

Vegard Jarness, Sam Friedman

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‘I’M NOT A SNOB, BUT...’

CLASS BOUNDARIES AND THE DOWNPLAYING OF DIFFERENCE

Vegard Jarness¹

University of Bergen

Sam Friedman

London School of Economics and Political Science

Abstract

In this article we demonstrate how upper-middle-class respondents in Norway and the UK draw strong symbolic boundaries based on cultural taste and lifestyle. However, we also find that such expressions of judgment are marshalled in interview settings by a strong moral imperative to appear open, tolerant and respectful of others. We argue that these apparently contradictory accounts represent the collision of interviewees’ spontaneous *visceral* and scripted *honourable* selves. We also focus on how this complex presentation of self plays out in social life – both in terms of respondents’ interactions with ourselves, as interviewers, and in their recollections of everyday-life encounters with those very different to themselves. Strikingly aware that others may perceive them as ‘snobbish’ and ‘elitist’, interviewees go to lengths to downplay difference in social encounters. Such reflexive monitoring of self-presentation, we argue, constitutes a distinct Bourdieusian ‘strategy of condescension’, allowing the privileged to both benefit publically from adherence to culturally dominant norms of openness, while continuing to privately harbour private feelings of snobbery. Thus, contrary to claims that the pervasiveness of egalitarian moral sentiments makes cultural-aesthetical boundaries less effective in social life, we argue that flying under the moral radar of egalitarian sentiments may – intentionally or otherwise – help secure the legitimacy of cultural distinctions.

Keywords

Distinction, egalitarianism, legitimacy, lifestyle, self-presentation, symbolic boundaries, symbolic domination, taste

1. Introduction

Do class-structured lifestyle differences imply that the upper-middle classes are hostile to, and even avoid interaction with, working-class people? According to the longstanding, yet frequently contested, thesis forwarded by Pierre Bourdieu they do, and violently so:

‘Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 56). Framed in Weberian terms, Bourdieu held that the social space – his concept of social class – ‘tends to function

¹ Corresponding author: Vegard Jarness, University of Bergen, Department of Sociology, Postboks 7802, N-5020 Bergen, Norway. E-mail: vegard.jarness@uib.no

symbolically as a *space of life-styles* or as a set of *Stände*, of groups characterized by different life-styles' (Bourdieu, 1985: 730). This symbolic function is in effect a *masking* of underlying social class divisions: people tend to view differences in lifestyles in an 'innocent' language of likes and dislikes, yet the (often unintended) consequences of people's choices of friends, spouses and neighbourhoods include group formation, symbolic boundaries and social exclusion.

Against the backdrop of Bourdieu's advances, sociologists have increasingly questioned the relevance of this model beyond the case of 1960s France. Objections include the arguments that historical developments have made cultural distinctions less pervasive over time (e.g. Chan, 2010; Peterson and Kern, 1996), and that cross-national differences indicate that Bourdieu's advances are 'typically French' and not readily generalizable to other national contexts (e.g. Lamont, 1992, 2000). In short, because upper-middle-class people are becoming less snobbish and more egalitarian – or so the arguments go – the less consequential differences in lifestyles are in terms of cultural hostility.

Our aim in this article is twofold. First of all, we map and compare class-cultural boundaries in Norway and the UK, drawing on qualitative in-depth interviews with subsamples of upper-middle-class respondents from both countries. A comparison of these countries is particularly fruitful with regards to what Lamont (1992) terms *national repertoires of evaluation*, i.e. the culturally specific classification systems people draw on to make sense of their and other people's way of life. On the one hand we have the UK, a country where class division has a long and culturally significant history, e.g. between the nobility and the commoners, the middle and working classes, and more recently between an 'ordinary elite' and a growing 'precariat' (Savage et al., 2015; Skeggs, 1997); on the other we have comparatively egalitarian Norway, characterized by the absence of an influential nobility or a strong industrial bourgeoisie (Sejersted, 1993) and where egalitarian sentiments are highly prevalent in expressions of self and interactional styles (Gullestad, 1992; Hansen, 2012; Jarness, 2013; Ljunggren, 2015; Mangset, 2015). Some scholars even argue that strong moral values encouraging refrain from judgment make Norway an exceptional case when it comes to symbolic boundaries (Sakslind and Skarpenes, 2014; Skarpenes and Sakslind, 2010). Thus, a comparison of these presumably different countries is particularly suited to an investigation of class-cultural boundaries: previous sociological accounts would lead one to believe that Britons are somewhat 'snobbier' in their evaluations of others and, conversely, that Norwegians are markedly more tolerant.

Our findings suggest that the prevalence of boundary drawing is strikingly similar across both countries. Yet we find that these judgments appear only fleetingly in interviews and are marshalled by a morally-driven desire to downplay class difference and cultural distinction. We argue that this monitoring of self-presentation is constitutive of the ‘practical sense’ embodied in the habitus of the upper-middle classes and, if effective, may function as one means through which they exercise symbolic domination. In particular it constitutes a distinct ‘strategy of condescension’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 472), allowing respondents to conceal powerfully felt feelings of judgement, and therefore circumvent any suspicion of snobbery from those in less privileged positions. This process, we argue, permits very feelings of cultural distinction to fly under a dominant moral radar of tolerance and egalitarianism – even if this is not an intended pursuit on the part of social actors.

Second, in developing this empirical argument we also advance a methodological case for the use of particular interviewing techniques in investigating class-cultural boundaries. In particular, we follow Pugh (2013) in urging researchers to mine, analytically, the seemingly contradictory information that interviews elicit about people’s ‘honourable’ and ‘visceral’ selves. Such data not only helps elucidate how equally real sentiments of snobbishness and openness often co-exist in the socially advantaged, but it can also reveal the ‘meta-feelings’ through which people grapple with how they feel and how they feel they *ought* to feel (Hochschild, 2012). One fruitful way to elicit such meta-feelings, we argue, is to use the interview-setting to probe people’s recollections of *cross-class encounters*. These accounts offer fertile territory for probing how people negotiate potential interstices between their normative *attitudes* towards those different from themselves, and their actual *feelings* when thrust into cross-class interactions.

2. Boundary drawing: connecting the honourable, the visceral and the strategic

A central tenet of Bourdieusian thought is that lifestyle differences are linked to misapprehended relations of domination between the upper and lower classes, expressed in the latter’s compliance with the status quo. According to Bourdieu (1977, 1984), power differentials linked to class-structured lifestyles are *misrecognised* by social actors, meaning that power relations are not perceived for what they objectively are, but in a form that renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder. Legitimacy in this sense does not imply that power relations are acknowledged, accepted, or even explicitly perceived. On the contrary, it results from a misconception of the real basis of asymmetric power relations, which, according to Bourdieu, is the unequal distribution of various forms of capital. The legitimacy

of power relations is thus secured because the question of legitimacy is not raised. Power relations are naturalised and taken for granted and remain in the realm of doxa, ‘the universe of the undisputed’. Meanwhile, the symbolic value of, and social prestige associated with, specific cultural practices are maintained through institutional recognition, consecration and canonisation in the fields of cultural production and education.

In contemporary class and stratification research, several streams have challenged this model of symbolic domination. Most notably, some proponents of the ‘cultural omnivore’ thesis argue that the eclectic taste orientations of recent generations of the upper middle class indicates a marked blurring of class-structured cultural distinctions (for overviews, see Hazir and Warde, 2016; Ollivier, 2008; Peterson, 2005). The figure of the ‘highbrow snob’ exclusively appreciating goods inaccessible to the wider public, they argue, is therefore losing prevalence. Although there are several authors who have pointed out that this development was foreshadowed, and even a central part of, Bourdieu’s initial advances (Jarness, 2015; Friedman et al., 2015; Johnston and Baumann, 2014), the usual tendency in the literature is to frame findings of omnivorousness as a rebuttal of Bourdieu’s model (see e.g. Chan, 2010; Warde, 2011).

However, there is a serious problem with the notions of ‘openness’ and ‘snobbishness’ operationalised in this stream of research; in particular, analytical aspects of taste (i.e. evaluations, classifications and judgments of cultural and material *goods and practices*) are problematically conflated with symbolic boundaries (i.e. evaluations, classifications and judgments of *people* displaying tastes for various goods and practices). A prime example of this can be found in Warde’s (2011) work on British cultural taste, in which dislikes of cultural objects are seen as ‘a supreme indicator of symbolic boundaries’ (Warde, 2011: 343).

Although there are reasons to suspect that these two analytical aspects are intertwined, one cannot simply infer whether social actors are hostile or open to other people’s lifestyles from their likes and dislikes. Instead, this requires direct empirical interrogation – as demonstrated by Lamont and her followers (Lamont, 1992; Lamont and Molnar, 2002; Pachucki et al., 2007). Explicitly questioning the assumption that lifestyle differences automatically lead to status hierarchisation, these researchers have used qualitative interviews to map the various repertoires of evaluation people draw on to symbolically demarcate themselves from others.

Of particular interest in regard to this article is the way in which Lamont (1992) documents the discursive repertoires of evaluation drawn upon by upper-middle class men in France and in the United States. This analytical strategy involves mapping the relative

salience of various sub-types of symbolic boundaries: cultural, socio-economic and moral (Lamont, 1992: 4). Lamont argues that Bourdieu and his followers have overstated the significance of cultural and socio-economic boundaries to the neglect of moral boundaries and thus reduce social life to a zero-sum game of distinction. However, Lamont argues that for many it is more important that the people they associate with are morally honest and kind, rather than that they have good taste.² We strongly agree that the empirical mapping of subjective symbolic boundary drawing is crucial, and that this cannot simply be inferred from data on people's tastes. However, we also believe there are some unresolved methodological issues within the Lamontian framework.

The first problem is the assumption that the 'relative salience' of various subtypes of symbolic boundaries can readily be discerned from the ways in which people talk about themselves and others in the interview setting. Lamont does this by ranking interviewees on five-point scales pertaining to cultural, moral and socio-economic boundaries (see esp. Lamont, 1992: 222). This analytical strategy is questionable, since the various subtypes of symbolic boundaries seldom appear in pure form and are often tightly intertwined and/or contradictory. While Lamont appears at times aware of this (see e.g. Lamont, 1992: 32), to employ her 'relative salience' framework implies separating out these sub-types and measuring which are most frequently occurring, or most strongly expressed, by interviewees.

A better solution, we argue here, is to focus analytical attention on the complex *interconnections* and *contradictions* between interviewees' accounts of boundary drawing. Indeed, we use the recent work of Pugh (2013) to argue that the expression of symbolic boundaries in interview settings is fundamentally bound up with the *different levels of information* interviews elicit about people's beliefs, feelings and practices. In particular, we connect our data to contradictions Pugh identifies as necessarily flowing from interviews, particularly the tension between more scripted 'honourable' narratives, where interviewees frame their answers to present themselves in a socially-desirable light, versus spontaneous 'visceral' narratives that capture people's emotional landscape of 'disgust, passion and inchoate notions of right and wrong'. However, rather than analyse these kinds of information separately, or hold up their combination as evidence of the 'problem' of people's cultural incoherence (Vaisey, 2009), we explicitly mine such contradictions. By focusing our analytical lens here we are able to access a particularly valuable type of information – what

² The significance of moral boundaries has also been explored by Norwegian scholars (Sakslind and Skarpenes, 2014; Skarpenes and Sakslind, 2010), who show how the Norwegian middle classes explicitly *refrain* from passing judgment on others' cultural practices and frequently depict themselves *in opposition* to what they see as morally dubious cultural snobbery.

Pugh (2013: 51) terms ‘meta-feelings’, or how people feel about how they feel. Meta-feelings, then, allow us to see the distance between interviewees’ honourable and visceral selves, the felt collision between how they feel and how they feel they *ought* to feel (Hochschild, 2012).

A second problem with the Lamontian approach is the assertion that ‘because symbolic boundaries are primarily enacted at the discursive level’ attitudinal data gathered in interviews ‘can be interpreted as behavioural data’ (Lamont, 1992: 18). Of course speech acts *are* a form of behaviour, but it does not necessarily follow that people’s actions are in accordance with their sentiments, and therefore that the behavioural enactment of symbolic boundaries can be inferred from their verbal articulation.

Indeed, Jerolmack and Khan (2014: 191) argue that if we want to fully understand how symbolic boundaries relate to social interaction, we must use ethnographic observation rather than interviews to see how they are enacted in real life. While we largely concur with this line of critique, we do believe that particular interviewing techniques can enhance our understanding of the relationship between attitudes and action in boundary drawing. In particular, we argue that eliciting accounts of cross-class interaction can generate particular analytical pay-offs, particularly when this follows on sequentially from interview questions tapping attitudinal data about symbolic boundaries. Such cross-class encounters provide a discursive setting to probe how people’s reported self-presentation and/or actions connects with the attitudinal stance they express elsewhere in the interview. Indeed, this is a particularly fruitful means to generate information about interviewees’ meta-feelings, as they grapple to explain to us – the interviewers – the contradictions between their reported action and the intentions, motivations and feelings that accompanied the action. While we stop short of arguing that such instances allow access to Goffmanian (1959) ‘backstage’ performances – interviews will arguably always constitute ‘frontstage’ settings – we do think this interviewing technique can unearth unique insights into how and why people monitor self-presentation in everyday life, and occasionally even encourage them to share ‘face-threatening’ narratives (Goffman, 1967) that would not emerge if we were only employing observational methods.

Moreover, we connect these complexities of self-presentation to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of the habitus – understood as a socially structured capacity, or practical sense, that enables social actors to navigate social situations. We shall argue here that the careful monitoring of self-presentation that we find among our upper-middle-class interviewees represents a symbolically valuable aspect of their practical sense. While these individuals frequently draw very strong class boundaries in interviews, they wilfully (and

sometimes strategically) mask these judgments in cross-class encounters. This concealment, if effective, acts as a distinct form of what Bourdieu (1989: 16) calls ‘strategies of condescension’, whereby ‘agents who occupy a higher position in one of the hierarchies of objective space symbolically deny the social distance between themselves and others, a distance which does not thereby cease to exist, thus reaping the profits of the recognition granted to a purely symbolic negation of distance’. This conception of ‘condescension’ is therefore rarely wilful or even conscious. Instead, it simply describes how the instinctive downplaying of difference in cross-class encounters – what Bourdieu calls the ‘art of behaving *comme il faut*’ – allows the privileged to both benefit publically from adherence to dominant norms of tolerance, while continuing to privately harbour feelings of distinction. In other words, powerfully-felt sentiments of snobbery remain unchallenged by flying under the dominant moral radar of egalitarianism and/or meritocracy.

In sum, our analysis aims to contribute to, and extend, two prominent streams of research; that associated with cultural omnivorousness and that associated with symbolic boundaries. From the former we retain the notions of openness and tolerance but argue that this does not necessarily imply blurred class-cultural divisions. While this point has been highlighted in previous work – most notably Johnston and Baumann (2014) – we probe further here, focusing on how tensions between what Johnston and Baumann term ‘democratisation’ and ‘distinction’ play out in interviewees’ presentation of self – both in interactions with ourselves, as interviewers, and in their recollections of everyday-life encounters with those different to themselves. We show that interviewees go to lengths to downplay class-cultural judgements in social encounters and argue that such reflexive monitoring of self-presentation constitutes a distinct Bourdieusian ‘strategy of condescension’.

From the latter stream of research, our contribution is more methodological and focuses on the complex contradictions in accounts of boundary drawing that occur in interview settings. We use the recent work of Pugh to argue that the expression of symbolic boundaries in interviews is fundamentally bound up with the *different levels of information* interviews elicit about people’s beliefs, feelings and practices. By explicitly honing in on such contradictory sentiments, as well as people’s reflections on their own inconsistencies, we challenge Lamont’s analytical strategy of mapping the ‘relative salience’ of various types of boundary drawing. We also point toward new methodological directions in the study of symbolic boundaries, particularly the use of interviews to probe recollections of cross-class encounters in everyday life.

3. Methodology

We draw upon two studies of class and lifestyle, one conducted in Britain 2013-2014 and one in Norway in 2009-2010. The British data is drawn from the mixed methods Great British Class Survey (GBCS) project (Savage et al., 2015). The GBCS was a web survey that ran on the BBC website from January 2011 to July 2013 and elicited 325 000 responses. 50 follow-up qualitative interviews were then conducted in April 2014, with a particular oversampling of respondents at the top ('elite') and bottom ('precariat') of the GBCS class schema. In this article we draw on 18 interviews conducted with GBCS respondents that, for comparative purposes, fall into Class 1 of the more widely recognised EGP class schema (i.e. 'higher-grade professionals, administrators, and officials; managers in large industrial establishments; large proprietors') (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993).³ The sample includes 8 women and 10 men, aged 21-77 (avg. 49.1). 16 interviewees were white-British, one was Black-British and one was Indian-British.

The Norwegian data is drawn from the Class, Status, Closure project in the city of Stavanger (Jarness, 2013). 46 qualitative interviews were conducted between September 2009 and May 2010. Respondents were evenly sampled across the Oslo Register Data Class Scheme (ORDC), which is informed by Bourdieu's notion of the social space (Hansen et al., 2009). In this article we draw on 20 interviews conducted with respondents that fall into Class 1 of the EGP class schema. The sample includes 9 women and 11 men, aged 28-66 (avg. 39.5). All of the interviewees were White-Norwegian.

The British interviews were split into two halves. First, a set of open-ended questions probed respondents' life histories. Second, questions included on the GBCS survey (i.e. probing economic resources, tastes, lifestyles, networks and class identity) were repeated but probed for qualitative detail. The Norwegian interviews had a similar focus but mainly focused on issues of taste and lifestyle. Significantly, the British interviews did not directly probe issues of snobbery and symbolic boundaries. These issues instead emerged more organically from discussions concerning class identity, lifestyle and intimate relationships. The Norwegian interviews, in contrast, probed symbolic boundaries more systematically. Such differences in interview-schedule constitute a limitation of the study, and it is important to acknowledge that some cross-national differences in boundary drawing that emerge in this article may be an artefact of the more or less direct questions posed. Yet, even if *some*

³ In order to assimilate the process of subsampling in the two national samples, we chose the EGP schema since this is widely recognised as a class schema suited for cross-national comparisons.

questions asked by interviewers differ, the vast majority of topics covered – relating to class identity, taste and lifestyle – were very similar.

The comparability of data is also enhanced by common interviewing techniques employed by both interviewers. Particularly important here was the cultivation of strong and sustained rapport with interviewees, which was key in facilitating shifts in self-presentation from the honourable to the visceral self (Weiss, 1994). A number of common strategies were used; active listening, sustained eye contact, a relaxed and interactive conversational style, and – particularly important for research on symbolic boundaries – conveying non-judgmental empathy (through nods, smiles, glances and other forms of non-verbal communication) even when interviewees expressed very aggressive social judgments (Wengraf, 2001). This process was aided by the shared class position of interviewers and interviewees, and the cultural affinities (and prejudices) interviewees often assumed we shared. This allowed us to occasionally assume the role of ‘trusted confidant’ (Lee, 1993) and arguably facilitated heightened levels of self-disclosure. To give one example, when we interviewed British respondent, Benedict, his house was being extensively refurbished and before the interview a brief exchange ensued between himself, the group of builders in his house, and ourselves. Later, during the interview, Benedict referenced the conversation, inferring (wrongly) that we had both found the exchange socially awkward:

I’m not second-guessing what you were like *there*, but I could sort of tell... Well, the way *we’re* talking now, that’s what interests me, it’s about ideas and that critical position. It’s less about facts and stories and jokes. [Emphasis added.]

Finally, and significantly for this paper, both sets of interviewers asked a specific set of questions about instances of cross-class interaction. These were sequentially located at the end of the interviews when we both felt rapport had been established. Interviewees were asked to recount encounters with ‘people from backgrounds very different to your own’, and then were probed on their experience of the interaction and the emotions it elicited.

In the findings that follow we largely employ a comparative case study approach, comparing four pairs of interviewees from the British and Norwegian data. We select these cases not because they are somehow hyperbolic but because they illustrate themes found consistently across all our interviews. Moreover, we believe that by examining a few interviewees in depth we are better able to convey the contradictions inherent in people’s accounts, as well as their attempts to make sense of such incoherence. However, to situate

these cases in the broader body of our qualitative data we begin by explaining how the main themes of judgment and tolerance emerged throughout our interview sample.

4. 'Visceral' vs. 'honourable' selves

Across our interview data we detected a widespread tension between accounts of explicit boundary drawing and accounts of acceptance, openness and decency. Especially in the early stages of interviews (but also at other points) respondents were typically very careful to refrain from making judgments about other people's way of life. While they certainly reported difference, very few made explicit claims that their own lifestyle was superior to others. Instead, most expressed what Pugh (2013) terms *honourable* narratives, i.e. belief statements which presents oneself in an admirable light, or put in Goffmanian terms, 'which incorporate and exemplify the official accredited values' (Goffman, 1959: 19). Such forms of display work were particularly evident in the frequent use of studied turns of phrase such as 'live and let live', 'each to their own' or 'who am I to judge?' As British respondent Alaine summed up, 'I always think... It doesn't matter what class you come from, life's what you make it'.

However, at other points in interviews, the very same respondents frequently contradicted themselves, making very explicit judgments – ranging from clothing styles, musical tastes, preferences for cars, to political views, child rearing and sexual practices. In these instances interviewees moved swiftly from the honourable to the *visceral*, inhabiting a charged emotional landscape of snobbery and judgment. This was not necessarily a linear process – with a clear dividing line – but instead manifested as particular (but unpredictable) moments where feelings of judgement spontaneously bubbled-forth. These moments were often signalled by phrases such as 'I have to admit that...', 'Well, to be honest...', 'Oh my God, I'm glad this interview is anonymous' or 'I'm not a snob, but...'

The honourable self (as open, inconspicuous and accepting) that we find here can be connected to a wide body of work showing a widespread quest for 'ordinariness' and disavowal of subjective class identity across a number of countries (e.g. Khan, 2015; Savage et al., 2001; Skeggs, 1997; Van Eijk, 2012). However, considering the literature on eroding symbolic boundaries, the concomitant prevalence of visceral downward judgement is arguably a more significant finding. As others have highlighted, class snobbery can have far-reaching social implications – fuelling discrimination in the workplace (Ashley et al., 2015; Friedman et al., 2016; Rivera, 2012), demographic segregation via differential association and interaction (Bottero, 2005; Butler and Robson, 2003) and the cultural pathologisation of working-class culture (Jensen, 2014; Lawler, 2005; Mckenzie, 2015).

For this reason we are keen to illustrate that *vertical boundary drawing*, i.e. classifications, evaluations and judgments of people who are perceived as different or inferior to respondents themselves – took place among *all* interviewees. Thus, Table 1 elucidates how such downward judgments are expressed ‘from above’ by all 38 Norwegian and British interviewees. This vertical boundary drawing includes demarcations of people with predilections for popular culture lacking a ‘raison d’etre’, and ‘flashy’ and ‘pathetic’ material consumption choices. People perceived as embodying such tastes, practices and manners are frequently depicted as ‘boring’, ‘scruffy’, ‘uneducated’, ‘simple-minded’, ‘embarrassing’, ‘not very subtle’, ‘lazy’ and ‘trashy’.

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Boundary drawing
British interviewees				
Charlotte	F	77	Retired teacher	On those living in social housing: ‘And how they speak! They just don’t know language is so rich.’
Paul	M	61	Accountant	Describes ‘most’ in his village as ‘philistines’: ‘Contempt is too strong but people who never look for the best in things.’
Fraser	M	66	Retired headteacher	‘How can you not like classical music and opera?! I shouldn’t say that but it’s true.’
Indi	M	71	Business owner	On tabloid readers: ‘It’s only the workers... they’re not used to reading, they just see the photos, especially nude photos.’
Elizabeth	F	60	Artist	On reading chick-lit: ‘it just lacks a raison d’etre’.
Alaine	F	33	Senior business manager	‘There’s a particular type, you know, tattoos, shorts, associated with a lot of our [town’s] problems.’
Anthony	M	57	University professor	On crowds at football vs rugby matches: ‘There’s a definitely a class difference – the atmosphere is more dangerous, unpleasant.’
Fiona	F	48	IT manager	On ‘heavily branded’ fashion: ‘So many buy mass-produced things simply because they’re told it’s fashionable’.
Jennifer	F	52	Fiction writer	‘They eat ready meals, I cook from primary ingredients, they watch commercial TV, they have a narrow world-view, I’m globally aware.’
Samantha	M	34	Political lobbyist	‘I try to be discerning and it’s a bit false to say there’s different types of taste, I think there is some objective level.’
Pierce	M	38	Journalist	‘People who like [Justin] Bieber are a perfect example, just designed for lowest common denominator.’
Roisin	F	59	FE lecturer	‘My friends are all professional, you tend to gravitate towards people you feel more comfortable with.’
Henry	M	21	Graduate lawyer	On the ‘nouveau riche’: ‘[they’re] just a bit flashy, not very subtle.’
Georgia	F	42	Head of marketing	On social housing: ‘You look at a building, the people, and decide whether it’s problematic.’
Benedict	M	51	IT manager	‘It’s a lazy default. So all the judgments on McDonald’s, soap operas, celebrity, they’re all kind of working-class things, aren’t they?’
Jeremy	M	27	Marketing manager	Describes extended ‘working-class’ family as ‘uncultured’: ‘they just consume... with no intelligence’.
Jarvis	M	38	solicitor	Describes those ‘living off benefits’ as ‘lazy’ and ‘very often’ making a ‘career’ out of benefits.

Louise	F	48	Senior retail consultant	'You're not going to get anywhere if you can't speak properly, it's down to accent and presence.'
Norwegian interviewees				
Freja	F	43	Head of cultural organisation	'I want a sailboat, not a motor boat. I want a nice cabin, not a caravan.[...] And I catch myself looking down on other people's choices.'
Jonas	M	34	Head of cultural organisation	On 'earnest and heartfelt' people without the intellectual capacity to relate to the world in an 'ironic and distanced way': 'To be around those kinds of people is of course horrible.'
Oscar	M	33	Academic	On 'ordinary people' buying popularized, used-to-be-distinguished designer furniture: 'It's not that refined any more. It's almost pathetic.'
Olivia	F	48	Head of cultural organisation	On the 'nouveau riche': 'The money came very fast to this town. It's reflected in the popular culture most people prefer, revues and that.'
Sara	F	46	Journalist	'When I meet people that I cannot connect with and on top of that they all have a taste in music that is so far off from everything that I like, it's sort of an affirmation that we don't have much in common.'
Sofia	F	66	Academic	'From my point of view, there are very few people who are endowed with sufficient cultural competence in this town.'
Theodor	M	43	Head of cultural organisation	'If you haven't got a single picture on your wall, if you don't own a single book, if you've hardly got a record collection... [...] I find that really disturbing. It's important to have values in life.'
Thomas	M	40	Journalist	'I'm elitist. And a snob. [...] I demand that the people I'm surrounded by are conscious about themselves, their surroundings and society at large. I expect them to be able to discuss politics, and Bob Dylan's discography, for that matter.'
Anna	F	51	Manager, oil company	On people who read 'gossip magazines': 'Either they have a terribly boring life or too much spare-time. It doesn't have any substance.'
Georg	M	47	Banker	On 'scruffy working-class bars': 'I would never put my feet in any of those places.'
Johan	M	53	CEO	'When people are served really bad wine, and they think it tastes good, then I can tell that they've never really tasted the good stuff.'
Kristian	M	35	Dentist	On living in 'scruffy neighbourhoods': 'I wouldn't feel at ease. I could never live in such an area.'
Lucas	M	31	Lawyer	'It would be horrible to be stranded on a desert island with a welder who only cares about smoking roll-ups and talking about the latest titty mail he's received.'
Mikkel	M	36	Manager, oil company	Why he avoids certain neighbourhoods: 'I guess these people live lives totally different from mine. I guess uneducated people without any academic background whatsoever.'
Pia	F	48	Lawyer	On 'bad clothing styles': 'I almost think they belong to a lower class. [...] I guess I'd think that this person was a bit simple-minded.'
Wilhelm	M	40	Manager, oil company	On conformity in consumer choices: 'Why do all people drive a Volkswagen Passat? Haven't they got their own taste?'
Helene	F	28	Medical doctor	On people with 'bad music taste': 'I find that a bit sad, really. They must be kind of boring.'
Lea	F	35	Medical doctor	'A horrible example of bad taste is women who wear these sweaters that look like they're made for pregnant women. Combined with these ordinary, boring jeans and these sad, high-heeled shoes.'
Nora	F	34	Lawyer	'People who try to be intellectual, but who are not, and just talk some mumbo-jumbo because they've smoked too much weed...

Table 1: Vertical boundary drawing

5. Mining contradictions

While some scholars (e.g. Vaisey, 2009) may interpret the apparent contradiction between honourable and visceral selves as unhelpfully obfuscating the practical consciousness *really* driving social action, here we analytically embrace (and scrutinise) this incoherence. In the following, we focus on two exemplary cases: Sara, a Norwegian journalist, and Fraser, a retired British headteacher. Sara is in her mid-40s. She was brought up in what she describes as a 'cultured' home. Both her parents worked for renowned cultural organisations and she was brought up to appreciate the 'fine arts'. Despite expressing a very precise set of cultural preferences, Sara was also ardent that she is not a 'prejudiced snob':

I don't want to bother other people with my taste. People have their right to like what they like, don't they? And who am I to judge? I'm not a taste police. Why would I be that? You know, who has given me that mandate? [...] I know what I like and I seek out that stuff. And I know what I don't like and I leave that stuff be.

Nevertheless, at several points later Sara veers into quite explicit boundary drawing. She is deeply sceptical, for example, of 'popular music like the Swedish *dansband* crap' and taste judgments frequently meld into judgments of particular types of people displaying denigrated tastes. After talking about 'bad' fashion choices, Sara paints a picture of the stereotypically 'badly dressed Norwegian woman':

She wears skirts which are far too short, shows far too much cleavage. Generally, people who don't wear enough clothes look stupid. You know, regardless of how good a figure you have, if you show too much skin, that's not nice. It's trashy. But the worst thing is people at my age who show too much skin. Especially if they should have left more to the imagination, if you catch my drift?

A very similar contradictory account is given by Fraser, a recently retired British headteacher. Fraser is from a wealthy, upper-middle-class background and has enjoyed a long and successful career. He has a 'very comfortable pension', owns his large detached home, and has savings of 'not quite a million, but certainly six figures'. Despite acknowledging his advantaged social position, Fraser is keen to stress empathy towards those 'less fortunate' and continually eschews any sense of snobbery:

I always try to sort of respect it even if I don't agree. If it's their taste it's their taste. Live and let live let's say as far as taste is concerned.

Yet despite a strong moral commitment to tolerance, Fraser frequently contradicts himself on the topic of snobbery. Here, for example, he goes on the offensive about those who enjoy bingo:

It's not sort of an intellectually absorbing pastime – other than if you're a greedy person and hope to win.

We interpret such brazen contradictions as the collision of divergent but equally *real* aspects of honourable and visceral selves. Faced with a stranger asking somewhat uncomfortable questions (i.e. a probing sociologist in action), interviewees like Fraser and Sara at first upheld an honourable front of openness and decency. However, as our interviews progressed – and as rapport was built and respondents began to feel more relaxed and 'talk themselves warm' – more visceral feelings of disgust and righteousness began to emerge.

However, we are keen to stress that interviewees were not unaware of such contradictions. On the contrary, they often attempted to immediately reconcile judgements with immediate qualifications. Thus, after Fraser told us that his neighbours were all 'y'know, nice people, professional people', he stressed to us that he didn't mean this in 'a snobby, snooty sort of way, nothing against working class people, many of my friends are working class, it's not like that, it's just we're people of similar outlook and education'. In the following passage, he makes a similar attempt to deflect an initial statement that he reflexively recognises may be 'arrogant':

I mean if somebody says, 'he likes classical music,' or 'he likes opera' or 'how highbrow,' I'd feel sorry for them 'cause if you don't appreciate the beauty of something like opera, you know, you're missing out on life. [Pause.] I'm not saying I'm arrogant. I accept it's a matter of taste.

Such instances of reflexivity – common across all interviews – demonstrate a very careful marshalling of self-presentation. Respondents clearly feel, and therefore express, strong social judgments yet are simultaneously sensitive to the way such views breach widely-shared norms of tolerance and acceptance. In most cases, this tussle resulted in the eventual restoration of the honourable, with expressions of openness quickly intervening in the interview setting whenever visceral feelings of judgment bubbled-forth. However, the sense of regret, embarrassment and defensiveness that invariably followed admissions of judgment illustrated the power of what Pugh (2013) calls *meta-feelings* in mediating the expression of

symbolic boundaries and underlined the difficulty of suppressing the visceral in pursuit of socially-desirable self-presentation.

So far we have argued that there are striking similarities between the two national samples. There are, however, some crucial nuances to this claim. Although the desire to foreground the honourable self is strong in both samples, what actually constituted the honourable differed cross-culturally. In the following, we scrutinise this by focusing again on two cases.

Johan is in his mid-50s. He is a CEO of a large Norwegian company. Having an income and other economic assets that ‘most people dare not dream of’, Johan sees no point in being ‘stingy’. He is particularly interested in cars and motorcycles, and has a big collection of both veteran and new models. However, reflecting on the strict norms in the town where he grew up, he explains how the acquisition of expensive material objects was often frowned upon:

The Law of Jante was extremely powerful where I grew up. So my parents were always very cautious when it came to buying stuff. It was like, ‘No, no! We can’t buy a new car, because people might dislike it.’ So I remember from very early on, I told myself never to let other people make decisions for me.

‘The Law of Jante’ is frequently referred to by Norwegian interviewees. It is a popular saying referring to the novel *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks* (1936 [1933]) by the Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose. Generally, the Law of Jante refers to negative depictions of individual success and achievement, or a mentality emphasising the collective while discouraging those who stand out as achievers. Several Norwegian interviewees reflexively point out that they perceive their environment – or, more generally, Norwegian society – as pervaded by such a mentality, while explicitly disavowing this mentality themselves. Unlike his parents, Johan refuses to let the Law of Jante prevent him from acquiring expensive motor vehicles. However, when reflecting upon his privilege at another point in the interview, a somewhat different story is conveyed:

My income is far higher than average. And I’ve got lots of stocks and other assets. And in that sense, I’m privileged. [...] But for one, I never show off. And second, I never boast of my riches.

So while Johan resolutely refuses to let negative reactions influence his expensive lifestyle, he is still acutely *aware* of such reactions, emotionally, and is careful to report that he never

‘shows off’ or ‘boasts’ of his riches. This is a typical example from the Norwegian data; comparing and contrasting one’s own lifestyle against the honourable cultural ideal of egalitarianism and sameness (Gullestad, 1992). Whether one agrees with the ideals of egalitarianism or not, it seems the interviewees feel compelled to justify themselves within these terms of reference.

Among the British interviewees, references to the honourable played out in a different manner. Indeed, mindful of Britain’s aristocratic past and hierarchical class structure (which many interviewees believe is still present in British society), interviewees were careful to distance themselves from a snobbery they associate with ascribed privilege. Georgia provided a telling example. Brought up just outside London, she had been very successful in business – currently earning £150,000 a-year as a communications director of a multinational company. Like others, though, Georgia was keen to downplay her success and stress her ‘ordinariness’. Asked about her class identity, for example, she told us:

I definitely don’t perceive myself as upper class because to me that just goes into snob territory and that’s a terrible thing.

Yet what was particularly interestingly about this self-distancing from snobbery was the way in which Georgia immediately located it within the context of the British class system:

I mean I’ve always felt kind of privileged, but not in a sense of... You know, some of my friends went to private schools and know nobility and mixed in very weird and wonderful circles. So when you use the term privileged it’s often referenced in that old school sense. So to me posh was always public school, it was daddy with money, it was inherited... Whereas I suppose I know it’s me that’s got me where I am.

What is striking, then, is the very different cultural backdrop that frames Georgia and Johan’s honourable self-presentation. While expensive lifestyles and financial success may be inherently suspicious in an egalitarian environment like Norway, in Britain the issue is more about the nature of such success – whether it is achieved *meritocratically*. In short, Norwegians are more concerned with equality of *outcome* whereas the British emphasize equality of *opportunity*.

6. Cross-class encounters and the (strategic) monitoring of self-presentation

In the previous section we saw how boundary drawing and openness are intertwined across *all* our interview data – albeit in different ways in different countries. We interpreted this as reflecting tensions between honourable and visceral selves, and resulting in a set of meta-feelings through which respondents reflexively grapple with the contradictions they straddle.

Yet, sociologically, it is important to ask what are the *implications* of this tension in terms of the enactment of class boundaries – i.e. how do the contradictions play out in everyday interaction, particularly in encounters between people in very different class positions? To tap these questions both interviewers asked interviewees to recall specific examples of cross-class encounters. Although this was a largely explorative methodological strategy we were both surprised by the quality of the data that emerged. In most cases such recollections constituted what Hochschild (2003) has termed ‘magnified moments’, instances of heightened and often fraught emotion where interviewees were able to provide us with a window into how the tensions between their honourable and visceral selves played out in everyday settings. In the following, we analyse four such instances.

Benedict, 52, is a senior IT manager at a British art school. As mentioned earlier, when we interviewed Benedict his house was being refurbished and there was a small army of builders scattered around his home. He seemed to have a good relationship with them and began the interview by telling us that he enjoyed having them around; enjoyed talking to them about ‘ordinary stuff’. Interestingly, though, at the end of the interview when Benedict was noticeably more comfortable and open, he confided that these interactions were not so straightforward and that it was ‘class’ that represented the ‘barrier’:

Benedict: But sometimes I think I’m kind of talking [with the builders] at a level, at which I’m possibly just performing and it’s taking quite a lot of effort, you know? I’m having to kind of power down. And I don’t really have the energy for that anymore.

Q: Is that about the subjects that you can connect on?

B: Yeah. The subjects, but also the way you talk about the subject, whether it’s critical or not. That’s the level at which I’m most comfortable and, paradoxically, it’s more effort to be superficial [pause]... But then again when you suddenly don’t have links with the man on the street, it’s that sort of idea that you’re detached from real life. So I’m fairly insistent about this idea of living as close to the street as possible, because you know, you work in an organisation with people, from cleaners to the principal, and some people are very good at talking vertically...

Q: Do you think you’re good at that?

B: I’m not as good as I used to be, but I try... I mean it’s how you appear to others isn’t it? So it’s partly about the performative, yeah, wanting to establish a sort of zero base, so there’s a persona that I want to project which is more, you know...

This passage is telling for two reasons. First, it demonstrates the considerable discomfort Benedict experiences when suppressing his ‘critical’ self in the interests of upholding a ‘superficial’ honourable self. However, it also illustrates very clearly his *motivation* for enacting what he calls the ‘performative’. For Benedict, ‘projecting’ a convincing version of

his honourable self is a carefully calculating move, particularly in the workplace where he sees successful ‘vertical’ interaction as a key management tool.

Jonas, who is in his mid-30s and heads a renowned Norwegian cultural organisation, displays a similarly strategic presentation of self. He tells us that, culturally, he prefers to ‘appear indistinct, not too obvious and hard to pin down.’ For example, although he likes the renowned Norwegian expressionist Edward Munch, he would not put his pictures on his walls – this is a ‘bit of a cliché’ that would ‘testify to a lack of understanding’. However, while Jonas has no moral issues conveying his ‘snobbish’ self to us, the interviewer, he very consciously downplays such attitudes when encountering people whom he suspects do not share his cultural interests. Again this is particularly evident in interactions connected to his professional life:

It’s all about positioning, of course. There’s a difference between what I personally feel, and the professional role I play. In a town like this, to appear elitist equals death. I mean, if I appear in public, I won’t show any elitist tendencies... Well, not that I am elitist, but I am very careful about expressing myself in ways that don’t appear too academic, too elitist or too high cultural... [...] So in my professional role, this is something I am very conscious about. For instance, I’ve had a fair share of media coverage lately. And just the other day, [the local newspaper] printed this fairly long interview. And I think it was more important to [the readers] that they got to know that I play football in my spare time, rather than [the work I do]. [...] But I mean, this is my professional role. As a private citizen... I’m not afraid to wave my flag and tell people what I like and don’t like. [...] But it all depends on the situation.

Thus, Jonas strategically compartmentalises different roles. Although he sees no problem in expressing judgment as a private person, he is careful not to act in ‘elitist ways’ in the public sphere. Indeed, he sees it as strategically wise to ‘keep his head down’ in order to avoid negative attention from those who do not share his views on aesthetics.

In the real-world situations recounted by Jonas and Benedict we again see the tensions of the honourable and visceral, and particularly the difficulties – emotionally and practically – of successfully marshalling feelings of judgement. However, in recollections of particular cross-class interactions, Jonas and Benedict also reveal a strategic motivation for honourable self-presentation that is not evident from attitudinal questions. Like many of our interviewees, they are aware that elitist sentiments may result in unwanted negative attention, and therefore under-communicate difference in professional settings. Translated into Bourdieusian terminology, it is possible to see this as a distinct strategy of condescension, an instinctive practical sense, or ‘reflexive mastery’, for when and where it is (in)appropriate to act *comme il faut* with those different to oneself (Bourdieu, 1990: 66ff). Indeed, this strategy allows

Jonas and Benedict to both benefit publically from adherence to culturally dominant norms of openness, while privately continuing to harbour feelings of snobbery.

It is important to stress, however, that although some respondents quite calculatedly avoided rousing hostility, the successful enactment of Bourdieusian strategies of condescension is not contingent on conscious deception. Instead, it simply implies a capacity or competency to monitor one's presentation of self in ways that may prove to be socially profitable, regardless of motivation. Indeed, it may be that it is simply a by-product of what individuals *themselves* see as following an appropriately moral or honourable line of action. Take Freja, for example, a Norwegian museum director in her mid-40s. Although reporting a very precise and bounded set of cultural preferences, Freja – like many we have presented – is unsettled by the thought of seeing herself as 'snobbish'. However, she admits that these sentiments are severely tested in her workplace where she is frequently forced to interact with people with whom she has little in common:

Some pensioners used to hang around in this café next door... [...] And then one of them started to come into the museum every day and asked if he could play the piano. He knew how to play a couple of folk tunes. You know, the kind of songs everyone knows. And he wasn't the world's best piano player. [...] And then this prominent academic figure came by and said: 'This music is really degrading this place'. And the music wasn't great. I grant her that. But I don't know. I mean one should have some standards when it comes to quality. But sometimes the social aspect sort of becomes more important than the art, if you know what I mean?

In this emotionally uncomfortable encounter, Freja is conflicted by accommodating two very different types: the prominent academic (with whom she shared cultural interests and aesthetic sensibilities) and the piano-playing pensioner (with whom she didn't share cultural interests and who was actually performing quite poorly on the piano). Although she ultimately sides with the pensioner, this is not a calculated or dishonest attempt to downplay difference. Instead, for Freja, the visceral invokes feelings of openness and collectivism ('the social aspect') that, at least in this moment, outweigh the primacy of aesthetic judgement. This is important to emphasise. Unlike the cases of Benedict and Jonas – where it is largely the appearance of openness that is emphasised – here we see a more meaningful and intentional bridging of class boundaries. However, we would reiterate that this does not negate the fact that Freja retains very clear feelings of aesthetic judgment, which appear throughout her interview, and which crucially remain concealed from the pensioner in this interaction.

It is also significant that such instances again revealed important cross-cultural differences between Norwegian and British respondents. Although similar recollections of

emotionally demanding encounters are salient in the British data, these recollections often revolved around traditional markers of privilege in Britain. For example, even when explicitly attempting to downplay difference, many interviewees reported difficulties in bridging class differences in social interaction. Here powerful embodied markers of class such as accent acted to discredit even the most well-intentioned expressions of tolerance. Our interview with Henry, a law student from a wealthy background and educated at an elite public-school, epitomised this process. Henry admitted that his friends tend to be from ‘similar situations’ but explained that this doesn’t mean ‘I’m exclusive or averse to having other friends’. The issue, Henry explained, is more that his attempts at fostering diverse networks are undermined by what he called the ‘reverse-snobbery’ of others, and particularly the symbolic baggage attached to classed markers of his upbringing. In one telling anecdote, he described ‘the mistake’ of going to a pub and being subsequently made to feel ‘distinctly uncomfortable’ by the ‘locals’:

I said one word and just instantly click, boxed... The guy behind the bar was like, ‘You shouldn’t be here, you must be friggin’ royalty.’ And of course I was there with a load of other kids from schools like mine who spoke like me and we were like [accentuates his received-pronunciation (RP) accent] – ‘I’ll have a gin and tonic, please.’ It was just, you know, the end of the world, just from the second you’ve spoken. I sometimes think I wind people up the wrong way just for existing.

What we wish to highlight here, then, is that attempts to downplay class differences are complex. They can be both stressful – in terms of the labour required to muffle very real visceral feelings of judgment, as in the case of Benedict – and they are also not necessarily successful, as in the case of Henry. Of course one limitation of this data is that without the testimonies of the working-class individuals involved in these exchanges, we have limited means of ascertaining whether respondents are *effective* in their performances of honourable selves – i.e. whether their ‘audiences’ actually see them as decent, accommodating and open-minded people. However, the reflections of those like Henry suggest that some fail to convince however determined they try. Indeed, it is important to recognise that trying and failing to downplay difference can actually backfire if interlocutors challenge (and socially sanction) what they see as disingenuous or insincere self-presentation. As Henry’s example illustrates, strategies of condescension can fail in fairly conspicuous ways, and may even act to galvanise antagonism and resistance from the bottom up.

7. Concluding discussion

Despite the voluminous literature on eroding symbolic boundaries, we have shown here that upper-middle-class respondents in Norway and the UK draw strong vertical boundaries based on cultural taste and lifestyle. However, we have also demonstrated that such expressions of snobbery tend to be bookended in interview settings by a strong moral imperative to appear open, tolerant and respectful of others. These honourable accounts dominate the way interviewees present themselves initially in interviews and they also appear again to deflect, reconcile or marshal self-presentations when visceral moments of judgement bubble-forth. Although we discover marked cross-cultural differences in the cultural imaginaries underpinning such honourable narratives – UK interviewees evoke imaginaries cut through with remnants of aristocratic hierarchies and severe class divisions, whereas Norwegian interviewees are conscious of norms discouraging individual achievement – it seems the *end result* of this is strikingly similar in both countries: interviewees do not want to be considered ‘snobbish’ or ‘elitist’, and go to lengths not to be perceived as such. Thus, while people may draw upon different Lamontian ‘national repertoires of evaluation’ to make sense of themselves and others, such repertoires can still play a very *similar* role in underpinning how the privileged believe they should behave in cross-class encounters.

We believe this careful monitoring of self-presentation may constitute a profitable capacity embodied in the habitus of the upper-middle class. As many studies demonstrate, working-class groups often distinguish between people of privilege who are ‘decent’ and ‘accommodating towards others’ and people of privilege who are ‘snobbish’ and ‘look down on others’ – with the former clearly valued over the latter (Friedman, 2014; Jarness, 2013; McKenzie, 2015). It is thus not so much the possession of cultural and economic resources, or the exclusive lifestyles associated with these resources, which the less resourceful view with suspicion: rather, it is the perceived ‘smugness’, ‘elitism’ and ‘contemptuousness’ of the privileged that rouse negative reactions. In this way, it is possible to argue that there may be a particular symbolic market for the downplaying of difference we see in our data. In other words, the successful monitoring of self-presentation may be effective (and profitable) because it means that actual social boundaries existing between classes – as well as the potential privileges and advances accruing from practicing certain legitimate lifestyles – are not questioned, as those in lower class positions (wrongly) presume that the upper middle-class do not believe their cultural practices and ways of life are superior. Flying under the moral radar of egalitarianism, then, may – intentionally or otherwise – help secure the legitimacy of cultural distinction and class-cultural boundaries.

In making this argument we also aim to further the Bourdieusian notion of ‘strategies of condescension’. While Bourdieu refers to such strategies in a number of texts (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984: 472; 1989: 16; 1991: 68-9), these references are fleeting and explore largely caricatured and hypothetical examples, such as the French aristocrat who pats his coachman on the arse (Bourdieu, 1991: 124). In this way, we hope our analysis demonstrates more concretely how the concept can help us connect empirical phenomena to processes of symbolic domination. In particular it allows us to see how, in downplaying difference, those in privileged positions can ‘derive profit from the objective relations of power [...] in the very act of symbolically negating that relation’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 68). Moreover, in extracting such strategies through interview *narrations* of downplaying, we further demonstrate that ‘the truth of any interaction is never entirely to be found within the interaction as it avails itself in observation’ (Bourdieu, 1989: 16). Finally, we also believe our analysis draws attention to the possibility – neglected in Bourdieu’s writings – that such strategies may not always be successful. Indeed, it is worth acknowledging that we lack the empirical tools to fully interrogate the Bourdieusian concept of condescension here. In particular, methodological triangulation is needed to examine whether those in less privileged positions actually find such performances of openness convincing, as well as observational data that can provide an alternative interpretative lens on whether people’s behaviours actually tally with their recollections.

Our final point is methodological and has to do with the use of interviews in empirically mapping symbolic boundaries. Clearly, boundary drawing deserves specific empirical and analytical attention and should not be, as it often is, simply conflated with people’s cultural likes and dislikes. However, our points about the complexities of self-presentation – both in the interview situation and in the outside world – imply that the mapping of symbolic boundaries is no simple task. It is clearly not straightforward to simply ‘tap’ symbolic boundaries by turning on a recording device and asking people what kinds of people and practices they do not like and why.

Moreover, our analysis helps nuance Lamont’s (1992) analytical strategy of mapping the ‘relative salience’ of various subtypes of symbolic boundaries and then comparing aggregates of interviewees with different characteristics (e.g. nationality and class). To apply this analytical strategy on our data, however, would effectively conflate the crucial analytical distinction between, and empirical intertwinement of, what Pugh (2013) calls the visceral and the honourable. As we demonstrate, interviewees frequently present contradictory accounts of their evaluations and classifications of others. The accounts of visceral judgment are primarily

(but not exclusively) characterised by what Lamont calls *cultural* boundaries (manifested in aesthetic judgments of others' tastes) and honourable accounts of acceptance, openness and decency are primarily characterised by *moral* boundaries (manifested in refrainment from judgment and explicit dis-identification with 'snobbishness'). To follow Lamont's framework would imply measuring which of the accounts are most frequently occurring, or most strongly expressed, by the interviewees. True, this may inadvertently capture the fact that interviewees' accounts can be characterised as both judgemental *and* open/accommodating towards others. However, by explicitly honing in on such contradictory sentiments, as well as people's reflections on their own inconsistencies, we believe our analysis takes this one step further. In particular, we demonstrate that these seemingly contradictory sentiments are so strongly *intertwined* that to separate them out is to miss the complex ways in which they combine to animate meta-feelings that often drive reflections (and actions) around boundary drawing. We thus emphasise the fruitfulness of applying Pugh's framework, as this renders possible an analysis of symbolic boundaries that fully captures the complexity of articulations (or downplaying) of class judgement in social life.

While our argument does not directly contradict Lamont, we do believe it points toward new methodological directions in the study of symbolic boundaries, particularly the use of interviews to probe recollections of cross-class encounters in everyday life. Not only do these accounts offer an important means by which to 'ethnographize' the interview (Ortner, 2003), but they also produce rich observational and reflexive accounts of how interviewees themselves negotiate 'magnified moments' where honourable and visceral selves tussle to orientate action. Indeed, probing this fraught relationship between what those in privileged class positions say they *think* about others and their reflections on what they actually *do* is, we believe, particularly important for understanding how class boundaries can be effectively maintained even within supposedly meritocratic or egalitarian societies.

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