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The social distinction in having domestic versus foreign favorite music artists



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ABSTRACT

Music can be used as a group-specific symbol to express social position and mark group boundaries. It is unknown, however, to what extent the divide between domestic and foreign music is used as a marker of social position, despite the relevance of this dimension in the discussion on esthetic cosmopolitanism and cultural globalization. In this contribution, we examine to what extent people have domestic versus foreign music artists as their favorites and to what degree this is stratified by the educational level and social class of the father and of the respondents themselves, while accounting for different genres and the language in which artists perform. Father's education level was (negatively) related to the likelihood to have domestic favorite music artists. Nevertheless this effect was overruled by the respondent's educational level. The higher one's own educational level and social class, the less likely one is to have domestic favorite artists, even when controlling for genre and the language artists use when performing. This provides evidence for the existence of a domestic versus foreign divide in the consumption of music in addition to high-, and lowbrow culture.

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1. Introduction

There is an upward trend in the popularity of domestic music artists since the late 1980s in many Western countries, regardless of increasing economic interdependencies and growing flows of foreign

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imports, which provide alternatives to domestically produced goods and culture (Frith, 2004; Achterberg et al., 2011). In the Netherlands, the focus of our study, Dutch music has become increasingly popular between 1990 and 2005 and has even replaced Anglo-American (pop) music to some extent (Hitters and Van de Kamp, 2010). The Dutch House of Representatives voted in favor of a 35% quota for Dutch-language music on public radio broadcaster (June 30, 2011, voting results House of Representatives), an initiative from the Dutch radical right Party for Freedom. This proposal fits a wider surge of protectionist measures proposed by radical right-wing parties in Europe (Norris, 2005; Kriesi et al., 2008). In contrast to views on cultural globalization that expect that cultural goods will more and more resemble those from dominant markets (often labeled homogenization or Americanization), that expect a diversification of cultural goods, or a mixing of domestic and international cultures, creating new, hybrid cultural forms and products (i.e. hybridization), the trend of increasing popularity of Dutch music seems to support the idea of neonationalist cultural resistance against cultural globalization. Especially as Dutch music is increasingly sung in the native tongue (Achterberg et al., 2011). The relevance of the division between national(istic) and international or cosmopolitan orientations is also marked by the focus on esthetic cosmopolitanism: the openness to cultural experiences from other nations (e.g. Regev, 2007, 2011; Szerszynski and Urry, 2002). Music is particularly relevant to this debate as it can be used as a group-specific symbol to distinguish one's own (national) group and to express social position because of its pervasive presence in everyday life (Coulangeon, 2005) and cultural and communicative functions (Bryson, 1996). Nevertheless, despite the global-local dialectic and the upward trend in the popularity of domestically produced music, the study of social distinctions remains underexposed in the consumption of nationally produced music versus music from foreign countries. In this contribution, we examine the stratification of this dimension, by looking at the likelihood of having domestic versus foreign music artists as favorites.

One of the central issues in previous research on musical taste and cultural consumption has been the distinction between the taste for elite/highbrow and popular/lowbrow genres as a marker of social position (Bourdieu, 1984), or on the combinations of these genres (omnivore) as opposed to a lowbrow univore taste (Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992). This divide is expected to “contrast the proclivity of the upper classes for elite music, i.e. classical music, opera and, to some extent, jazz, with the working classes' preference for popular genres, i.e. pop music, rock, rap, dance music, etc.” (Coulangeon and Lemel, 2007, p. 95). Family background and individuals' own socio-economic characteristics are considered as key factors in predicting people's participation in (high) culture (Bourdieu, 1984; Van Eijck, 1997; Purhonen et al., 2011). Katz-Gerro et al. (2007) have recently shown that the father's status is positively associated with the taste for classical music, blues, jazz, opera, and therefore highbrow music. Van Eijck (2001, p. 1164) mentions that “level of education and family background are the best predictors of participation in the arts”, indicating “socialization as a major predictor of cultural consumption”. We study to what extent higher social strata differ from lower social strata in their likelihood of having domestic versus foreign favorite music artists while controlling for the genre in which the artists perform. Moreover, we control for the language used by artists because cultural expressions in foreign languages may be more complex (Berlyne, 1970; Ganzeboom, 1984; North and Hargreaves, 1995), and because domestic music artists performing in a foreign language may be regarded as a rather explicit form of hybrid culture, with the distinction between domestic and foreign music being more explicit when origin and language coincide. Our research questions are: To what extent are people (whose fathers)¹ with privileged social positions less likely to have domestic favorite artists than respondents (whose fathers) with less privileged social positions? And to what degree do the differences between social positions in the likelihood to have domestic favorite artists persist when taking into account the genre and language used by the artist?

2. Theories

With the ongoing trend of interdependencies between countries in every domain, the conflict between people with nationalist orientations and cosmopolitan orientations has deepened (Norris,

¹ We have insufficient information on the mother's socio-economic status in our study. We therefore refer to the father's, even though we do not mean to suggest that the father's social position alone affects respondents' cultural consumption.

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