

Sounding Habitus: An Interdisciplinary Study on the Factors Influencing Musical Preferences

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Abstract. This paper employs Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' as a theoretical framework to scrutinize the multifaceted elements that influence musical preferences and inclinations in individuals. Drawing from an interdisciplinary approach, this study weaves historical accounts with empirical analyses conducted on scholarly articles primarily in sociology and educational studies. It seeks to explore how the constitutive factors of habitus, specifically education, Social Class Background, Cultural Background, and Ideology, affect one's taste in music. The paper argues that these variables are not merely incidental but play an integral role in shaping a person's musical predilections. Through a detailed examination of academic literature and historical contexts, the study further contends that understanding the complex web of these contributing factors can offer profound insights into not just musical tastes but also social hierarchies and cultural legitimacies. The findings aim to contribute to the existing discourse in both sociology of music and educational theory, offering a nuanced perspective on how identity is musically constructed and socially embedded.

Keywords: Pierre Bourdieu, Habitus, Musical, Preferences, Social Class, Cultural Background, Ideology, Identity Construction.

1. Introduction

The complexities of human musical taste and preferences have long been a subject of interest across various disciplines, yet their intricate relationship with social structures is often overlooked. It is within this context that this paper employs the concept of 'habitus'—a term coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu[1]—to dissect how individuals' and groups' routine behaviors, attitudes, and tastes in music are influenced by various social factors. In doing so, this study aims to contribute a nuanced mechanism for understanding the social underpinnings of musical preferences. Moreover, it serves as an analytical tool for observing how social groups form and sustain relationships through shared musical tastes.

Central to this study is Bourdieu's notion that habitus is shaped by a multitude of disparate factors, such as education, social class background, cultural background, and ideology. Departing from these dimensions, this paper will provide a comprehensive analysis through the lens of sociology of music, employing a combination of historical literature, sociological theories, and scholarly articles.

By undertaking this multifaceted exploration, the paper aspires to enrich the existing literature, providing deeper insights into how social variables shape and are shaped by musical predilections.

2. What is Habitus? Why is It Important to Music Taste and Preferences?

Habitus is a concept introduced by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, mainly detailed in his book "Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste"[1]. In simple terms, habitus is like a set of unconscious rules and habits that influence how we act, what we like, and the decisions we make. These rules are often shaped by multiple factors like our family background, education, and culture. Bourdieu developed this idea primarily to address two major questions: The first is how to understand the relationship between individuals and society, and the second is to explain the interaction between culture and power.

In the field of sociology, habitus serves as an incredibly useful tool. It helps us understand why certain social and cultural phenomena, like inequality or specific cultural preferences, persist over time. The concept has also found applications in other disciplines, such as anthropology and education studies.

Investigating how habitus influences both individual and collective musical preferences carries significant academic and practical implications. First and foremost, this research topic offers a critical entry point into the interdisciplinary field bridging Musicology and Sociology. It facilitates a more nuanced understanding of music as a multifaceted social and cultural phenomenon. Secondly, the research contributes to our comprehension of social structures and community formation. It elucidates how music serves as a medium for social connection, potentially fostering or sustaining social relationships. From the perspective of the interplay between individual and society, this study provides a methodological framework for observing and explaining how social factors—such as education, social class, cultural background and ideology—shape and are mirrored in an individual's musical preferences.

3. Habitus and Its Influence on Music Taste and Preferences

Habitus, as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu, significantly influences individual tastes and biases, operating deeply within the intersections of education, cultural background, personal history, and ideology. It's essential to unpack each of these pillars to understand the profound effect habitus has on shaping our musical tastes and inherent biases.

3.1. Education

In Pierre Bourdieu's "Distinction," the profound impact of one's educational background on their knowledge, understanding, values, and choices is emphasized. Within music, when an individual undergoes intensive training or is heavily exposed to a particular style or genre in an academic environment, their education naturally shapes their music appreciation and understanding. This alignment often makes their musical tastes resonate more with their education. Therefore, an individual's educational background shapes the depth and breadth of their knowledge, encompassing their comprehension and appreciation of music. For example, well-educated individuals may have opportunities to learn about and appreciate various styles of music, such as classical music, jazz, and even folk music from around the world. This educational experience may guide them to develop broad and diverse music tastes. Masafumi Ogawa notes that universities nationwide predominantly emphasize Western art music in their graduation concert programs and curricula.[2] As of 1993, out of 443 music faculty members in fifty education schools across the country, the vast majority teach Western music. Only a handful specialize in Japanese traditional music or ethnomusicology.[2] Consequently, students graduating from these institutions primarily impart Western music education in public schools. This pattern perpetuates a Western music bias in the educational system that has persisted for over a century. Therefore, it's crucial to recognize that the education system itself might harbor inherent biases that could shape students' perceptions. For example, suppose a school's curriculum or teaching methods lean towards a particular culture or musical style. In that case, students might prefer this style and develop misconceptions or biases towards other cultures or musical styles.

A clear example can be seen in the influence of early German Nazis, which led many people in the music learning process to view German classical music as the most noble, especially music from Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. In Tomas Turino's Music mentioned in his book, that the Germans take pride in their musical heritage, especially the contributions of the "three Bs" - Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms.[3] This pride, broadly defined under the Nazis, became a source of national and racial pride, crucial for the nationalist movement. In 1938, Joseph Goebbels hailed music as a gem of German cultural heritage. During the Nazi era, the government-funded international tours of German orchestras aimed to showcase their artistic superiority and counter-accusations of savagery against

the regime. The Nazi era's exaltation and spread of German classical music to some extent shaped the modern perception of classical music as a noble art. The policies of this period emphasized the superiority of German classical music, and this high regard for classical music has in some way continued to this day, many schools continue to teach students that the most noble form of music is classical music, and German classical music is particularly precious. This profoundly impacts people's perception and appreciation of classical music, leading to a perception of music outside the classical genre as being less sophisticated or establishing a relationship of inequality.

The extreme importance of education also stems from the fact that, as Paul W. Kingston, Ryan Hubbard, Brent Lapp, Paul Schroeder, Julia Wilson wrote in "Why Education Matters"[4], new Marxism and other conflict theories argue that schools essentially reproduce the social stratification system, and apparent educational effects actually reflect the influence of social classes. To support this point, advocates describe a two-step process: economic status (starting point) is strongly correlated with educational achievement, which is in turn tightly linked to subsequent economic status (endpoint). In short, they argue that social class affects an individual's educational opportunities and achievements, and these educational achievements determine the individual's future economic status, forming a continuous process of social class reproduction. Thus, class background also factors into how habitus affects music taste and racial bias.

3.2. Social Class Background

In Koen van Eijck's "Social Differentiation in Musical Taste Patterns"[5], he describes the influence of social class, age, and educational level on music preferences. Classical music, such as symphonies, opera, and chamber music, is generally appreciated by older members of higher social status groups, their tastes often centered around refined classical music discourse. Popular music, such as pop music, disco, and top 40 hits, usually make up the music repertoire of younger people without higher education, their tastes often centered around pop music discourse. For popular music genres, such as emotional Dutch songs, folk, blues, accordion music, etc., they often attract older members of lower social status groups, their tastes often centered around folk music discourse.

From the perspective of cultural capital, this passage emphasizes how music tastes reflect and shape an individual's status in society. Cultural capital is a concept put forth by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to describe the knowledge, skills, and education possessed by an individual or family, abilities that can be transformed into economic and social advantages through social interaction. In this example of music taste, the preferences of different social groups for different types of music reflect their cultural capital. For older members of higher social status groups, their cultural capital might include a deep understanding and appreciation of classical music, knowledge and skills likely obtained from long-term education and training. Typically, people of higher social status tend to have higher levels of education. They might be exposed to and learn more about classical music in schools or other educational environments. This educational background could make them more capable of understanding and appreciating the complexity and depth of classical music. Also, classical music was historically an art form primarily provided to the upper class. When they enjoy classical music, they not only enjoy the music itself, but also display their cultural refinement and social status. This taste for classical music becomes their cultural capital, capable of earning them respect and recognition in social interactions.

3.3. Cultural Background

Cultural background plays a significant role in shaping one's "habitus", greatly influencing our musical tastes. One's cultural background dictates the type of music to which they are exposed, subsequently shaping their musical preferences. For instance, if an individual grows up in an environment where rock music is prevalent, they might develop a preference for rock. Conversely, if one's cultural background is heavily immersed in classical music, that person may lean more towards that genre. Race is a key pillar of culture, as it often correlates with specific cultural, communal, and historical experiences that shape an individual's habitus. However, it's crucial to understand that race

itself doesn't directly determine an individual's musical taste. Like other cultural elements, race is just one of many factors that contribute to an individual's musical habitus. In works like Kesha M. Morant's "Language in Action: Funk Music as the Critical Voice of a Post—Civil Rights Movement Counterculture"[6], it's noted that genres such as gospel, soul, and funk are not only forms of entertainment but also crucial expressions of the historical and experiential narratives of African Americans. These genres encapsulate the struggles, faith, and joy of African Americans. The historical context of this music, including its role during the era of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, forms the foundation of African American musical preferences.

As an element of habitus, cultural background shapes the music which can be perceived both as a tool of protest but also as a positive medium to express personal or group identity and experiences. In this sense, music becomes not just a reaction to the external world, but also a reflection of the internal realm. Through music, individuals and groups can express their emotions, values, and life experiences - integral facets of their identity. This form of expression transcends barriers of language and culture, allowing people the opportunity to understand and appreciate the lived experiences of those from diverse backgrounds. As a vital part of human culture, music can mirror the social and cultural background of an individual or a group. For instance, the folk music of a certain region might incorporate elements of that region's history, geography, customs, and habits. Listeners can, through these elements, gain understanding and experience the cultural ambiance of that region. Karl Neuenfeldt and Kathleen Oien's work, 'Our home, our land... something to sing about': an indigenous music recording as identity narrative[7], delves into the multiplicity of indigenous (and non-indigenous) identities in Australia and how these identities are forged and conveyed within the framework of popular music. The paper suggests that the development of these indigenous identities is usually collaborative but can occasionally be contentious. Recordings and individual indigenous songs are considered vehicles of self-expression, despite their manifestation within the primarily Western aesthetic of popular music. The themes of these songs regularly encompass memories of the past, spatial elements, and cultural aspects, all crucial components of identity. This might include a recollection of the past, a profound affection for the land, and a reverence for and perpetuation of cultural traditions.

3.4. Ideology

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "ideology" refers to a set of beliefs or principles, especially those that serve as the foundation for a political system, party, or organization, which dictates how they understand and interpret the world. Cultural background significantly influences an individual's or group's ideology, as our notions and beliefs are often formed and evolved within our cultural surroundings. For instance, someone living in a society with open, liberal values might adopt a more liberal ideology, displaying tolerance towards a broad range of cultural phenomena and events. Conversely, ideology can also influence and shape culture. When a particular ideology dominates a society or group, it may affect the society's or group's cultural expressions, including art, music, literature, film, etc. If a region's ideology bans a particular type of music through policy, people living in that region may develop an aversion to this music. However, this effect might not always be certain. Prohibiting a certain music could instead stimulate curiosity towards it, possibly evoking a "forbidden fruit effect", making the music more attractive. An ideology might promote or restrict certain types or themes of music. For instance, in some societies, like North Korea and Soviet Union, Although these two belong to different eras and geographical locations, both countries emphasize the centralization of power, with little to no devolution or decentralization. Additionally, the governments in both nations exert strict control over media, education, and other social institutions to reinforce their ideological stance. In that case, music with nationalist themes might be emphasized, while music that advocates rebellion or social criticism might be championed in others. Therefore, music can serve as a tool to propagate or reinforce a specific ideology.

Pauline Fairclough noted that the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) was the most influential group in Soviet musical life between 1928 and 1931.[8] Figures from both the

modernist and conservative camps held disdain for members of RAPM. The association's aggressive publications and statements evoked significant discontent among many musicians and intellectuals. Amidst a tense political and social climate, proletarian groups like RAPM gained tremendous influence through combative lobbying and intimidating strategies, dominating the music scene for a brief period. The RAPM and the Soviet musical culture serve as an apt example of how music ideology can shape individual music tastes. When a music ideology, such as that represented by RAPM, gains prominence in society, it can promote a certain type of music through means like education, broadcasting, and concerts. This extensive exposure can make the general public more receptive to and appreciative of this music, thus molding their musical preferences. Additionally, music ideologies are often interlinked with broader social and political values. In the Soviet Union, music was viewed as a vital tool for enlightening the proletariat. Individuals who share these political values might adjust their musical tastes to align with the community's broader objectives.

4. Discussion

In Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," education, social class background, cultural background, and ideology are intimately interconnected and mutually influencing factors. These elements do not exist in isolation; instead, they interact in complex ways to shape an individual's musical tastes and biases. Ideology serves as a link between education, social class background, and cultural background. People's political beliefs, values, and worldviews form a filter through which they interpret and understand other social and cultural phenomena, including music. Music, as a tool of ideology, can guide individuals towards affection or bias for specific types or styles of music. Adorno's perspective in "Introduction to the Sociology of Music"[9] on how music can serve as a comforting tool, transforming into a disciplinary function, is pertinent. When music brings comfort to people, it acts as a tool of control, allowing them to accept reality without rebelling against it. For instance, the influence of pop music on young audiences emphasizes passionate love, happiness, and optimism while neglecting life's negative emotions and social problems. In this context, the function of music shifts from genuine happiness and joy to an ideology that fosters modern societal integration by providing temporary comfort and masking inner desolation and depletion. This function essentially strengthens a particular ideology through music. Under this specific ideological framework, people's tastes may evolve in line with the musical styles endorsed by society.

To mitigate or avoid the influence of ideology on musical tastes and biases, changes can be made within other elements of habitus, such as education. Firstly, it's essential to broaden the diversity of musical education. Early and higher education in music should encompass various types and styles of music from different cultural, social, and political backgrounds, allowing students to understand and appreciate the richness of music more fully. However, it is essential to give credit to the origins and performers of these various musical forms, avoiding the issue of music appropriation.

Next, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and exchange is necessary. This can be achieved through unbiased interactions with musicians and artists from different cultural backgrounds, fostering an understanding of the diversity and complexity of music. It would help break down any single ideology's influence on musical tastes.

Furthermore, students should be encouraged to think critically. Nurturing critical thinking and analytical skills will enable students to recognize how music may be used as a tool of ideology, and they will learn to evaluate music independently.

Most importantly, both educators and students should continually reflect on their biases and beliefs, and how they might affect their understanding and appreciation of music. Such reflection can help identify and eliminate potential biases.

Overall, these measures can help reduce or prevent the formation of prejudices influenced by ideology, fostering a more open and holistic appreciation of music. Through these concerted efforts, it is possible to shift away from any restrictive ideological confines and towards a more inclusive and understanding approach to musical education.

While the insights presented in the article are valid, it's worth mentioning that the concept of habitus is framed within a specific sociocultural context and may not fully resonate with or be applicable to all cultures and social structures, potentially introducing some nuances or biases. If the article lacks sufficient empirical evidence or data support, then this theoretical analysis may become abstract and difficult to verify. As mentioned in the book "The Quality of Big Data: Development, Problems, and Possibilities of Use of Process-Generated Data in the Digital Age"[10], digital data have a significant drawback in terms of data quality as they do not cover the entire population. Due to the so-called digital divide, not everyone uses the internet, and those who do are structured socially, leading to a selection bias. Since each individual is unique, focusing solely on ideology, education, social class background, and cultural background may overlook other influencing factors, such as individual personality and personal experiences, or broader social trends. As mentioned in the book "The Genetic Basis of Complex Human Behaviors"[11], the research indicates that genetic factors play a critical role in these complex psychological and behavioral traits. Therefore, one's personality could also shape musical tastes and biases, extending the scope of inquiry into the realm of biological genetics. Social structures and cultural norms change over time. The applicability and relevance of the habitus concept and its elements may vary in different historical periods, potentially limiting the universal applicability of the research results. Therefore, this study on how education, cultural background, social class background, and ideology within habitus affect people's taste and bias towards music requires substantial data support; otherwise, data errors may occur, leading to biased research results.

5. Conclusion

The complex interplay between education, social class background, cultural background, and ideology within the concept of habitus is indeed vital in shaping our musical tastes and inherent biases. By unraveling and critically examining each of these pillars, we can begin to understand how they function not in isolation but in a delicate symbiosis, mutually influencing and reinforcing one another. The profound effect of habitus extends far beyond merely defining personal preferences in music. It shapes our understanding and appreciation of music within specific socio-cultural contexts, influencing how we perceive, value, and engage with musical forms. This intricate web of factors within habitus also holds the potential to perpetuate biases, both conscious and unconscious, that may limit our openness to diverse musical expressions. The process of unpacking these elements requires careful examination and reflection, challenging us to confront and question our preconceived notions and prejudices. In doing so, we can work towards a more inclusive, unbiased, and authentic engagement with music across various cultural landscapes. The statement underscores the urgency of exploring the multifaceted nature of habitus to recognize its pervasive influence on our musical orientation. It isn't a mere theoretical exercise but an essential endeavor that has real implications on how we educate, consume, and appreciate music. In the broader context of a globalized world, where cross-cultural interactions are more prevalent than ever, understanding the forces that shape our musical tastes and biases is not only academically enriching but also culturally enlightening. By dissecting the intertwined pillars of habitus, we are not only acknowledging the complexity of our musical preferences but also empowering ourselves to navigate the rich tapestry of global musical traditions with an open mind and heart. The exploration of habitus becomes a pathway towards breaking down barriers and fostering a more holistic and empathetic understanding of the global language of music.

Regarding how habitus influences an individual's musical tastes and biases, future academic research can delve further into deconstructing how various elements within habitus shape musical preferences and prejudices across different cultural, regional, and social structures. Initially, an in-depth study can be conducted into how people from different cultural backgrounds form varying musical tastes through habitus. This may reveal the intrinsic mechanisms of how culture affects musical appreciation. Such research may employ fieldwork from ethnomusicology, living and

engaging with local communities to authentically understand the interplay of local culture and music. Moreover, an analysis of how the modern music industry interacts with ideology, social class, and cultural background, and how these factors influence the production, promotion, and consumption of music can be insightful. Examining music consumption patterns can reveal the most popular and purchasable music in a given society, thereby understanding people's preferences for specific types of music. Furthermore, the study may explore how modern technology changes people's music consumption habits and tastes, and how it may alter or affect the traditional structure of habitus, as modern technology is an indispensable part of social development. In conclusion, the multifaceted exploration of habitus offers a vibrant and nuanced understanding of the forces that shape our musical tastes and biases. By weaving cultural experience, education, social class background, ideology, industry analysis, and technological evolution into the intricate fabric of musical preference, scholars can pave the way for a more comprehensive and inclusive appreciation of music across diverse social landscapes.

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