Wheni S Cranberrys Auces Hapedl Ike a Can? an Investigation of Cultural Capital, Gender, Andc Onsumptionin Televisionp Rogramming

Jennifer E. Chang, Penn State University
W. Edward Rott, Penn State University

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15691/gender/v05/GCB-05

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
ABSTRACT

To date, no systematic attempt has been made to examine how cultural capital might interact with gender in the consumption sphere. Working under the assumption that television programs provide useful insights into the behavior of real consumers, we examine consumption as depicted by characters in six popular prime-time television series. The characters selected allowed for a 2 x 2 consideration of gender (male, female) and cultural capital (low, high). We find that (1) men are more prototypical of cultural capital dimensions than are women, (2) consumption defines gender as a fluid rather than a strictly binary construct, and (3) certain dimensions of cultural capital manifest differently in men and women. Examples are given to support the findings, and ideas for further investigation are discussed.

In his analysis of Bourdieu’s theories of cultural capital, Holt (1998) illustrates that cultural capital in fact structures American consumption. He points out the need to understand how cultural capital and other social categories interrelate in consumption. In particular, how do cultural capital and gender interact? Holt (1998) speculates congruence between class and gender for low cultural capital women, noting the commonality of fostering communal ties. Extending this line of reasoning, we might also expect congruence between class and gender for high cultural capital men because of the common emphasis on the pursuit of individuality. We investigate the relationship between cultural capital and gender by evaluating not only communal vs. individualist subjectivity, but also the nuances of five other dimensions of cultural capital.

We focus our analysis on consumption as depicted in current media. The goal is not to provide a broad-sweeping generalization, but rather, to impart an understanding of the texture of cultural capital and gender as depicted in a subset of North American television programming. The pervasiveness of television programming, in particular, provides a foray into the cultural consumption of products and lifestyles (Hirschman and Thompson 1997). Consider the following example from the television show, Frasier, in which a British woman named Daphne prepares a Thanksgiving feast for Marty (LCC1 male):

Marty: Could you just once cook a traditional Thanksgiving meal? I mean, look at this
cranberry sauce! It's supposed to keep the shape of the can, quiver a little bit! What are all these chunks in there?

Daphne: Those are cranberries. [Audience laughs.]

[Marty’s son enters with a frozen pie as requested by Marty.]

Daphne: Honestly, wouldn’t you rather I just bake a pie from scratch?

Marty: Is it that you can’t learn, or you won’t learn? [Audience laughs.]

The example presented renders a glimpse into the potential for understanding cultural capital and gender in consumption. After all, through the course of a storyline, characters “naturally” engage in consumption-use behaviors that structure their realities and add character depth. At the same time, characters creatively and actively consume products in bricolage fashion (DeCerteau 1984) as they also “violate” socially prescribed consumption norms to further effect humor and other collective reactions. While we focus on individual characters as our unit of analysis, their interactions with products and other characters embellish the theories. For instance, the example of Marty above may be contrasted with other characters who make cranberry sauce from scratch (Monica, Friends, HCC female) or slyly dump the contents of the can into a pot to mimic homemade status (Will, Will & Grace, HCC male).

Our analyses diverge from Holt’s (1998) initial speculations about cultural capital and gender, but also provide insights into the nuances that help explain such differences in findings. We parse our analyses into three sections. First, we investigate the general relationship between cultural capital and gender. Most notably, we find that gendered tastes are congruent with class tastes for LCC men, rather than for LCC women (as suggested by Holt). Moreover, the predominance of male characters depicted as prototypes for HCC and LCC sharply contrasts with the marginal definitions of female characters. In fact, we note that “X” women (who shun social convention and are neither high or low cultural capital) tend to “fill in” the dimensions unaccounted for by the depictions of HCC and LCC women. Second, we consider gender not as a state but as a fluid continuum of femininity and masculinity, and note the “effects” of consumption on gender representations. Third, the nuances of the dimensions of cultural capital qualitatively differ in definition for each group. We present two examples to illustrate the need for further study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of consumption as it is depicted in mass media entertainment is not new (e.g. Holbrook and Grayson 1986; Hirschman 1988; Wells and Gale 1994; Wells and Anderson 1996; Sherry 1997; and Hirschman and Thompson 1997). Inquiries into how consumption patterns differ along dimensions of gender (among the many, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Thompson 1996; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Grunert 1993) and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1997, 1998) have also been carried out. However, we believe that this paper represents the first attempt to examine how gender and cultural capital interact in consumption as it is
practiced by characters on prime-time television.

Holbrook and Grayson (1986) and Hirschman (1988) represented early attempts to bring mass media depictions of consumption into the purview of consumer research. Holbrook and Grayson (1986) brought semiological analysis to bear on the portrayal of consumption in the film *Out of Africa*, where they demonstrate how symbolic consumer behavior is used to develop plot and character. While this represented a step forward in taking seriously product usage depictions in a fictional setting, the authors’ objective was less to draw connections between fictional consumption and real life than it was to establish “what consumption can tell us about works of art . . . [and how it can] help convey the meaning of that artistic creation.” (Holbrook and Grayson 1986, p. 375.)

In her analysis of the ideology of consumption in the TV shows *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, Hirschman (1988, p. 344) argues that “consumers acquire messages about products from a variety of media vehicles on a daily basis. These messages convey symbolic meanings concerning the use of products to express personal values, social norms, and cultural ideologies.” Thus, we have the beginnings of one rationale for studying consumption on television: mass mediated entertainment provides symbolically rich models for enabling self-definition. This rationale drives Sherry’s (1995) “telethnography” of coffee as it is consumed in television programs. Sherry recognizes that the depiction of coffee consumption within the programming context conditions, at least in part, viewers’ perceptions of coffee, thus “ostensibly delivering a receptive audience to prospective marketers.” This role for programming as a “model” for consumption is supported by Hirschman and Thompson (1997), who argue that consumer relationships to programs are an essential aspect of perceived meanings they derive from advertisements.

A second rationale is suggested by the work of Wells and Gale (1994) and Wells and Anderson (1996), who studied materialism levels of characters on television. The authors found that fictional data from fictional narratives (in this case, prime time television characters) supported findings derived from empirical investigations using real data (i.e., Richins and Dawson 1992 and Richins 1994). Wells and Anderson (1996, p. 125) believe that:

> Writers, directors, and producers of successful TV comedies and dramas, and the actors who play popular TV characters, are accurate observers of human nature. If this is correct, their insights... may tell us something useful about the real behavior of real consumers.

While the authors are careful not to claim that TV narratives mirror real life, they do argue persuasively that these fictional narratives “extract, abbreviate, and amplify relationships that also occur in real behavior.” (Wells and Anderson 1996, p. 125.) Television, therefore, would seem to offer us a viable and important setting for the study of consumption for two reasons. First, it is a “symbolically pervasive” (Sherry 1995) medium that offers viewers guidance about how consumption goods can be used in their everyday lives; and second, it may act as a reasonable “surrogate” for real life in the study of consumer behavior. While the goal of this study is not generalization to the everyday world, the particular consumption patterns investigated may lead to future questions and insights.
about relationships between cultural capital and gender in real life.

A potential application of "telethnography" is the study of how interactions of cultural capital and gender manifest in consumption patterns as portrayed on TV programs. The concept of cultural capital was developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in his study of the relationship between aesthetic taste and social position. The term refers to "a set of socially rare and distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge, and practices" (Holt 1998, p. 3) and is a function of a person's education, upbringing, occupation, and interactions with the surrounding culture. Holt (1997, 1998) was the first to bring Bourdieu's theories to bear on consumption practices in the United States. In his 1998 study, Holt divided his ethnographic subjects into two groups, those high in cultural capital (HCCs) and those low in cultural capital (LCCs), and found that they differed along six dimensions in terms of tastes and consumption practices (see Table 1 for an adaptation).

Bourdieu's (1984) study has been criticized for focusing solely on class-related dimensions and ignoring others, including gender. In fact, Bourdieu's model is arguably male-centered, given the gender imbalance in his sample (25.5% women in the dominant class sample, and 38% women in the working class sample). At the same time, his focus on only those of paid, full employment (as opposed to part time, unpaid or no employment) further skews the sample towards male perspectives. Holt (1998), in fact, acknowledges that his own work made no attempt to locate any interaction between cultural capital and gender, and suggests that an examination of this interaction would be fruitful.

Studies of gender differences in consumption practices have been numerous; the existence of this conference is testament to the subject’s continued interest within consumer research. Nor has this interest been limited to marketing-oriented consumer behaviorists. Bourdieu (1990), for example, in his early structuralist "reading" of an Algerian peasant house, associated the "female space" with the inside, the private, the home, the domestic; whereas the "male space" was out in the world, away from home, and public. This idea was found to hold on prime time American television also, in Acland's (1990) analysis of gendered space as depicted in the bar-based situation comedy Cheers. Moreover, Bristor and Fischer (1993) introduced three distinct feminist perspectives and their implications for consumer research. For instance, from a post-structural feminist perspective, they noted that women are socially constructed as only partially formed human beings and "frequently defined in terms of their marital roles" (p. 524). Such findings have been further validated within the marketing domain since then (Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Schroeder 1998). In an inquiry into consumption practices of professional women, Thompson (1996) found that these women exhibited what he termed an "ethic of care" as they consume, using consumption as a resource to foster local communal ties. Although he did not study men, it would follow from most people's common impression that men in general might not exhibit an "ethic of care" to such an extent as women do, and therefore are more individualistic. "Everyday knowledge" might also lead most to believe that women are relatively more likely to trade comfort for style in their personal dress than men would be, and Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) noted practices involving home
furnishings which distinguish women. Grunert (1993) found that women showed a higher degree of emotionally induced, "compensatory" eating than did men.

None of these studies, however, specifically attempted to tie gender differences in consumption to differences related to class or cultural capital. There have been several studies in the communication literature, however, which have looked at how class and gender interrelate in prime-time television. Ellis and Armstrong (1989), for instance, found that females belonging to the same social class as males on television exhibited quite different linguistic patterns, ones more closely associated with lower classes. Steeves and Smith (1987) found that women in prime-time TV were consistently portrayed in subordinate positions to men, thus placing them "at the underside of the classes occupied by their male colleagues" (p. 58). In an examination of four decades of American situation comedies, Butsch (1992) found that, consistently over time, working class families exhibited inverted gender roles, in which men fail as men and women end up filling the responsibility vacuum. Men in middle class families, conversely, tended much more often to meet the standards of masculinity required of them in terms of fathering, breadwinning, etc.

In this paper, we intend to tie together the various strands represented by these studies. We will examine consumption patterns exhibited by prime-time situation comedy characters, with the specific goal of determining how differences in cultural capital are, or are not, moderated by differences in gender.

METHODS

The goal of the study is to understand the relationships between cultural capital and gender in consumption. We draw upon television programming as "tele-ethnographic data", in line with earlier work by Wells and colleagues (Wells and Gale 1995; Wells and Anderson 1996). We took a grounded theory approach with an initial interest in product placements and representations of gendered consumption in television programming. We focused on six top-rated television sitcoms in the Fall 1999 season: Dharma & Greg, Everybody Loves Raymond, Frasier, Friends, King of Queens, and Will & Grace. The six sitcoms were selected on several criteria. Aside from top Nielsen ratings, each program exhibits distinct relationships between genders, which allowed us to analyze interactions and compare product consumption. Cultural capital also varied by program. Everybody Loves Raymond and King of Queens depict predominantly LCC characters, while Frasier and Dharma & Greg depict mostly HCCs (with LCCs as foils). Friends and Will & Grace contain representations of both. Moreover, each show also imparts a measure of "realism" to the story line, rather than slapstick or contrived humor within which product consumption is exaggerated (e.g., The Drew Carey Show, Just Shoot Me).

A team of three individuals (the two authors and a trained undergraduate assistant) analyzed consumption behaviors in all episodes during the Fall season. We viewed the episodes and noted instances of product usage on a standard template for analysis. A loose coding scheme emerged from the initial analyses with blanket themes such as "cultural capital" and "transgressing gender norms" which were useful towards structuring our later thoughts. Tacking back
and forth between data and theory, we noted patterns of consumption between character gender and representations of cultural capital. We began to focus on principle characters as our unit of analysis, and revisited the data in light of a 2 x 2 consideration of gender (male, female) and cultural capital (HCC, LCC). The characters were selected for their distinct patterning of cultural capital, as agreed upon by the researchers. As a result, we focused on four LCC males, four HCC males, three LCC females, and three HCC females (see Table 2). Though we focus on white characters in this study, future studies should consider the interaction between race, gender and cultural capital.

Two other characters selected for analysis, Phoebe (Friends) and Dharma (Dharma & Greg), do not fit easily into either the LCC or the HCC category, nor do they fall into an “in between” category. Rather, these two highly eccentric characters might more fruitfully be thought of as falling into a separate category, one not located on the LCC-HCC continuum. In a satirical study of the American class system, Fussell (1983) described a category of people he labeled “X” (not to be confused with Generation X). X people are self-directed, often “bohemian,” and loath to conduct themselves in any way that would betray their eccentric ideals or mark them as coming from a distinct class background. In their freedom they represent “a sort of unmonied aristocracy” (Fussell 1983, p. 213). Phoebe and Dharma were included in the study in the hope that, in their eccentric use of consumer goods, they would reveal insights into the relation of cultural capital and gender than might otherwise be missed.

As we directed our analysis, we also focused on how each character related (or did not relate) to the dimensions of cultural capital. We developed sets of themes, as discussed in the next section.

**THEMES**

We segment the themes into three parts: general relationships between cultural capital and gender, the “effects” of such relationships on masculinity and femininity, and the specific nuances of the dimensions of cultural capital. We reference and build upon the dimensions of cultural capital as described in Table 1. For instance, we distinguish between external (outwardly displayed) and internal (inwardly ruminated) dimensions of high cultural capital to help account for gender differences.

**General Relationships between Cultural Capital and Gender**

*Men as Prototypes for Cultural Capital.* Unlike female characters, male characters tend to represent the prototypes for high and low cultural capital. LCC males anchor on the dimensions of material aesthetics, referential interpretations, local tastes and materialism. They also strongly exhibit forms of communal subjectivity and autotelic leisure. HCC males tend to anchor on the HCC dimensions, as represented in Table 1.

In terms of material aesthetics, LCC males emphasize comfort, function and durability, while HCC males emphasize formal aesthetics. Issues of space, in particular, illustrate this point. For instance, Marty Crane’s old and worn La-Z-Boy chair in his son Frasier’s living room sits in sharp contrast to the elegant newness of Frasier’s HCC lifestyle. Like Marty, a former police officer who now hobbles around with his cane, the chair has also weathered the years, and serves as a lifelong companion often misunderstood by others. When Frasier
presents him with a new chair, he refuses it. In another episode, Frasier "accidentally" sits in his father's chair while suffering back pain and is surprised, yet somewhat reluctant (even in his drugged state), to realize the comfort of the chair. Quibbles over material and formal aesthetics show up repeatedly as Frasier and his brother Niles (both HCC male) show disdain over their father's clothing, cabin in the woods, restaurants and friends, and as Marty similarly pokes fun at his sons' stuffiness and inability to appreciate them. 3 Other LCC male characters are also strongly wedded to comfort. Doug's own lounge/TV area in the garage, Joey's leather barcalounger, and Raymond's basement office play similar roles in comfort and functionality rather than formal aesthetics. By contrast, both Will and Greg's (HCC male) deviations from formality are the source of humor in several episodes. Though different programs, both Will and Greg become unemployed in the Fall season. Will begins to lounge around in his robe, eating Lucky Charms and watching Lifetime Television, while Greg grows a beard and attempts to self-actualize through meditation and spiritual reading. Greg's economic capital and personal decision to quit affords him the freedom to grow as an individual, which contrasts with Will's forced unemployment and ensuing depression.

Moreover, HCC males uphold idealism, cosmopolitan tastes and critical interpretations, while LCC males uphold a strong display of material abundance, local tastes and referential interpretations. The staunch refusal to turn on a new big screen TV (Greg), in addition to the consumption of small gourmet pizzas (Will), demitasse cups of coffee (Niles, Frasier), and ethnic cuisine (Greg, Frasier, Niles, Will) exemplify HCC behaviors. By contrast, Joey's (LCC) devouring of a beef trifle (accidental combination of half dessert and half shepherd's pie) attests to his referential interpretation, local tastes and abundance: "What's not to like? Custard, good. Jam, good. Meat, goooooood." Seemingly "gourmet" foods such as filet mignon jerky (Marty) similarly illustrate referential interpretations linked to local tastes. Material abundance is constantly a source of display with all LCC males, as shown in the centrality and sacredness of a large TV (Doug, Joey), wearing of Porsche clothing to suggest wealth (Joey), and purposeful wasting of electricity after financial gain (Joey). The hoarding of eggs at a Las Vegas buffet to earn back gambling losses (Joey), and preference for food that comes in baskets (Doug) further connote the value of abundance. Moreover, while HCC males are portrayed as furthering their individualist subjectivity and self-actualization through expertise, LCC males engage in communal, male bonding rituals.


HCC Females as Externally HCC. Through the course of our analysis, we found it useful to segment the dimensions of cultural capital into external behaviors and internal thoughts. Formal aesthetics, cosmopolitan tastes, and (to a certain extent) individualist subjectivity are externally displayed, while critical interpretations, idealism, and self-actualizing leisure involve the development of the mind and one's internal thoughts. Our analyses reveal that HCC females converge with the external but not internal dimensions of HCC. For instance, both Monica and Grace express their own styles through their fashionable clothing, decorating habits, and meals. Monica, in particular, is known as a high-strung, controlling perfectionist in the home. The most minute incidents (e.g., Monica complaining that Rachel "moved my phone pen") bring out the humor of her character's
neuroses. One episode of *Will & Grace* centers around trying to avoid "boring" friends who would rather eat at the Olive Garden than go for dim sum and trendy nightclub hopping. Interestingly, Monica, a chef, and Grace, a designer, take on stereotypically female creative roles but in professions dominated by males. Their roles amplify their personal aesthetic styles, which, when challenged (e.g., by a big white dog statue in Monica's apartment, or the failure of a picnic dinner in Grace's new apartment), are met with disdain. Kitty's display of stylish wealth through her dress and home is similarly not ostentatious (cf. Karen, LCC female).

While Kitty aptly devises plans to her advantage and achieves some self-actualization through ventures to the opera, the HCC females studied display few abstract thoughts, self-actualizing practices or advancements of knowledge. In fact, Grace's decision to purchase a "hydrobra" in one episode to appeal to a man leaves her with an epiphany that she has been superficial all along. HCC male characters, by contrast, read, meditate, enjoy poetry and discuss research projects, all activities that engage the mind. These findings converge with common, unfortunate stereotypes that women are valued for style and outward appearance rather than their thoughts. Certainly, age and maturity may also prompt differences in HCC male and female depictions.

Our comparisons of male and female representations thus far reveal that women display only a subset of cultural capital dimensions. Such findings support a poststructural feminist perspective which sees women's unique experiences as typically overlooked (e.g., Bristor and Fisher 1993). Such insights become more evident with analyses of the "X" and LCC women. In fact, one might argue that the "sum" of representations of an HCC woman and an "X" woman are equivalent to the representation of an HCC man, as alluded to next.

"X" Females as Supplements for HCC Females. While HCC females are not portrayed as mindful of abstractions, philosophy and critical thought, "X" females step in as a substitute or supplement for what is lacking in HCC women. "X" women strongly exhibit the internal dimensions, and dabble briefly in the other HCC and LCC dimensions, as desired. For instance, though both Phoebe and Dharma add an eclectic silliness to the humor of the program, they are also very spiritual, contemplative, creative individuals who transcend the typical boundaries of thought. Phoebe's songs and commentary are often esoteric yet truthful. She is against mass consumption, instead preferring to know the history, legacy and spirituality behind objects. Dharma, similarly, is highly self-directed, often engaged in meditation and crafts. She teaches yoga, yet will also take on odd-jobs (e.g., dressing as a chicken, flipping hamburgers, appearing in a bikini in an ad).

LCC Females as Supplements for LCC Males. Compared with HCC females, LCC females are more parochial, less self-directed, and less cosmopolitan. Unfortunately, representations of LCC women engaging in their own consumption activities are relatively sparse compared to those of their male counterparts. In fact, spending too much time with a girlfriend (Carrie) or at an aerobics class (Debra) is met with jealousy on the husband's part. This speaks to earlier research on representations of gender and linguistics (Ellis and Armstrong 1989) and the subordination of female roles (Steeves and...
Smith 1987) in media. However, Karen, who avoids her husband and home life altogether to spend time with Will, Grace and Jack, is a point of humor. Despite her wealth and seeming disparity from the others, Karen epitomizes the LCC dimensions to an extreme. She is not self-directed (as she literally does nothing for her job), not refined, falsely cosmopolitan, and seeks instant gratification. The latter, in particular, is often associated with low cultural capital (Roth 2000).

Their consumption activities, which relate to their husbands, affect a dual embracing-subverting view of traditional femininity. LCC females embrace the husband-wife unit, as they are not shown consuming on their own, except in instances to invoke humor. At the same time, LCC females also subvert traditional feminine roles in asserting control over situations that their husbands abdicate through their ineptness. In this sense, LCC females are represented as having more independent power than HCC females. This is discussed further in the next section.

“Effects” on Gender

While each character we analyzed fits within clear gender and cultural capital boundaries, we viewed gender also as a continuum. That is, each character, whether male or female, exhibits varying levels of masculinity or femininity in their consumption habits.

HCC and Femininity. For HCC females and males, we noted a strong polarization towards consumption as stereotypically more feminine. As mentioned earlier, HCC females take on traditional stereotypes of emphasis on style and appearance over the nurturing of the mind. For HCC males, individual story lines also accentuate the transgression of gendered boundaries. When Frasier reluctantly tastes and nearly chokes on his father’s filet mignon jerky (symbolic of his disdain for LCC), he accidentally agrees to pay for Daphne’s wedding. Thrilled, Daphne believes that now she will have total control over the wedding since her mother is not paying for it. Frasier, however, quickly sidesteps Daphne and her mother and takes over this traditionally feminine role. His recitation of Bartlett quotes and enjoyment of a Tahitian vanilla herb bath are also the brunt of “sissy” jokes by Bulldog, a radio announcer (who displays LCC characteristics).

Moreover, commonalities across characters converge on the notion of transgression of gender norms. While Will is a gay character, in specific episodes of other programs, Frasier and Niles find themselves mistaken as gay, and Greg is the object of another male’s affection.

LCC Males and Manliness. LCC males strongly polarize towards stereotypes of masculinity regardless of stage in life. As a retired police officer, Marty values his old chair, beer cans, TV remote control, football games, camping, poker, and Bulldog’s male-ego radio show, which accentuate male stereotypes. The HCC stuffiness of his sons serves as a contrast to his masculine consumption. Doug’s TV area in the garage (next to the car, an emblem of masculinity), frequent disorganization, golf game with buddies on his wedding anniversary, attentiveness towards attractive women (similar to Joey’s objectification of women as “sweet potato pie”) are also stereotypically male. Deviations from the norm of manliness strongly illustrate its importance. In one episode, Doug decides to wear slacks rather than his usual jeans to the movies, resulting in confusion on the part of his wife and father-in-law (who mistakenly thinks he must be going on a
trip). Similarly, instead of hunting with his buddies, Ray stays home with his wife and is the subject of mockery.

**LCC Females and Polarization of Femininity.** As mentioned earlier, depictions of LCC females in consumption tend to involve their husbands as well. Carrie, Debra and Karen, in effect, exhibit both traditional notions of femininity as well as measures of control and strength over their male counterparts. As Karen embraces the stereotype of a woman (shopping, focused on appearance), Carrie and Debra embrace their roles as wives. Renouncing the tasks of making dinner and cleaning (shown in all three characters) are viewed both as a statement against traditional roles and a point of reactionary humor aimed at the ineptitude of the husband. LCC female roles are subverted (see Butsch 1992), as they show strength and move towards control when their husbands fail at tasks such as packing and kitchen activities. As one example, during an argument, Ray looks in the refrigerator and mentions they are out of milk. Debra pulls out another milk container farther back and pours it on him, stating “Milk: It does a body good.”

**Nuances of Cultural Capital and Gender**

We round out our discussion with a consideration of some nuances of how the dimensions of cultural capital are defined by different genders. While it is beyond the scope of the paper to illustrate all nuances, we discuss material aesthetics and autotelic leisure to suggest the importance of considering the qualitative dimensions of cultural capital.

**Definitions of Material Aesthetics.**

Perceptions of material aesthetics, while shared across the genders, differ for men and women. In general, LCC individuals value comfort, durability and traditions over more formal aesthetic expression. Consider notions of personal space, and the differing definitions of “comfort” among LCC males versus LCC females. Within the household, LCC males (Doug, Ray, Joey, Marty) view their personal space as comfort in terms of hanging out, relaxing and just being oneself. They avidly transform the traditional use of space to carve their own household niche or presence in what is traditionally viewed as a woman’s territory. This is a distinct separation from the domestic territoriality of one’s wife (Doug, Ray), female roommate (Joey) or other male-but-feminized family members (Marty). For instance, Doug often totes a bowl of cereal into the garage TV lounge to relax alone or with male friends.

While men emphasize transformations of space to achieve comfort, women emphasize transformations of the self. In fact, rather than the comfort of hanging out, women strive for consoling comfort, to utilize space to create their own personal world to transform oneself. Women aim to nurture the spirit. Carrie’s chocolate bars stashed near her bed, her nightstand complete with magazines, mints, Chapstick and flashlights represent her “whole other world”, her place for solace. Karen’s heavy reliance on alcohol in nearly every episode serves as her crutch. By contrast, an “X” character like Dharma, violates space by placing toilet paper on the TV and, in a panic, throwing Chinese food into the clothes dryer.

**Definitions of Autotelic Leisure.** Similarly, the conceptualization of autotelic leisure differs for men and women. LCC males who engage in autotelic leisure are depicted as regressing in age whether playing video games (Joey) or engaged in the horsing-around banter of a football or baseball game (Marty, Doug, Raymond). LCC females are not readily shown in autotelic leisure.
situations, except to suggest maturity and the dual embracing and subversion of traditional female roles in the company of their husbands. For instance, on a romantic getaway, Carrie hides the mini bar key from her husband at a bed and breakfast to minimize expenses and ensure his attention. The fact that he initially wanted to stay at Trump Towers for only $39 a night (and where they could gamble) also illustrates LCC male age regression. In fact, it is only the unconventional women, the “X’s,” who exhibit regression in age. Yet in their case, leisure becomes less autotelic and more self-actualizing.

Moreover, when HCC characters engage in autotelic thought, similar age issues emerge. Monica and Chandler (both HCC), having lunch together, discuss the logistics of his moving in with her. This moment of preliminary domesticity is capitalized upon by Monica, who dreams of turning the spare bedroom into a beautiful, tasteful guestroom. Like a little girl dreaming of her future, she sips a small juice box while in thought. Chandler, on the other hand, wants a playroom, complete with action figures and his barcalounger. His relaxed, playful approach emphasizes youth as opposed to growing up.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This article brings to light the lingering question of how cultural capital and gender interact. While we do not propose broad-sweeping generalizations of the television characters presented to consumers in the everyday world, we add depth to the pre-existing literature by examining television programming as text. In our analyses, we uncovered the general relationships between cultural capital and gender, noting that men prototypically characterize LCCs and HCCs, while women tend to be marginalized as LCCs or characterized as upholding only the external dimensions of HCC. In fact, the internal, more thought-driven dimensions (e.g., critical interpretations, idealism) lacking in HCC women are supplemented by “X” group women, who are made light of in programs because of their eclectic and out-of-the-ordinary styles. These issues are amplified by Ellis and Armstrong’s (1989) and Steeves and Smith’s (1987) findings regarding women’s subordinate linguistic patterns and roles in television programming, respectively.

That women cannot be neatly categorized into Bourdieu’s model and Holt’s (1998) cultural capital dimensions also suggest that Bourdieu’s model is male-centered. The convergence of such data parallel and validate studies of feminist theory (see Bristor and Fischer 1993; Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Schroeder and Borgerson 1998), as they relate to models of cultural capital and the male-centeredness of marketing concepts and models. The data also reflect a broader question of the imbalance of gendered representations in television programming, and join the debate as to whether television mirrors or influences society. Moreover, this research brings to light the question of how gender roles are produced and reproduced in television programming. It provides a starting point to discuss the “cultural default” status of masculinity not as natural or inevitable, but rather as socially constructed.

Furthermore, we considered gender in terms of a dialectic, in which cultural capital, in part, drives gendered representations. HCC strongly correlates with female stereotypes while LCC males correlate with male stereotypes and LCC females exhibit a bipolar embracing and subverting of female stereotypes. The data speak to several
dimensions of cultural capital, which build upon and deviate from Holt’s (1998) initial speculation of congruence between cultural capital and gendered tastes for LCC women. In fact, LCC men in the programming data exhibit stronger communal bonds than LCC women. Our initial foray into the nuances of material aesthetics and autotelic leisure also reveals the qualitative multidimensionality of such definitions based on gender alone. While for men, "comfort" might mean being oneself and transforming the household space, for women, "comfort" means transforming oneself by being in their own space. A fruitful extension of the study might also consider other variables such as race and social class. It would also be important carefully to isolate and tease apart cultural capital and economic capital. Cultural and economic capital were loosely correlated in each case, though the characters of Marty (LCC male) and Karen (LCC female), both wealthy LCCs, served as important counter examples. A longitudinal analysis of returning television characters (e.g., Mary from the Mary Tyler Moore show) might lend further insight into the impact of age on gender representation.

Our use of “tele-ethnographic data” provided a wealth of dimensionality to each character. The discrete units of each television program allowed for conscientious analysis of each situation. Humor, while not the focus of the study, did allow for insights into social norms (and violations of social norms) with regard to class and gender. While we were unable to generalize across the broad spectrum of television programming, we discovered strong convergence in the depictions of each character over the course of Fall 1999. On a related point, issues of an individual’s cultural capital trajectory over time as well as the gradations of cultural capital (Holt 1998) are important future considerations in tele-ethnography. For instance, on one episode of Dharma & Greg, hillbilly music plays in the background as Dharma tries to make do with her husband’s desire to simplify his life. The music alliterates the message that type-"X" Dharma, once a bohemian, then married into a patrician family, has now descended into a provincial existence. Furthermore, while the bulk of the characters in this study exhibit strong HCC or LCC tendencies, a vast number of other characters within each program lie in between the two. We incorporate the “X” group as a starting point towards supplementing traditional considerations of cultural capital. Further considerations of the “X” group are called for if research is to parallel movements in the broader sociocultural environment.

Moreover, a broader, sociological focus is in order. At the social group level, how individuals interact with one another (within and across gender and cultural capital) may lead to polarization or approach-avoidance in consumption behaviors. We noted, for instance, the tendency for similar individuals within a social group (e.g., main characters in Friends) pulling “down” those who try to deviate upwards from the group, much like “crabs in the bucket”. Also, prescribed roles (e.g., mother, friend) and power-dependence relationships reveal different dynamics that may impact how gender and cultural capital interact. This study provides a starting point for considering such issues.

NOTES

1Throughout the paper, we denote “LCC” as “low cultural capital” and “HCC” as “high cultural capital”.

2We are also not concerned in this paper with investigating the reciprocal relationship
of influence between consumption practices as represented on television and as experienced in real life, although this would be an interesting topic for a future study.

3 It is important to point out that HCC is not a monolithic construct. While insecurity drives Frasier and Niles' efforts to seem extremely high in cultural capital, this is not the case with Greg and Will. Frasier and Niles are on an upward cultural trajectory and appear quite self-conscious of it; thus their insecurity. Conversely, Greg and Will were born into HCC families and are thus more confident and secure in their HCC status.

4 Butsch (1992) found that in four decades of television representations of working-class families, husbands/fathers often fail to demonstrate competence in carrying out domestic and family responsibilities. In these cases, the wife—to great comic effect—must assume the husband's traditional role, thus subverting and inverting traditional gender relationships. This pattern is consistently repeated in King of Queens and Everybody Loves Raymond.

REFERENCES


Jennifer E. Chang is an Assistant Professor of Marketing, and W. Edward Roth is a doctoral candidate at the Pennsylvania State University. Address correspondence to the first author at the Smeal College of Business, Department of Marketing, 707-K Business Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802; jchang@psu.edu.
**TABLE 1: Dimensions of Cultural Capital, Adapted from Holt (1998)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LCC</th>
<th>HCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MATERIAL AESTHETICS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Comfortable, functional, durable, easy to care for, based on traditions, what one is used to</td>
<td><strong>FORMAL AESTHETICS</strong>&lt;br&gt;(external)&lt;br&gt;Aesthetic expression, personalization, assume that quality and durability are a given (&quot;functional&quot; = parsimonious design)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENTIAL INTERPRETATIONS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Face value, representations of the empirical world interpreted as realistic, prefer that which seems relevant to themselves</td>
<td><strong>CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS</strong>&lt;br&gt;(internal)&lt;br&gt;Abstraction, representations of the empirical world are evaluated as not reflecting reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MATERIALISM</strong>&lt;br&gt;Value abundance, size, exhibit luxury, brute encounters with the world</td>
<td><strong>IDEALISM</strong>&lt;br&gt;(internal)&lt;br&gt;Creative, contemplative, abstracted, mind, material frugality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOCAL TASTES</strong>&lt;br&gt;Prefer comfort, familiarity</td>
<td><strong>COSMOPOLITAN TASTES</strong>&lt;br&gt;(external)&lt;br&gt;Respect for and interest in the &quot;exotic&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNAL SUBJECTIVITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Passionate and routinized participation in particular consumption activities, prefer mass-produced and popular products</td>
<td><strong>INDIVIDUALIST SUBJECTIVITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;(internal and external)&lt;br&gt;Pursuit of individuality through authenticity (avoid mass culture) and connoisseurship (reconfigure mass cultural objects by accentuating specialized knowledge, eclecticism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUTOTELIC</strong>&lt;br&gt;Intrinsic enjoyment from the knowledgeable application of skills and talents with others who also enjoy the activity</td>
<td><strong>SELF-ACTUALIZING LEISURE</strong>&lt;br&gt;(internal)&lt;br&gt;Diverse, educational, informative experiences that allow them to achieve competence, acquire knowledge, express themselves creatively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2: Description of Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALE LCC:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joey <em>(Friends)</em></td>
<td>Late 20's; friendly, likeable, well-meaning but somewhat dim; sporadically-employed actor; single and unattached.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marty <em>(Frasier)</em></td>
<td>Mid-sixties, retired police officer, father of HCC characters Frasier and Niles. Disabled by gunshot to hip while on duty, walks with cane; lives with Frasier with whom he often quarrels. Widower.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond <em>(Everybody Loves Raymond)</em></td>
<td>Mid-thirties family man, lives in suburban New York home with wife Debra and two young children. His parents live across the street. His brother, a police officer, lives nearby.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug <em>(King of Queens)</em></td>
<td>Early to mid-thirties, married to Carrie, lives in house in Queens, New York with his wife and her father. Works as delivery driver for UPS-type company. Slightly overweight.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALE HCC:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frasier <em>(Frasier)</em></td>
<td>Early forties, popular Seattle radio psychologist. Divorced, shares a fashionable high-rise condominium with LCC father, plus his father’s physical therapist Daphne and dog. Highly intelligent and educated; also rather pompous and pretentious.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niles <em>(Frasier)</em></td>
<td>Late thirties, brother of Frasier. Also a psychologist, recently divorced from domineering wife. Frequent visitor to Frasier’s home. An unapologetic snob, very precise in dress and manner, even fussier than his brother. They are close friends but also frequently compete.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will <em>(Will &amp; Grace)</em></td>
<td>Mid-thirties, gay, recently unemployed and re-employed attorney, lives across hall from best friend Grace. An all-around “good guy”, generally interested in personal style in dress and entertaining.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg <em>(Dharma &amp; Greg)</em></td>
<td>Early thirties, “straight arrow” comically married to bohemian child-of-hippies Dharma, with whom he shares a loft in San Francisco. Comes from very wealthy family. An attorney who recently quit a lucrative position to “find himself.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## TABLE 2: Description of Characters (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEMALE LCC.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carrie (King of Queens)</strong></td>
<td>Early to mid-thirties, recently married to Doug, attractive, defined in terms of relationship with husband but can also stand her own ground when necessary. Considers herself the pretty, sexy one in contrast to her husband, the chubby but funny and affable one. Also plays daughter role; her father shares their house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Debra (Everybody Loves Raymond)</strong></td>
<td>Mid-thirties, married to Raymond, two young children, lives across the street from her in-laws, can also stand her own ground. Frequently finds herself having to compensate for her husband’s social, domestic, or parental ineptitude. Seems to have little identity apart from being Raymond’s wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Karen (Will &amp; Grace)</strong></td>
<td>Mid to late-thirties, “works” with Grace in interior decorating business though the running joke is that she does nothing all day but improve her vanity. She is married to a wealthy man who she is never with, and drinks heavily.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEMALE HCC.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monica (Friends)</strong></td>
<td>Late 20’s, employed as a chef; thin, attractive; shared apartment with girlfriend Rachel but recently traded her for new live-in boyfriend Chandler. Likeable but very fussy, “anal retentive” about her apartment and all of its furnishings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grace (Will &amp; Grace)</strong></td>
<td>Late 20’s, a designer, who moved in with her best friend Will (gay male) after she broke off her engagement. Realizing that she was too dependent on Will, she moved into her own apartment (across from him) at the beginning of the season. She is also likeable but hyper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kitty (Dharma &amp; Greg)</strong></td>
<td>Mid-fifties; of a wealthy family, also married into wealth. Stereotypical rich lady. Mother of Greg, she is horrified by his eccentric wife (Dharma) and in-laws. Stuffy and pretentious, not afraid to use money to advance her interests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEMALE “Xs”</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phoebe (Friends)</strong></td>
<td>Late 20’s, single; eccentric coffeehouse singer and massage therapist. Highly self-directed, perhaps a bit “ditsy.” Adds a skewed perspective to the otherwise relatively “normal” Friends group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dharma (Dharma &amp; Greg)</strong></td>
<td>Late 20’s, female half of odd-couple marriage with Greg. Very eccentric, bohemian, self-directed; inherited her New Age ethic from her aging hippie parents. Acts in ways that often confound Greg and horrify Greg’s mother Kitty. Living with Greg has introduced her to “good life”; she is occasionally seduced by his family’s wealth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>