2

Democracies of Taste Ruled by the Law of Jante? Rudiments of a Nordic Sociology of Consumption

Henri A. Weijo

What do Nordics consume? The simple answer would be to rattle off Nordic culinary staples like rye bread, wild berry sauces, gravlax, and pickled herring, or brand names from product categories like furniture, home electronics, and fashion that exemplify the idea of "Nordic cool." But how do these things relate to one another? What is, say, a hearty reindeer stew compared to an aesthetically spectacular dish in a nouveau Nordic restaurant? What is an IKEA recliner compared to a wooden dinner table from the latest Danish design talent? What is a weekend getaway at a summer cottage compared to one spent in one of the increasingly cosmopolitan Nordic capitals? Furthermore, how do Nordics consume? Is there a way of doing taste that would qualify as distinctly Nordic? For instance, does the undeniably egalitarian and conformist cultural mood of Nordic culture (Berggren and Trägårdh 2010) give a distinct flavor to Nordic consumption practices?

H. A. Weijo (✉)
Aalto University School of Business, Helsinki, Finland
e-mail: henri.weijo@aalto.fi

© The Author(s) 2019

S. Askegaard, J. Östberg (eds.), *Nordic Consumer Culture*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04933-1_2

This chapter explores these "what" and "how" questions by introducing a sociological perspective on Nordic consumption. Sociology of consumption investigates how a society's class and status groups are organized around or through consumption (e.g., Weber 1978; Corrigan 1997; Warde 2015). Such investigations (this chapter is no exception) often build on the theoretical oeuvre of Pierre Bourdieu (Corrigan 1997; Warde 2015; Arnould and Thompson 2018). Within the Bourdieuan analytical tradition, there is a paradigmatic split that maps onto these questions of what and how things are consumed. The greater field of sociology favors large swatches of statistical or survey data and concentrates on what different social classes are wont to consume (e.g., Bryman 1984; Peterson and Simkus 1992). A primary focus in this line of research has been to compare consumption categories in relation to one another to uncover how these categories serve as markers of distinction for different social groups (e.g., DiMaggio 1987; Lamont 1992). Conversely, consumer culture researchers prefer the "how" side of things and have made greater use of methods like ethnography and deep interviews (e.g., Holt 1997; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Arnould and Thompson 2018). I will draw from both analytical traditions to outline what I believe are distinctly Nordic patterns of consumption, concentrating first on the "what" and then on the "how."

The rest of this chapter unfolds as follows. I begin by briefly outlining Bourdieu's sociological approach to the study of consumption. This section also elaborates how Bourdieu's theories have been used to study national taste patterns and relations between consumption categories. The following section builds on these macro-level studies to illuminate what Nordics consume. I will argue that in this regard our region does not differ much from other European countries and regions, save for markedly more omnivorous taste patterns. The subsequent section concentrates on how Nordics consume and explains how the cultural norms of conformity and the ethos of egalitarianism provide a macro backdrop for Nordic consumption praxis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of future research possibilities and speculation on where Nordic taste might be heading next.

Sociology of Consumption and National Patterns of Taste

Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) sociological approach foregrounds endowments of cultural, social, and economic capital (in simplified terms: what you know, who you know, and what you have) as the key determinants of class positions. Bourdieu saw these capital endowments accruing gradually through one's upbringing and resulting in socialized dispositions that make people with similar stocks of capital gravitate toward certain consumption fields over others. In other words, children of similar class backgrounds acquire habituated skills and aesthetic preferences through immersion in similar hobbies, vacation plans, and educational paths all the way up to higher education. For Bourdieu, taste is thus intertwined with societal structures of power, both historically and institutionally. If people with similar stocks of capital do indeed share a homological identification ("birds of a feather flock together"), then this explains, amongst other things, why social classes can appear so rigid across the decades or even the centuries.

Bourdieu's work begat a stream of research on how national and macro-level characteristics produce relational patterns between cultural fields and categories. Many of these investigations have built on DiMaggio's (1987) dimensional framework that he originally developed for categorizing societal patterns for artistic production and consumption. These dimensions have since been further developed within more general and comparative studies of national taste structures (e.g., Lamont 1992; van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010). The dimensions are *differentiation*, *hierarchy*, *universality*, and *strength of symbolic boundaries*. I review each of these and illuminate them with examples from well-known past studies.

Differentiation denotes the heterogeneity of cultural categories and to what degree categories break down into more refined or complex subgenres. Societies with a high degree of differentiation are usually socio-economically and ethnically diverse, offer more and better educational opportunities for their citizens, and have more tolerance for social role divergence (especially relating to sex and gender). Strong differentiation animates cultural production in Britain: the country's post-colonial

immigration flows have spawned a host of subcultures whose field and capital logics do not mimic or become subjugated to those favored by the cultural elites (Gelder 2005). Thornton's (1996) famous study of club cultures illuminated this differentiation: electronic music genres break down into seemingly endless subgenres whose origins can often be traced to ethnic populations and communities (e.g., McLeod 2001). The USA as the proverbial melting pot is similarly diverse in terms of demographics, which supports the fragmentation of taste categories (Lamont 1992; Peterson and Simkus 1992).

Hierarchization means that cultural categories differ in their relative power and prestige, as opposed to being "different but equal." A society with a higher degree of hierarchization usually has a stable or widely shared system for social status, more income inequality, low social mobility, and a smaller and more exclusive political and educational elite. Bourdieu's (1984) study of 1960s France underlined the strict hierarchization of taste structures. For instance, classical music and other forms of "high art" favored by the elites were seen as more prestigious than those favored by the working classes, like folk music or *chansons*. Bourdieu also recounted how French cultural elites and political institutions judiciously reinforced this hierarchization. Differentiation enjoys a reverse correlation with hierarchization: stable taste hierarchies necessitate the type of cultural consensus that is difficult to sustain in diverse societies like the USA (Lamont 1992).

Universality denotes that the citizenry has a shared consensus on the content and relations between cultural categories. Universality thus suggests strong social cohesion, demographic homogeneity, higher social equality, and egalitarian educational opportunities. Quite logically, universality has a strong inverse correlation with differentiation, given the lack of cultural consensus in such societies. Yet, somewhat counterintuitively, universality does not usually support taste hierarchization. For instance, taste structures in Britain reflect the country's deep and historical class divide. As a result, the working classes have embraced a countercultural ethos to taste, which manifests in ignorance and open dismissiveness of the cultural categories favored by the elites, such as classical high culture (Thornton 1996; Bennett et al. 2009). France in the 1960s provides a notable exception, as strong class hierarchies coincided

with relatively strong taste universality (Bourdieu 1984). This was once again a testament to how strongly cultural institutions can structure national patterns of taste.

Lastly, the strength of symbolic boundaries refers to the degree of difficulty for producers and objects to move between cultural categories, and how easily these categories can be contested or reinvented. In other words, strong symbolic boundaries mean that a cultural product from a category sitting at the bottom of the national taste hierarchy cannot shed its category origins, limiting the product's opportunities to gain prestige. Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of France in the 1960s underlined how the cultural elites, institutions, and other taste gatekeepers like cultural critics or the media jealously and systematically guarded the boundaries between symbolic categories. The USA, on the other hand, represents a polar opposite. America is a post-modern consumer culture par excellence—the movement of goods and producers between categories is uninhibited and rapid (Lamont 1992; Holt 1997). For example, a hip-hop artist in America can earn recognition as an artist of true excellence, even if hip-hop otherwise might enjoy less prestige than, say, jazz (van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010). Overall, strong symbolic boundaries have a negative correlation with high differentiation, low hierarchization, and low universality (Lamont 1992).

What Nordics Consume: Nordic Macro-Level Taste Patterns

This section uses the dimensional framework to shed light on Nordic taste patterns. Here I draw mostly from a recent large-scale inquiry into Finnish cultural capital and taste patterns led by a group of Finnish sociologists. The study remains one of the few similar-scale replications of Bourdieu's (1984) project, and certainly the only one conducted in the Nordics (for the final project report, see Purhonen et al. 2014). Spatial limitations prohibit covering all the interesting nuances that the study identified and many of the insights remain unique to the Finnish context. I will highlight issues in the study that I believe have relevance to the entire Nordic region. I will also draw from other studies conducted in the Nordics when appropriate.

Table 2.1 Dimensions of taste structures in selected countries

	France in the 1960s[a]	The USA in the 1980s and 1990s[b]	Britain in the 2000s[c]	Pre-EU Finland[d]	Finland in the 2000s[e]
Differentiation	Neutral	Stronger	Stronger	Weaker	Neutral
Hierarchization	Stronger	Weaker	Neutral	Weaker	Stronger
Universality	Stronger	Weaker	Weaker	Stronger	Neutral
Strength of symbolic boundaries	Stronger	Weaker	Neutral	Stronger	Neutral

[a]Bourdieu (1984)
[b]DiMaggio (1987), Lamont (1992), van Venrooij and Schmutz (2010)
[c]Bennett et al. (2009), Purhonen and Wright (2013)
[d]Mäkelä (1985)
[e]Purhonen et al. (2014)

Mäkelä (1985) had originally dismissed Bourdieu's applicability in the Nordic context. He saw Bourdieu's theories as mostly incompatible with Nordic welfare societies, where demographic homogeneity and a history of egalitarianism deter taste conflict and competition.[1] Some authors had also speculated that pre-European Union (EU) Nordic countries lacked access to consumption objects with which distinctions could be created (combined with higher levels of taxation and income distribution), at least in a truly hierarchical fashion (Østergaard 1997; Rahkonen 2008). Table 2.1 summarizes these differences in taste structures as either stronger, neutral, or weaker tendencies within that particular dimension. I have also included some of the studies mentioned in the previous section to give context to the interpretation (see the notes for sources that have presented similar categorizations). The table reveals a notable shift in Finnish taste patterns, with the most dramatic change taking place in the hierarchization of taste.

Virtanen (2007) writes that contemporary Nordic taste structures do not differ much from their European counterparts. In fact, Nordic marketplaces have in many ways become more globalized than those of other

[1] Rahkonen (2008) speculates that Mäkelä's hostility toward Bourdieu may have also been ideologically motivated. Bourdieu's ideas of rigid and invisible forces creating social division did not jibe well with the strong leftist zeitgeist of the 1980s.

European countries, where local production still enjoys greater preference (e.g., Østergaard 1997; Gottlieb 2004; Kjeldgaard and Östberg 2007; Giddens 2013; Østergaard et al. 2014). These global influences explain the growth in differentiation and the decline in symbolic boundary strength. The simultaneous growth in hierarchization in Finland runs counter to DiMaggio's (1987) model, but I believe this is also consistent with these global influences. For example, Giddens (2013) speculates that globalization has degrading effects on the solidarity and monocultural tendencies of Nordic societies. Other writers argue that growing differentiation and weakening category boundaries are logical consequences of societies becoming more post-modern, at least in the western world (Lamont 1992; Holt 1997; van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010).

Purhonen et al. (2014) singled out two categories where change has been more dramatic than others. The ascendant taste hierarchization was particularly evident in music, which again mapped onto similar trends across the western world (van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010). The strongest change had occurred in food tastes, which had become polarized between modern, ethnic, and light food favored by educated, young, and urban populations, vis-à-vis traditional and hearty food preferred by rural, older, and less educated populations. This revealed a robust hierarchization of food consumption, coupled with stronger symbolic boundaries and an erosion of taste universality. Much of this change can be explained by the drastic increase in variety within the food market following Finland's entry to the EU (Østergaard 1997; Weijo et al. 2018). These changes also align with findings elsewhere highlighting changing Nordic preferences for food due to global influences (Askegaard and Madsen 1998; Kjeldgaard and Östberg 2007; Purhonen and Gronow 2014). They accord too with studies on cosmopolitanism and global nomads that recount growing tensions between local and global tastes (e.g., Bardhi et al. 2012). My own research into the Restaurant Day food culture movement similarly recounted the growing desires of educated, young, urban, and globalist Finns to draw stronger distinctions between "good" and "bad" food in a competitive fashion (Weijo et al. 2018).

Despite these growing similarities to other western countries, the Nordic region remains distinct in one particular area: the pervasiveness of omnivorous taste patterns. Omnivorous consumption was originally

conceptualized as a tendency of certain elite consumer groups in the West to consume across a multitude of cultural categories, anything from the high arts to low popular culture (Peterson and Simkus 1992). Subsequent studies have exposed omnivorousness as a mirage, as omnivorous consumers usually maintain only fleeting and experimental engagements in fields outside their natural taste dispositions (e.g., Holt 1997; Warde et al. 2007). Yet Purhonen et al. (2010, 2014) argue that Nordic omnivorousness is special. It is more pervasive and egalitarian, with all social classes consuming across a variety of cultural categories and in ways that can no longer be considered merely experimental or fleeting (see also Prieur et al. 2008). Virtanen (2007) similarly shows that these omnivorous tendencies are a distinct Nordic trait: the average populational proportion of omnivores in the 15 EU countries under study was 13%, but for Denmark and Finland almost double that (24% and 23%), and for Sweden almost triple (33%). Purhonen et al. (2010) also underline that univores—consumers refusing to venture outside familiar taste categories—were markedly rare in Finland, both among lower classes (to whom univore taste is a way of showing upper-class resentment) as well as elite groups (to whom univore taste is a means for snobbery). This prompts them to speculate that Finland might be a "democracy of taste" (van Eijck and Knulst 2005) because "nowhere else—at least as far as we have more systematic information—are cultural snobs as rare and the all-encompassing omnivorous taste combination as usual as in Finland" (Purhonen et al. 2010, p. 293). Purhonen et al. (2014) similarly write that the omnivore–univore dynamic makes Finland still something of a "monoculture" (Bennett 2007), by which they mean that the entire population consumes from certain taste categories (usually local and traditional, like foods), though not necessarily always in the same way. These omnivore–univore tendencies may thus slow down the decline in taste universality that might otherwise follow growing differentiation and waning symbolic boundaries under postmodernity. The democratic kind of omnivorousness may also explain the recent rise in hierarchization in Finland, as it suggests that the population agrees on which cultural categories enjoy more esteem than others.

The Nordic education system was built on strong egalitarian ideals (Sampson et al. 1994), which disseminate cultural capital more equally amongst the population and promote taste universalism. Virtanen (2007) attributes the higher levels of cultural participation and especially the aversion to both high- and lowbrow distinctions in the Nordics to the countries' high-quality and egalitarian educational systems. Purhonen et al. (2010, 2014) concur that omnivorousness in the Nordics correlates with education levels, though not as strongly as in other regions. Virtanen (2007) also identifies higher state expenditure in subsidizing culture as a key contributor to omnivorousness—the proportional size of cultural budgets in the Nordics is about three times bigger compared to other EU countries, giving even the less well-off at least the opportunity to experience a broader array of taste categories. However, it is clear that the higher classes are usually more likely to take advantage of such state sponsorship. Nordic countries also have more generous budgets for recreational sports, which have been established for similar egalitarian purposes (Kahma 2012). These governmental investments and inclusion in school curricula may explain why Nordics rather universally value leisure reading and recreational sports (Virtanen 2007; Kahma 2012).

The universality of Nordic welfare programs reconfigures their public perceptions and supports taste universalism. Political scientists describe the "paradox of redistribution" as the condition where universal welfare programs—equally available for rich and poor alike—are often the most effective in aiding those they are chiefly intended to, namely the less well-off (Korpi and Palme 1998). The universalism of these programs also ensures their broad political support. This allows for their continuous development and also reduces the stigmatization of service patrons. For example, many public services in the USA, like public transit, carry a risk of stigma because they are considered first and foremost social programs (Stromberg 2015). In the Nordics, a service like public transit is a taken-for-granted part of city infrastructure and a matter of great convenience. You see a similar dynamic of universalist attitudes with libraries: the Nordics are by far the most active library patrons in Europe, and these patterns hold across social classes (Virtanen 2007). This level of popularity in all likelihood could not be maintained without a social consensus on the necessity of these services.

How Nordics Consume: Conformity and Muted Distinctions under the Law of Jante

Holt (1997) writes that the aforementioned classification of taste categories is necessarily limited and, more importantly, often masks important aspects of taste patterns (see also Warde et al. 2007; Atkinson 2011). He underlines that America's egalitarian and populist laissez-faire ethos ensures that everyone is in a sense "entitled" to consume across all cultural categories. Holt's own analysis revealed that the true logic of distinction in America revolves around differences in consumption *practices* across the social classes. This focus on practice over object categories has since become a central linchpin for cultural consumer research in the study of taste and distinction (Arnould and Thompson 2018).

Is there a "how" to Nordic taste practices? After a deep dive into the literature, I believe we can answer in the affirmative, at least tentatively. I identified two distinct features of Nordic taste practices, which I call *the double bind of conformity* and *muted displays of distinction*. I emphasize that they do not illuminate differences between social classes, unlike Holt's (1997) analysis. They work similarly to the aforementioned egalitarian laissez-faire ethos in the USA and provide a macro backdrop for Nordic taste practices. I also emphasize that they are my own interpretive propositions and thus somewhat speculative. Future research should interrogate these features across Nordic countries, especially across different social classes.

The Double Bind of Conformity

Nordic culture is undoubtedly conformist (Berggren and Trägårdh 2010). There is a fair amount of historical evidence that the cooperative communal traditions of coping with agricultural difficulties in the harsh northern climate, peasant taboos of wealth-flaunting, and a lack of strong aristocracies have together forged a Nordic embrace of egalitarianism through *commonness*, which manifests in social classes from top to bottom striving to portray themselves as belonging to one "big middle" (e.g., Gullestad 1992, 2013; Byrkjeflot 2001; Berggren and Trägårdh 2010).

The most famous expression of this Nordic idealization of commonness is the Law of Jante, or Janteloven, originally put forth by Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose (1899–1965). Janteloven bears similarities to other folk concepts like "tall poppy syndrome" in Anglo-Saxon societies and "the nail that stands out gets hammered down" in China (Belk 2011; Cappelen and Dahlberg 2017). It bears reminding that Sandemose was a fiction writer; Janteloven was not a result of rigorous anthropological inquiry. However, its popularity across the Nordics speaks to its cultural resonance as a shorthand for Nordic egalitarianism and conformity (Trotter 2015). One phrase in particular is associated with Janteloven: "You shall not imagine you are better than us." However, this is actually one of several laws. The full coda reads:

> You shall not believe you *are* anything.
> You shall not believe you are as much as *us*.
> You shall not believe you are wiser than *us*.
> You shall not imagine you are better than *us*.
> You shall not believe you know more than *us*.
> You shall not believe you are more than *us*.
> You shall not believe *you* are good for anything.
> You shall not laugh at *us*.
> You shall not believe anyone cares about *you*.
> You shall not believe you can teach us anything. (Sandemose 1999 [1933], p. 653; via Trotter 2015, emphasis in original)

The Nordic inertia "toward the middle" as expressed by Janteloven has a double effect for Nordic consumers. It admittedly disciplines what is perceived as too eager status-hunting, pulling these consumers down. But it also affects those who would rather opt out of the distinction game altogether, pulling these consumers up. Miller (2008) reviews Gullestad's (2013 [1992]) study of Norwegian home decoration and observes this double effect when he remarks that Gullestad's informants were mindful of "two crimes to be avoided." The first crime was creating an impression of a person with social ambitions and a desire to seek distance from peers through taste displays. Linnet's (2011) inquiry similarly found that Danish middle-class consumers were quick to brand those who seemed

too preoccupied with status-chasing as soulless and joyless. This stands in contrast with the competitive and refined displays of capital that the French appreciate (Bourdieu 1984). The second crime Miller (2008) identified was not keeping up with common standards of taste and care for the home. As Gullestad (2013) writes, "One of the worst things one can say about somebody's home is that it is impersonal (*upersonlig*) and without ambience (*uten atmosfære*)" (p. 147). Toeing the line between the two crimes is a nuanced affair: one must "as fashions change, keep up with the times but don't try to be any kind of vanguard" (Miller 2008).

Belk's (2011) work on benign envy similarly remarks on Janteloven's effect of simultaneously pulling up as well as down, though Belk saw the effect of pulling up as weak. The earlier examples suggest that the power of pulling up is stronger than Belk gives it credit for. It is also possible that the effect of pulling up shields those in the middle from feelings that they are better than those "below" and maintains a sense of egalitarianism. By disciplining others to keep up, those in the middle gain more room for their status displays. Perhaps we need an addendum to Janteloven: "You shall not imagine you are better than us, but you shall not make us feel that we are better than you, either."

Muted Displays of Distinction

Nordic culture does not erase distinctions, but it does make them subtler and more inconspicuous. More specifically, Nordics can show distinction when it is not perceived as directed to others, as showing off or putting others to shame. This issue was raised a while ago in the Consumer Culture Theory Facebook group, when a non-Nordic commentator offered that Nordic consumption should be studied from the point of view of collectivism or communism. This was quickly protested by Nordic scholars. Danish anthropologist Jeppe Linnet provided an erudite response:

> Even if Scandinavian society looks quite homogenous because of the economic leveling, normatively it is in this sense quite fragmented—or free, some would say (the socialdemocratic kind of freedom that a welfare state

> provides, e.g. being able to take a weird and risky education because one's parents have no say or financial involvement). However, this does not hold if others start to challenge us and suggest that they are "better" or have more worth—hence the Jante Law saying "you should not believe that you are better than us"—it has to do with a mutual sheltering of each other's subjective sphere. (Linnet 2013)

Linnet likens the Nordic idea of commonness to a shared mythology that requires collective buy-in and performative reification. This mythology collapses if consumption is seen as accentuating or communicating our differences—hence the imperative to balance individualistic desires with the "mutual sheltering of each other's subjective sphere," as Linnet so astutely put it. In other words, Nordic egalitarianism demands conformity toward the middle, but also *within* the middle. Our displays of taste should not be seen as a challenge to others or as a statement of how others should define themselves or live their lives through consumption.

Lindstén (2017) provides an example of such muted distinctions with her historical ethnography of coffee consumption in rural communities in Finland. In such communities, coffee was consumed daily and in a ritualistic fashion. On the face of it, these seemed like wholly egalitarian and even quiet affairs. Yet Lindstén's analysis identifies a great deal of stratification and inconspicuous signaling underlying these rituals. The home was cleaned up and prepared in direct proportion to the importance of the guests, such as when the local priest or head of the municipality came to visit. The presence of such esteemed guests meant that more, fresher, and a greater variety of biscuits were served. The coffee was brewed slightly stronger and the "good" plates and cutlery were pulled out from the drawer. When the coffee was served, the most honored guest always got the first pour. The coffee for this guest was usually served from a tray, unlike the others. The obligatory suggestion to "please, dig in" was always directed to the most esteemed guest; nobody lifted their cup until that person did. The other guests also took their cues for how many refills or extra biscuits they should take from the esteemed guest.

Lindstén's analysis found that those partaking in these coffee rituals were often oblivious to the rituals' hierarchical considerations. Lindstén speculates that these hierarchies were so naturalized and deeply ingrained

that they had become pre-discursive. Even in cases when these hierarchical considerations were made apparent or verbalized, participants would often rush to deny these meanings. Unmasking this status dance within the coffee ritual collapsed the myth of egalitarianism and brought great discomfort. This links to Gullestad's (1992) characterization of Nordic culture as embracing *differences that do not constitute differences*. In plainer terms, Nordic consumers will gladly acknowledge their differences in interests, personalities, or passions, but not in a way that would reveal or underline their differences in social status (as in Janteloven). To borrow from Goffmanian vernacular, differences in social status recede to the back stage in Nordic consumption practices, and it is rarely acceptable to bring them back to the front stage.

There are, of course, status differences that Nordics accept and are even willing to explicitly acknowledge. Trotter (2015) translates the logic of Janteloven into Bourdieuan vernacular and argues that status displays are legitimate among Nordic consumers if they seem *disinterested* in taste competition. In other words, under Janteloven, one can only accrue symbolic capital within a particular field if it is presented as, to paraphrase Trotter, not as an attempt to stand out from the field but as standing *for* the field. This is similar to what consumption community literature identifies as symbolic capital gained by selfless and dutiful laboring on the community's behalf (e.g., Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Another way of seeing this is that Nordics treat extrinsic motivations for field engagement as suspicious and intrinsic motivations as acceptable. Trotter (2015) singles out professional athletes as people Nordics are willing to grant status to, provided they present themselves as being driven by passion for the sport or representing the motherland. Gullestad (2013) also touches on this dynamic between intrinsic versus extrinsic when she contrasts "passive" and "active" home decoration: one can have nice things in the home if they are regularly and enthusiastically used in, say, hobbies. Creating an impression of disinterestedness in taste competition can also help mask actual status aspirations. Gullestad (2013) found that some of her informants made substantial and aesthetically impressive improvements to their houses during renovation projects. These projects were justified as serious economic necessities, such as maintaining the value of the home, which also provided a convenient shield from accusations of status-hunting.

The muting of status displays further presents temporal restrictions to when and how distinction can be claimed. As McCracken (2008) writes, the continuous reinvention of identity through experimentation with new consumption fields is like a national sport for middle-class Americans. When writing this chapter, I often found myself reflecting back to the three years I spent living in the USA. One thing I remember finding peculiar and even humorous was how quickly my American peers "claimed" new consumption fields as parts of their identities. For example, if an American friend had taken an interest in yoga, I found that they could declare themselves "a yogi" after buying a yoga mat and practicing their asanas for a few months. Yet it would not be uncommon for a Nordic person with years of dedicated yoga practice to balk at ascribing the "yogi" label to themselves and to self-deprecatingly insist that they are not that good at yoga. In other words, Nordic consumers are more careful with their identity reinvention projects, due to fears of social costs from perceived identity inconsistencies (cf. McAlexander et al. 2014). Arnould and Hartmann's dialogue-form chapter in this volume hints at this when they discuss Jantzen et al.'s (2006) work on Danish women's underwear consumption. Arnould's observation is astute:

> something that … I associate with Nordic consumer culture is a concern for symmetry. That is the women were quite unhappy with mismatched underwear. They were quite concerned with mismatches between the public and the private. The front stage and the back stage. Exposing a gap between the front stage and the back stage was something that they found monstrous that they wanted to avoid … I do think that's a Nordic thing, because in the US we would be quite … so in the North American context we would be quite happy if the front stage was well managed. We could give a crap about the back stage as long as nobody sees it, because it's a facade. The facade is all important. (pp. 300–301)

This "concern for symmetry," as Arnould put it, suggests that Nordic consumers are less able to play the "unruly bricoleurs" and free identity experimenters compared to their North American brethren (Holt 2002). Gullestad (2013) similarly identifies that Norwegians consider the "wholeness" of their homes as an important orienting principle, and that

this is not merely a question of aesthetic consistency. Linnet (2011) remarks along the same lines that wholeness is an important value for Danes, and that it means being consistent in one's presentation of the self to others as well as consistent to personal ideas of the self. Any new consumption field or interest must match a person's long-term identity narrative and will take a longer time to establish itself within it.

Concluding Remarks: Where Is Nordic Taste Going?

I conclude this chapter with speculative pontification on the future of Nordic taste. I begin by reviewing two outlier cases that may illuminate what the future holds.

The first case is Heikkilä and Rahkonen's (2011) study of upper-class Swedish-speaking Finnish women and their taste distinctions. Two things stood out from their findings. For one, the women they interviewed were not at all shy about declaring their own taste preferences as superior to others and drew specific boundaries, especially toward the general Finnish-speaking population. The women eschewed the Law of Jante—they damn right thought they were better than the rest of us. Second, the women avoided playing the taste game amongst themselves during the group interview. In fact, Heikkilä and Rahkonen recount that the women deferred and complimented each other's tastes almost to a fault. This stands in stark contrast to typical group interviews with high-status informants where taste conflict is often quick to emerge (Fern 2001).

What explains this atypical taste behavior? For one, Swedish speakers are not your typical minority. They remain economically privileged, at least comparative to national averages, and this may explain the group's sense of superiority in taste. Swedish speakers are also a small minority in Finland, less than 6% of the overall population. This number has been shrinking as more and more Swedish speakers are becoming bilingual or embracing Finnish as their primary language. These strong displays of distinction might reflect an awareness of increasing demographic marginality, even an existential threat to a way of life. Here we are reminded of

Gullestad's (1992) remarks that Nordic culture, with its expectations of conformity, monocultural tendencies, egalitarianism, and demographic homogeneity, has a dark side. Nordic culture can create a sense of exclusion for those not identifying with the big middle. At times, it can be even used to "justify" racism in the name of the common good. As Nordics become increasingly diverse, we can expect more atypical status displays when, for example, immigrants or refugees adapt their identities and consumption practices to their new Nordic surroundings (cf. McAlexander et al. 2014). I believe this offers a highly fruitful avenue for future research.

The second outlier case is Östberg's (2007) study of the so-called Brats phenomenon that jumped into public awareness in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the media began chronicling the life in the fast lane of the young, pretty, and rich debutantes of Stockholm, and especially their nightlife escapades on Stureplan. These Brats were brash, youthful, loud, and, most important of all, not shy about being conspicuous in their consumption behavior. They religiously kept up with trends. They wore impressive designer clothes and matched them with expensive watches. They ordered copious amounts of champagne (sometimes even remembering to drink the stuff). Their biggest fear was to end up as your average Svensson—if they had a rallying cry, it probably would have been "fuck your Janteloven, thank you very much."

Östberg (2007) writes that some of this performative ostentatiousness was driven by resentment. Some Brats were from families where the parents had relinquished their noble status in the 1960s or 1970s in conformity with the social democratic zeitgeist of Sweden. Östberg speculates that Brat culture may thus represent a pendulum swing of sorts, a generational rebellion at this mistake of the past. But perhaps it is more than that. Brat culture is no longer tied merely to Stockholm; it is emulated by wannabe "stekares" across Sweden and even other Nordic countries. Conspicuous consumption is indeed markedly more normal in the Nordics now compared to just a few short decades ago, especially in Sweden (see Sofia Ulver's chapter on statist individualism in this volume). We also see this in the evolution of markets and industries. My home university was named after famed Finnish designer and architect Alvar

Aalto, whose design philosophy celebrated simplistic aesthetics and a staunch dedication to egalitarian ideals—he insisted his designs be affordable to all (Markoutsas 1985). Similar design philosophies were espoused by other Nordic design greats like Børge Mogensen, the designer behind the aptly named "People's Chair." This egalitarian design philosophy still permeates IKEA's brand DNA, though it is now more used in marketing communications than judiciously performed (Kristoffersson 2014; Skou and Munch 2016). These changes may tie into the global trends and influences mentioned earlier in this chapter. Whatever the reason behind the rise of Nordic conspicuousness, it, too, merits further inquiry from consumer researchers.

Many of the works cited in this chapter reveal that the home is sacred for Nordic consumers. It shelters us from the harsh elements, but it also creates a private sphere wherein we escape the gaze of others (Purhonen et al. 2010; Linnet 2011). As Gullestad (2013) states, Nordic homes' exteriors are "often lacking in decorations, detail and any visual stimuli" (p. 146), while the insides reveal a flurry of creative and often impressive taste experimentation. The ongoing proliferation of digital media is making the boundaries between public and private spheres increasingly blurry or difficult to discern (Scott 2016). This presents another fruitful avenue for future research, particularly from a sociological perspective. What do these changes mean for Nordic homes, or the Nordic sense of homeyness (McCracken 1989)?

Nordics are ripe with paradoxes (Byrkjeflot 2001; Berggren and Trägårdh 2010). We are simultaneously conformist and individualistic. We regulate our markets with a keen eye, but also cherish markets and entrepreneurship as sources of prosperity. We are cosmopolitans who hold dear our native and common cultures. We celebrate our differences, yet fear exposing differences that truly matter. We are self-deprecating, but respond harshly to criticism from outsiders (Booth et al. 2014). I hope this glimpse into what and how Nordic consumers consume will prove useful in making at least some sense of the peculiarities of our beloved region. For those who did not find this chapter useful, I leave you with this popular (and quite Jantean) Finnish idiom: "You ain't shit, but neither am I."

References

Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. (2018). Consumer Culture Theory: A Short History of a Young Subdiscipline (Or the Tale of the Rebellious Offspring). In F. F. Wherry & I. Woodward (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Consumption*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Askegaard, S., & Madsen, T. K. (1998). The Local and the Global: Exploring Traits of Homogeneity and Heterogeneity in European Food Cultures. *International Business Review, 7*(6), 549–568.

Atkinson, W. (2011). The Context and Genesis of Musical Tastes: Omnivorousness Debunked, Bourdieu Buttressed. *Poetics, 39*(3), 169–186.

Bardhi, F., Eckhardt, G. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2012). Liquid Relationship to Possessions. *Journal of Consumer Research, 39*(3), 510–529.

Belk, R. (2011). Benign Envy. *AMS Review, 1*(3–4), 117–134.

Bennett, T. (2007). Habitus clivé : Aesthetics and Politics in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu. *New Literary History, 38*, 201–228.

Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E. B., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M., & Wright, D. (2009). *Culture, Class, Distinction*. London: Routledge.

Berggren, H., & Trägårdh, L. (2010). The Autonomous Child and the Moral Logic of the Swedish Welfare State. In H. Mattson & S.-O. Wallenstein (Eds.), *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State* (pp. 50–65). London: Black Dog Publishing.

Booth, M., Price, A., Bolsø, A., Bergmann, E., Stubb, A., & Trägårdh, L. (2014). 'The Grim Truth Behind the Scandinavian Miracle' – The Nations Respond. *The Guardian*. Retrieved September 10, 2018, from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/05/scandinavian-miracle-denmark-finland-iceland-norway-sweden.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. *Cultural Theory: An Anthology, 1*, 81–93.

Bryman, A. (1984). The Debate About Quantitative and Qualitative Research: A Question of Method or Epistemology? *British Journal of Sociology, 35*, 75–92.

Byrkjeflot, H. (2001). The Nordic Model of Democracy and Management. In *The Democratic Challenge to Capitalism: Management and Democracy in the Nordic Countries* (pp. 19–45). Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press.

Cappelen, C., & Dahlberg, S. (2017). The Law of Jante and Generalized Trust. *Acta Sociologica, 61*(4), 0001699317717319.

Corrigan, P. (1997). *The Sociology of Consumption: An Introduction*. London: Sage.

Coskuner-Balli, G., & Thompson, C. J. (2013). The Status Costs of Subordinate Cultural Capital: At-Home Fathers' Collective Pursuit of Cultural Legitimacy Through Capitalizing Consumption Practices. *Journal of Consumer Research, 40*(1), 19–41, https://doi.org/10.1086/668640.

DiMaggio, P. (1987). Classification in Art. *American Sociological Review, 52*, 440–455.

Fern, E. F. (2001). *Advanced Focus Group Research*. London: Sage.

Gelder, K. (Ed.). (2005). *The Subcultures Reader*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Giddens, A. (2013). *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Gottlieb, H. (2004). Subtitles and International Anglification. *Nordic Journal of English Studies, 3*(1), 219–230.

Gullestad, M. (1992). *The Art of Social Relations: Essays on Culture, Social Action and Everyday Life in Modern Norway*. Oslo: A Scandinavian University Press Publication.

Gullestad, M. (2013). Home Decoration as Popular Culture. Constructing Homes, Genders and Classes in Norway. In *Gendered Anthropology* (pp. 140–173). London and New York: Routledge.

Heikkilä, R., & Rahkonen, K. (2011). 'IT IS NOT A MATTER OF TASTE…' Cultural Capital and Taste Among the Swedish-Speaking Upper Class in Finland. *European Societies, 13*(1), 143–163.

Holt, D. B. (1997). Distinction in America? Recovering Bourdieu's Theory of Tastes from Its Critics. *Poetics, 25*(2–3), 93–120.

Holt, D. B. (2002). Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding. *Journal of Consumer Research, 29*(1), 70–90.

Jantzen, C., Østergaard, P., & Vieira, C. M. S. (2006). Becoming a 'Woman to the Backbone': Lingerie Consumption and the Experience of Feminine Identity. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 6*(2), 177–202.

Kahma, N. (2012). Sport and Social Class: The Case of Finland. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 47*(1), 113–130.

Kjeldgaard, D., & Östberg, J. (2007). Coffee Grounds and the Global Cup: Glocal Consumer Culture in Scandinavia. *Consumption Markets & Culture, 10*(2), 175–187.

Korpi, W., & Palme, J. (1998). The Paradox of Redistribution and the Strategy of Equality. *American Political Science Review, 63*(4), 661–687.

Kristoffersson, S. (2014). *Design by IKEA: A Cultural History*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Lamont, M. (1992). *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lindstén, H. (2017). *"Olkaa hyvä ja ottakaa. Pankaa sekaan ja kastakaa". Kahvinjuonti suomalaisten maaseutukotien arjessa ja juhlassa 1920-luvulta 1960-luvun lopulle*. Turku University Publication Series.

Linnet, J. T. (2011). Money Can't Buy Me Hygge: Danish Middle-Class Consumption, Egalitarianism, and the Sanctity of Inner Space. *Social Analysis, 55*(2), 21–44.

Linnet, J. (2013). *Comment*. Retrieved July 10, 2018, from Consumer Culture Theory Facebook Group at https://www.facebook.com/groups/213134458706536/permalink/675505949136049/.

Mäkelä, K. (1985). Kulttuurisen muuntelun yhteisö̇llinen rakenne Suomessa. *Sosiologia, 22*, 247–260.

Markoutsas. (1985). Retrieved from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1985-02-17/news/8501090933_1_alvar-aalto-design-wood.

McAlexander, J. H., Dufault, B. L., Martin, D. M., & Schouten, J. W. (2014). The Marketization of Religion: Field, Capital, and Consumer Identity. *Journal of Consumer Research, 41*(3), 858–875.

McCracken, G. D. (1989). Homeyness: A Cultural Account of One Constellation of Consumer Goods and Meanings. In *Interpretive Consumer Research* (Vol. 16). London: Association for Consumer Research.

McCracken, G. D. (2008). *Transformations: Identity Construction in Contemporary Culture*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

McLeod, K. (2001). Genres, Subgenres, Sub-Subgenres and More: Musical and Social Differentiation Within Electronic/Dance Music Communities. *Journal of Popular Music Studies, 13*(1), 59–75.

Miller, D. (2008). Marienne Gullestad (1946–2008). *Material World Blog*. Retrieved July 13, 2018, from http://www.materialworldblog.com/2008/03/marienne-gullestad-1946-2008/.

Muniz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Research, 27*(4), 412–432.

Östberg, J. (2007). The Linking Value of Subcultural Capital: Constructing the Stockholm Brat Enclave. In *Consumer Tribes* (pp. 93–106). Oxford: Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann.

Østergaard, U. (1997). The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity: From Composite States to Nation-States. In Ø. Sørensen & B. Sträth (Eds.), *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (pp. 25–71). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Østergaard, P., Linnet, J. T., Andersen, L. P., Kjeldgaard, D., Bjerregaard, S., Weijo, H., et al. (2014). Nordic Consumer Culture: Context and Concept. In *Consumer Culture Theory* (pp. 245–257). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Peterson, R. A., & Simkus, A. (1992). How Musical Tastes Mark Occupational Status Groups. In M. Lamont & M. Fournier (Eds.), *Cultivating Differences* (pp. 152–186). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Prieur, A., Rosenlund, L., & Skjott-Larsen, J. (2008). Cultural Capital Today: A Case Study from Denmark. *Poetics, 36*(1), 45–71.

Purhonen, S., & Gronow, J. (2014). Polarizing Appetites? Stability and Change in Culinary Tastes in Finland, 1995–2007. *Food, Culture & Society, 17*(1), 27–47.

Purhonen, S., & Wright, D. (2013). Methodological Issues in National-Comparative Research on Cultural Tastes: The Case of Cultural Capital in the UK and Finland. *Cultural Sociology, 7*(2), 257–273.

Purhonen, S., Gronow, J., & Rahkonen, K. (2010). Nordic Democracy of Taste? Cultural Omnivorousness in Musical and Literary Taste Preferences in Finland. *Poetics, 38*(3), 266–298.

Purhonen, S., Gronow, J., Heikkilä, R., & Kahma, N. (2014). *Suomalainen maku: kulttuuripääoma, kulutus ja elämäntyylien sosiaalinen eriytyminen [The Finnish Taste: Cultural Capital, Consumption and the Social Stratification of Lifestyles]*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press.

Rahkonen, K. (2008). Bourdieu in Finland: An Account of Bourdieu's Influence on Finnish Sociology. *Sociologica, 2*(2).

Sampson, P., Samuel, V., & Sugden, C. (1994). *Faith and Modernity*. Oxford: OCMS.

Sandemose, A. (1999[1933]). *En Flyktning Krysser Sitt Sport: Fortellingen om en Morders Barndom [A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks: The Story of a Murderer's Childhood]*. Oslo: Aschehoug & Co.

Scott, L. (2016). *The Four-Dimensional Human: Ways of Being in the Digital World*. London: Random House.

Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V. (2016). New Nordic and Scandinavian Retro: Reassessment of Values and Aesthetics in Contemporary Nordic Design. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 8*(1), 32573.

Stromberg, J. (2015). The Real Reason American Public Transportation Is Such a Disaster. *Vox*. Retrieved July 10, 2018, from https://www.vox.com/2015/8/10/9118199/public-transportation-subway-buses.

Thornton, S. (1996). *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Trotter, S. R. (2015). Breaking the Law of Jante. *Myth and Nation*, *23*.

van Eijck, K., & Knulst, W. (2005). No More Need for Snobbism: Highbrow Cultural Participation in a Taste Democracy. *European Sociological Review, 21*, 513–528.

van Venrooij, A., & Schmutz, V. (2010). The Evaluation of Popular Music in the United States, Germany and the Netherlands: A Comparison of the Use of High Art and Popular Aesthetic Criteria. *Cultural Sociology, 4*(3), 395–421.

Virtanen, T. (2007). *Across and Beyond the Bounds of Taste: On Cultural Consumption Patterns in the European Union*. Turku School of Economics, Series A-11.

Warde, A. (2015). The Sociology of Consumption: Its Recent Development. *Annual Review of Sociology, 41*, 117–134.

Warde, A., Wright, D., & Gayo-Cal, M. (2007). Understanding Cultural Omnivorousness: Or, the Myth of Cultural Omnivore. *Cultural Sociology, 1*, 143–164.

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Vol. 1). Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Weijo, H. A., Martin, D. M., Arnould, E. J., & Ger, G. (2018). Consumer Movements and Collective Creativity: The Case of Restaurant Day. *Journal of Consumer Research, 45*(2), 251–274.