to visually unravel the patterns.

After exploring the theoretical and empirical debates on (de)classed embodiment practices and specifying the socio-historical peculiarities of the Turkish case in the first two sections, the article will proceed to the interpretation of the oppositions that appear in MCA space. The analysis shows us that that occupational class position and cultural capital structure the level, type and consistency of engagement. Then, using cluster analysis, the article identifies patterns that unravel different forms of engagement and restraint. In-depth interviews further qualify these patterns in relation to understandings of bodily need and definitions of good taste in clothing, and they illustrate how interviewees' notions regarding the appropriate ways of delineating modernity, religiosity and femininity through their dressed bodies differ among clusters. The conclusion reemphasises the need to recognise the class-based hierarchies within embodiment patterns and highlights the contribution that this analysis makes to our understanding of class cultures in Turkey.

## 2. Cultural legitimacy in embodiment practices

Embodiment practices refer to practices undertaken to maintain, modify, adorn and cultivate our bodies. The dynamics behind people's engagement with these bodily consumption domains have been

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