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How Are Cultural Tastes Stratified?
Evidence from Library Borrowing for the Entire Population of Denmark

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Abstract:

Research shows that cultural tastes are socially stratified. Yet, most of this research relies on small-sample surveys and includes only a few dimensions of stratification. To address these limitations, we analyze registry data on library borrowing for the entire adult population of Denmark and consider four dimensions of social stratification: wealth, education, income, and occupation. We find considerable social stratification in library borrowing and in highbrow literary tastes by wealth and education, but not by income and occupation. As Denmark is characterized by higher wealth and educational stratification than income and occupational stratification, our results suggest that although cultural tastes always seem to be socially stratified, the type of stratification likely depends on the nature of the wider inequalities within a given context. We end by discussing the implications of our results, including how stratification of tastes according to wealth represents a type of stratification not considered in existing research on cultural stratification.

Data availability

Files needed to replicate all recodes and analyses are available at the Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/z2n4u/?view_only=d3e078958dd54b67a191c1e967d39b84. The data underlying this article were provided by Statistics Denmark. Data can be accessed under agreement with Statistics Denmark under the Research Scheme (https://www.dst.dk/en/TilSalg/Forskningsservice/Dataadgang).

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Introduction

The cultural lives of people are highly socially stratified. Rich, highly educated, professionals consume very different culture to poor, less educated, routine workers (Bennett et al 2009; Chan 2010; Katz-Gerro 2017; Warde 2018). This basic stratifying assumption has become so pervasive that it functions almost as a stylized fact. As Fishman and Lizardo (2013: 213) state: "… the most consistent finding in the sociology of taste is that social position systematically shapes cultural preferences."

Exactly *how* are cultural tastes stratified? In this paper, we use exceptionally rich data on library use and literary tastes to map the social stratification of taste. By social stratification, we refer to ranking of people based on material, social, or positional assets. We focus on library use and literary tastes, both important dimensions of cultural tastes (Kraaykamp and Dijkstra 1999; Kraaykamp and van Eijck 2010; Sokolov and Sokolova 2019; Sullivan 2007; Torche 2007), and map their social stratification along four dimensions: wealth rank, educational attainment, income rank, and occupation. Despite recent research highlighting the importance of wealth as a "fourth" dimension of social stratification (Hällsten and Thaning 2022), wealth is practically missing in research on the social stratification of taste. We focus on Denmark and, in doing so, address three limitations in existing research.

First, most research relies on survey data with comparatively small samples. While survey data make it possible to map general patterns of social stratification of taste, they are ill-suited for mapping social stratification in any great detail. Moreover, sample surveys often miss elites and the very wealthy, even though sociological claims often revolve around the distinctive tastes of the wealthy (Sherman 2016) and elites (Friedman and Reeves 2020). Finally, surveys often miss the poor, who tend not to participate in surveys. To address these limitations, we analyze registry data on library borrowing for the entire adult population of Denmark (about 4.6 million people) in 2020 and 2021. The registry data include all books in all public libraries, thus effectively covering the entire universe of library borrowing in Denmark. We merge the registry data on library borrowing with registry data on the individuals that borrow books, including information on their wealth, education, income, and occupation. The data enable us to map the social stratification of library use along the entire distribution of individuals' wealth, education, income, and occupation, *each dimension net of the other dimensions*, in unprecedented detail. While we can only observe the genres of books borrowed for those who use libraries (23%; *N*: 1,052,286), we can observe whether an individual uses libraries at all for the entire population. We analyze stratification in a preference for reading (as identified by any library use). Further, we analyze social stratification of literary tastes

among those who use the library, as identified by the genres of books borrowed. We substantiate the relevance of our findings by using survey data for a subsample of the population to replicate the main analyses and show that library borrowing is associated with self-reported literary and broader cultural tastes.

Second, most research derives the association between social position and cultural tastes from very general categories of cultural taste or participation (e.g., "how often do you go to the cinema?"). These general categories mask hierarchies of distinction that exist within these categories ("What genres of movies do you watch at the cinema?"; Childress et al. 2021; Flemmen et al 2018) and that individuals might associate categories with different things (for example, one individual might associate "cinema" with going to a blockbuster movie, while another individual might associate it with going to an arthouse movie; Savage and Gayo-Cal 2011). This is particularly true for research on reading that often focuses on whether people read or the number of books they own, rather than on *what* they read (Engzell 2021; Griswold et al 2005; Sikora, Evans, Kelley 2019, Park 2008). The registry data on library borrowing we draw on, in contrast, include metadata for each book, including information on genre (fiction and non-fiction, and subgenres within each main genre) and format (physical, digital, and audio). We use this metadata to analyze which genres and formats that individuals who use the library prefer based on the books they actually borrowed. In particular, we distinguish individuals' taste for popular (e.g., crime), highbrow (e.g., *Bildungsroman*), and award-winning books, and their taste for diverse genres and authors (i.e., literary omnivorousness). This way, the data enable us to address dimensions of literary tastes often linked to distinction.

Third, most research relies upon self-reported patterns of cultural taste and participation, which negate the fact that people do not necessarily do what they say they do, culturally (Yaish and Katz-Gerro 2012). The registry data on library borrowing capture *actual* rather than *self-reported* cultural taste and consumption, which is a significant advantage. Yet, the registry data do not capture individuals' literary tastes in their entirety (as individuals likely also purchase books) or how individuals use books to create distinction (Flemmen et al 2018; Jarness 2015). Previous research substantiates that reading preferences obtained from library loan data provide important insights into the social stratification of taste (Sokolov and Sokolova 2018, 2019). For a subsample of the population, we combine registry data on library takeout with survey data on self-reported literary tastes (e.g., preferred genres) and cultural participation (e.g., attendance at stage art and museums) and show that library borrowing correlates with broader literary and cultural tastes and participation. This correlation

corroborates using library borrowing as a proxy for broader cultural tastes and shows that individuals' self-reported tastes in surveys match their actual behavior.

Our empirical analysis shows that library use and literary tastes are socially stratified along multiple dimensions. The propensity to use libraries, and the number of books borrowed, increase with individuals' wealth rank and education, but not with their income rank and occupation. These results align with research showing stronger inequality in the Nordic countries by wealth and education than by income and occupation (Breen and Johnson 2005, Erola et al. 2016, Hertel and Groh-Samberg 2019, Pfeffer and Waitkus 2021, Skopek 2014). Among library users (23% of the adult population), we find substantial stratification in terms of the overall number of books people borrow and the likelihood of borrowing highbrow books (e.g., *Bildungsroman* and experimental literature). For wealth, the gradients occur across both popular (e.g., crime and biographical novels) and highbrow books, while education is the only domain for which we see a highbrow preference combined with a relative distaste for popular genres or books by popular authors. For income and occupation, we find no consistent stratification in the genres of books people borrow from the library. For example, individuals with high income and in high occupational groups do not systematically borrow more popular or highbrow books than do less advantaged individuals. Moreover, they do not exhibit more omnivorous tastes either, as measured by a preference for diverse genres or authors or borrow more consecrated books (or prefer authors) that have won awards. The key takeaway from our analysis is that the social stratification of taste is multidimensional and depends on the nature of the wider inequalities within a given context.

Theoretical Framework

We now outline our theoretical expectations linking cultural tastes (and library borrowing specifically) to social stratification. We argue that social stratification of cultural taste and consumption varies across dimensions of stratification (wealth, education, income, and occupation) because these dimensions potentially produce distinct approaches to cultural practice and consumption of specific cultural objects. Moreover, the specificities of the societal context may also affect the particular relationship between these different dimensions of stratification. We reflect on the importance of Denmark as a case after we lay out the main theoretical links between library borrowing and these measures of stratification.

Social Stratification of Cultural Tastes

A rich literature in sociology argues that cultural tastes are a means for the privileged to signal wealth (Veblen 1934), sociability (Tarde 1962), and status (Weber 1978). Moreover, cultural tastes map onto social hierarchies in a distinct "social space of lifestyles" (Bourdieu 1984) in which cultural tastes serve two functions. First, they signal where individuals and groups belong within the social hierarchy, with highbrow tastes (e.g., opera and poetry) signaling a higher position than popular tastes (e.g., heavy metal and reality television). Second, they delineate symbolic boundaries between groups (Childress et al 2021; Lamont and Molnár 2002) and, by being consumed in different ways (Jarness 2015), enforce symbolic boundaries.

This general connection between social stratification and the social space of lifestyles may, as Bourdieu has theorized, play out in more nuanced ways when specific dimensions of stratification are explored. We argue that each of the "big four" dimensions of social stratification (wealth, education, income, and occupation; Hällsten and Thaning 2022) will have a distinct connection with patterns of cultural consumption, and library borrowing specifically. This is likely to be even more pertinent when each dimension is considered *net of the other dimensions*, for example occupational stratification net of educational and income stratification. This matters of course because occupational stratification in part *reflects* educational and income stratification. What makes this challenging to parse is the fact that the four dimensions of social stratification are partly overlapping, and the Nordic countries, to which Denmark belongs, are not an exception to this pattern (Erola et al 2016; Hällsten and Thaning 2022; Mood 2017). The fact that they are only partly overlapping is crucial, however. As Pfeffer and Waitkus (2021) remind us: the level of income and wealth inequality need not correlate within a country, which is why Norway and Sweden, for example, can have low income inequality but comparatively high wealth inequality. In articulating these theoretical links, therefore, we are attempting to draw out the unique features of each dimension in relation to a specific form of cultural consumption, book borrowing and literary tastes.

Wealth stratification refers to the unequal distribution of net worth, i.e., the total value of assets such as cash, commodities, stocks, bonds, and property (Killewald et al 2017). In practical terms, most of the wealth that people own is bound up in real estate or pensions, with the importance of stocks and bonds rising as you move up the wealth distribution. Wealth insures individuals against adverse economic shocks and provides a steady stream of income (e.g., via capital income; Hällsten and Pfeffer 2017). Wealth also allows people to purchase cultural objects (say, books) and experiences. However, the consumption capacities of wealth are not unique to wealth *per se* and may be captured when we control for income. So, if wealth

is not necessarily distinct in facilitating the *purchase* of cultural objects and experiences, what is its specific contribution to patterns of cultural consumption? We would argue that wealth enables more voracious cultural consumption because it allows individuals to reduce their reliance on the labor market (for their income) and instead enjoy more leisure time. Consistent with this idea, wealth increases leisure time, measured by higher expenditure on tourism and taking early retirement (Coronado and Perozek 2003, Zhang and Feng 2018). This leisure time could be used in a variety of ways, of course, but in the context of this paper we would hypothesize that some of it is likely to be used for borrowing books and reading. An argument could be made that wealth (and income) would allow individuals to purchase rather than loan books, hence reducing stratification in our empirical context. Yet, given the widespread use of libraries in the Danish context, we still interpret library loans as an indicator of underlying reading preferences and expect it to be positively associated with other indicators of reading preference, e.g., reading from home libraries or purchasing books. This is in line with previous research showing a positive association between income and library use as well as borrowing children's books (Blaabæk 2023, Sin and Kim 2008).[1] Moreover, wealth may not only affect the intensity of someone's cultural consumption; it may also affect the kinds of cultural forms they consume. As Bourdieu (1984: 46) argued, the time and space freed from economic necessity that wealth provides gives people a greater opportunity to foster the "aesthetic disposition" - a refusal of cultural objects or experiences that are considered easy, facile or sensational. Instead, this disposition cultivates an insistence on a "disinterested" aesthetic lens, where true artistic beauty can only be experienced if one separates oneself from any physical, emotional or functional investment in an artwork (Bourdieu, 1984: 3). In this way, distance from necessity gives the wealthy a unique ability to foster an interest in, and engagement with, what might be considered more complicated, demanding, or "highbrow" books.

Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H1) *individuals with higher wealth use libraries more often and tend to prefer highbrow genres to popular genres.*

Educational stratification refers to the unequal distribution of educational qualifications. Education is correlated with higher incomes and is often a prerequisite to accessing particular occupations; but, again, if we are accounting for these variables, what is it about education *per se* that might be associated with cultural stratification? At a material level,

[1] We additionally use survey data to verify this expectation.

going to university may create a greater sense of "ease" in libraries, making them spaces in which university graduates can more readily find enjoyment. More concretely, many university-level educational qualifications require the ability to engage with, and extract information from, texts (Ganzeboom 1982; Notten et al 2012). In other words, higher-educated people have demonstrated an appreciation of and an ability to relate to the book as a cultural form. In light of this, we would hypothesize that differences in educational attainment reflect differences in this propensity or capacity to engage with the kinds of symbolic work that reading requires. On top of this, going through higher education frequently entails an engagement with literary texts that are often regarded as needing to be taught to be understood. Crucially, these dynamics will be more common in some subjects than others, the humanities and to some extent the social sciences more than the hard sciences (Reeves and De Vries 2016). On average, then, university-educated people are more likely to engage with "highbrow" literature in part because they have often both been taught "how" to appreciate such texts but also because they were more likely to imbibe the background assumptions that make these texts culturally significant. To be clear, we are not claiming that people with more education are necessarily more intelligent than people with less education. Rather, we are claiming that there is something specific about acquiring higher qualifications that requires the ability to perform this kind of textual engagement. We might even surmise that university graduates enjoy reading more than those who have not completed a university degree, but enjoyment will surely be bound up with both the way these individuals were socialized and their experiences of the educational system. Indeed, there is already good evidence that there are strong educational gradients in the taste for reading and in omnivorous literary tastes more specifically, and that this applies to the Nordic context just like other contexts (Griswold et al 2005, Kraaykamp and Dijkstra 1999, Purhonen et al 2010).

Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H2) *individuals with more education use libraries more often and tend to prefer highbrow genres to popular genres.*

Income stratification refers to the unequal distribution of disposable income (e.g., from wages, salaries, and self-employment) and the consumption opportunities that income provides. In relation to cultural tastes, income offers the financial means to purchase cultural objects and experiences. Income will be especially important when it comes to cultural consumption that is financially costly by constraining low-income consumption (rather than impacting preferences). However, as library borrowing has low financial costs (travel, late fees,

etc.), it is unlikely income *by itself* will have a substantial impact on library use. This case might have been different had we studied book purchasing, where there could be an unrealized preference at the lower end of the income distribution. Conditional on education, occupation, and wealth, it is therefore not clear why income would be substantially associated with library borrowing and so we hypothesize that:

H3) *individuals with higher income are not substantially more likely to use libraries or have a substantially stronger preference for highbrow compared to popular genres than individuals with low income.*

Finally, *occupational stratification* refers to the unequal distribution of the (dis)advantages that jobs afford in terms of income, work tasks, peers, and rank. As we have already addressed education and income stratification, here we focus on occupational stratification *net of* these two dimensions of stratification. Once these factors are accounted for, you are left with specific facets of your job that are more connected to (i) the tasks you perform in that role, (ii) the level of specialization, (iii) reasons someone may have ended up in that job, and (iv) the people you work with (e.g., reinforcement of certain practices by your co-workers; Sokolov and Sokolova 2018; Weeden and Grusky 2005). Bourdieu's account of cultural capital is especially relevant here because by holding constant income and education we are flattening the composition axis of cultural distinction and diminishing the importance of occupation to patterns of cultural consumption. Another implication of this move is that any residual differences between occupations might be driven by specific jobs in which there are strong selection mechanisms into that kind of work, which might predispose someone to reading more and reading more widely. For example, librarians or teachers (particularly in humanities-related subjects) might read more than people in other jobs which require similar qualifications and pay the same amount of money (Bourdieu, 1984). This will not be typical, however. Most occupations are not deeply connected to a love of reading, nor do they require people to read for pleasure. Thus, beyond some idiosyncratic occupations where there are clear selection effects, it is unlikely to be the case that there will be a uniformly positive or negative orientation towards library borrowing across occupations placed higher or lower in terms of tasks and specialization.

Our fourth hypothesis is that:

H4) *individuals in occupations with higher skills or specialized tasks are not substantially more likely to use libraries or have a substantially stronger preference for*

highbrow compared to popular genres than individuals in occupations with lower skills and less specialized tasks..

The Economic and Cultural Specificity of Denmark

Denmark is a particularly interesting place to consider the social stratification of library use and literary tastes. First, municipalities in Denmark are required by law to offer free, high-quality library services and they retain a central place in the literary culture of the society and are an important source of cultural capital. Second, Denmark is a relatively egalitarian country in comparative perspective but, despite this, there remains substantial stratification on some dimensions. Wealth stratification has remained moderately high (Skopek et al 2014) for some time (Boserup et al 2018), in part because the taxation of wealth (compared to taxation of income) is relatively low. Similarly, educational inequality is also moderately high in Denmark (Landersø and Heckman 2016). After compulsory school, the educational system segregates students into (longer) academically and (shorter) vocationally oriented tracks, each with different curricula and intended labor market segments. The curriculum in the academic tracks, for example University College (e.g., nurse and schoolteacher) and University (e.g., medical doctor and lawyer), emphasizes general knowledge and skills (analytical, language etc.) to a much larger extent than the curriculum in the vocational tracks (e.g., hairdresser and plumber). In contrast, income stratification is obviously present in Denmark, but it is relatively low compared to other industrialized countries, both in terms of overall inequality (as measured by the Gini coefficient) and in terms of the shape of the income distribution (say, the top 1 percent income share; OECD 2016). Finally, the Danish labor market is highly regulated, for example with regard to work conditions, on-the-job training, and health and safety regulation (Andersen et al 2021). Moreover, unionization is high, and public and private companies generally have flat hierarchies (Ibsen et al 2017). Together, these characteristics mean that inequality in the non-pecuniary benefits of high-status occupations is comparatively low (which, as we describe in H4, would suggest that there is little stratification of library use by occupation).

The political economy of Denmark then potentially works with rather than against our hypotheses. That is, if cultural stratification is associated with social stratification in general, then we would expect that the most salient forms of social stratification in a given society (the domains across which people are most divided) may also be the domains across which cultural stratification is largest too. Wealth and education are clearly the domains of social stratification that have been most resistant to the egalitarian impulses of Danish society and so these are also likely to be the domains across which we expect cultural taste to remain

socially divided too (cf. *H1* and *H2*). This does not mean, of course, that there are no inequalities in income in Denmark nor that the income inequalities that do exist *could* be linked with cultural stratification as a whole; our argument is that there is nothing about the Danish case that undermines the expectations we lay out above.

Data and Methods

We now present the data and methods we use to examine the four hypotheses presented above.

In terms of data, we use administrative registry data from Denmark that contain highly granular information on the books individuals borrow from public libraries in the period 2020-2021 (no data exist before 2020). We match the library records with administrative registries containing longitudinal information on, among other things, individuals' wealth, education, income, and occupation. Our sample consists of all adults (18+) living in Denmark on 31 December 2019 (*N*: 4,600,129), and we include information on books (physical, digital, text, and audiobooks) borrowed from any public library.

In terms of methodology, we use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression and regress the number of books individuals borrow of various fiction and non-fiction genres on four socioeconomic indicators (wealth, education, income, and occupation). As our hypotheses and research design are descriptive, we do not claim to estimate the causal effect of individuals' socioeconomic characteristics on their library use and literary tastes. In the results presented below, we focus on figures that show predicted values across the distribution of the four socioeconomic indicators, each net of the other indicators and conditional on the following control variables (described below): gender, age in years, immigrant status, dummy variables for being a student or retired, a dummy variable for children living in the household, a dummy variable for living with a partner, and (five) region dummies.[2]

It is important to provide some context about library use in Denmark. All municipalities (of which there are 98 in Denmark) are by law required to make (adult and children's) library services available. On average there are about four libraries per municipality, and on average the distance to the closest library is about two kilometers. It is free to borrow books from libraries, and books can also be accessed for free as E-books from the app E-Reolen ("E-Bookshelf"). While it is free to use libraries, individuals must sign up as a member, which can be done either online or at the local library. Except for the analyses of

[2] We have also run OLS models that do not adjust for these variables and present results in Appendix A1 and A2. While the empirical results are not identical, our substantive conclusions remain unchanged.

whether or not individuals borrow any book from the library, all variables measure the number of books borrowed within the sample of library users, as we cannot identify literary tastes for those who do not use libraries. As stated earlier, in our sample on average 23 percent of all adults have borrowed at least one book from the adult book collection within 2020-2021, meaning we can identify literary tastes among more than 1 million individuals (*N*: 1,052,286). While public libraries faced two lockdown periods during the Covid-19 pandemic, libraries were physically open for the majority of the periods (about three out of four weeks), and digital loans remained available throughout (Blaabæk and Jæger 2023).

The library data contains transaction records for each time a book is borrowed, renewed, or returned. In this paper, we focus on the number of books borrowed. Each book in the data has a unique identifier, which can be matched with a database containing metadata on the book, e.g., title, authors, and genre. In terms of genre information, each book can be categorized into several genres, and hence one book can count towards borrowing different genre categories. It is important to note that not all fiction books have a genre attached to them; about 29 percent of fiction books in our sample have no genre information. In some cases, genre information is missing from different versions of the same book and, in these cases, we impute the missing information. As genres are recorded in a written-text format, we also search for different variations in spelling (+ typos) of genres and re-code these in a uniform manner. In total, there are more than 100 different genre categories. We also note that poetry, a genre sometimes used to capture highbrow literary tastes, is not available as a genre in our data. This is because the library data records poetry as a form rather than a genre, and we do not have form information on books. To make patterns in borrowing comparable across genres with very different baseline rates of borrowing, we standardize the number of books borrowed from each genre. For example, the average number of books borrowed from the most popular genre (crime) among library users is 3.9, while for the fifth most popular genre (biographical novels) it is only 0.5. An important point lies in this fact alone – Crime is by far the most popular genre among Danish library users.

Library Usage

We use two indicators to measure library usage: (a) a dummy (0-1) for whether the individual has taken out at least one adult book in 2020-2021 (proxy for library membership) and (b) the total number of books taken out in 2020-2021 among library users. Together, these measures give information on the extensiveness of library usage across the distributions of wealth, education, income, and occupation.

Genre Preferences

In the main analyses, we focus on two types of genres: popular and highbrow. We define popular genres as the five genres where most books have been borrowed. The five genres are: Crime fiction, thrillers, biographical novels, historical novels, and family novels. Out of the fiction books with known genre information, 82 percent of books belong to one (or more) of these popular genres. We define highbrow genres based on a survey distributed among librarians ($N = 98$) and literary critics ($N = 7$) in which we asked them to rank genres in terms of literary quality (see Appendix A3). We define the three genres that received the highest literary quality scores as highbrow: Developmental novels/*Bildungsroman* (e.g., classical literature), descriptions of societies (e.g. social realism, social critique, etc.), and experimental literature.

Diverse Borrowings

We use two diversity measures to analyze social stratification of the taste for more diverse (or omnivorous) sets of books. First, the number of genres per fiction book taken (*N* genre labels / *N* fiction books), and second, the number of crime authors per crime book (*N* crime author / *N* crime fiction books). When measuring genre preferences in the main analysis, we do not distinguish between whether the genre is marked as the primary genre or not, but here, for simplicity, we only count the main genre category. The first indicator is only defined among loaners with at least one fiction book loaned (68 % of loaners), while the second is only defined among those with at least one crime fiction book loaned (32 % of loaners). The intention of using these indicators (rather than, for example, simply the number of genres) is to capture a preference for diversity conditional on the number of loans, as one would be more likely to loan more genres/authors if selecting many books at random, which we would not interpret as a preference for diversity. Consequently, we argue that spreading loans as widely as possible across authors/genres (e.g., loaning four genres across four books) is more indicative of a diversity preference than loaning many books that mostly are of one genre, but a couple is of a different genre (e.g., four genres across ten books).

Supplementary Measures of Popular and Highbrow Tastes

To test the robustness of our findings to alternative specifications of the popular and highbrow measures, we construct three additional outcomes. First, the number of crime books by the top 10 most popular crime authors – e.g., do individuals at top of the distribution of wealth,

education, income, and occupation have a dis-preference for the most popular crime books (Bryson 1996)? Together, the 10 most popular crime authors account for 23 percent of all adult crime books borrowed in 2020-2021. Second, the number of books borrowed that have received a major award in the period 2010-2021,[3] and third, the number of books by an author that has received a major award in the period 2010-2021. The last two measures capture a preference for highbrow literature in the form of consecrated culture. Similar to the genre measures, we standardize these three indicators.

Indicators of Social Stratification

We include indicators of individuals' wealth, education, income, and occupation based on population-level registry data. We measure *wealth* as total net family wealth in 2019. We recode the wealth variable into percentile-ranked dummies [1-100th], as this allows us to flexibly compare library borrowing and genre preferences across the wealth distribution. We rely on Statistics Denmark's 2014 definition of total wealth, which measures total real assets (e.g., real estate and cars), financial assets (e.g., stocks and bonds), pension funds, and self-employed company savings, net of debt (e.g., mortgage, bank or credit card loans, debt to the municipality or state, etc.). We measure *education* as the highest attained degree by the main educational categories within the Danish educational system [Primary school or less; High school or vocational degree; Short college degree (1-2 years); BA college degree (3 years); MA college (5 years); PhD]. We measure *income* as family disposable income (post-tax and transfers, including capital gains) in 2019, and similarly recode income into dummies for each percentile [1-100th]. We measure *occupation* as ISCO08 codes (International Standard Classification of Occupations), which categorize occupations by their main tasks and duties, and skill level. We include dummy variables for each two-digit ISCO code (46 in total). The main ISCO categories are 1: Managers, 2: Professionals, 3: Technicians and Associate Professionals, 4: Clerical Support Workers, 5: Service and Sales Workers, 6: Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Workers, 7: Craft and Related Trades Workers, 8: Plant and Machine Operators, and Assemblers, 9: Elementary Occupations, and 0: Armed Forces Occupations. We additionally include a include a dummy for missing information on

[3] We include the following awards: De Gyldne Laurbær ("The Golden Laurels," Danish), Nordisk Råds Litteraturpris ("The Nordic Co-Operation Literary Prize", Nordic countries), International IMPAC Award, Pulitzer Prize (Fiction), British Book Awards, Costa Book Awards, Booker Prize, and the Nobel Prize in Literature.

occupation in the regressions (indicating that the individual has no known occupation, e.g., due to being unemployed). We do not include this category in the figures showing occupational stratification of library use and literary tastes.

Control Variables

To account for the fact that students and retirees might have particular borrowing patterns relating to their social circumstances, in all OLS regressions we control for whether the individual in 2019 was either a student or retired. We additionally control for their gender (dummy for female), age in years, whether children are living in the household, whether the individual lives with a partner, region dummies (Northern Jutland, Central Jutland, Southern Denmark, Capital region, and Zealand), and immigration status (Danish, immigrant, or descendant of immigrants).

Results

We now present our empirical findings. First, we focus on the social stratification of library use along multiple dimensions of stratification. Is there a gradient in who uses the library in the first place? Second, we focus on stratification in literary tastes among the 23% who use libraries. Is there a gradient in who prefers popular and highbrow books? Third, we compare patterns of library use and literary tastes across measures of actual (registry data) and self-reported (survey data) literary and cultural tastes. Does library use align with broader cultural tastes? We summarize results graphically, as the flexible estimation with wealth, income, and ISCO dummies results in several hundred estimates per model. In Appendix A4-A6, we show regression estimates from coarser models to make them easier to interpret (using deciles for income and wealth rank rather than percentiles, and one rather than two digit ISCO codes).

Social Stratification of Library Use

Figure 1 shows, first, the estimated average share of the adult Danish population that has borrowed a book from the adult book collection in 2020-2021 and, second, how many books those who used libraries on average borrowed. All estimates in the figure (and in the figures below) are based on predictions from OLS regressions that include all four dimensions of social stratification (wealth, education, income, and occupation) and the control variables.

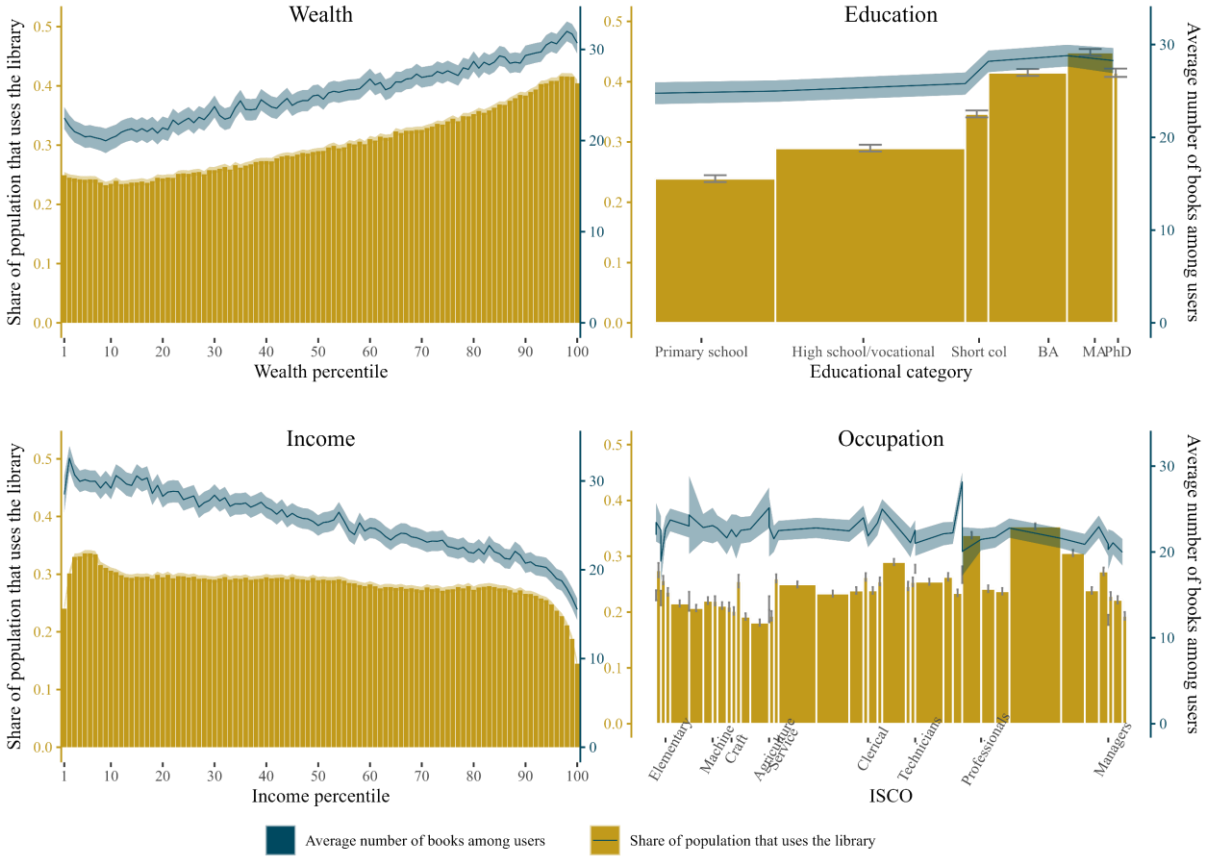
Figure 1 shows that high-wealth and high-education groups are more likely to use libraries, and when they do, they borrow more books. These patterns are consistent with

H1 and *H2*. In contrast, the pattern is reversed when it comes to income and there is no clear pattern for occupation. Social stratification by income suggests that high-income individuals are less likely to use libraries than low-income individuals but also that, with the exception of those at the very top of the income distribution, they do not borrow fewer books. These patterns mostly support *H3*. Finally, we do not find evidence that library use increases substantially with occupations placed higher rather than lower in terms of tasks and specializations, a result consistent with *H4*.

The clear stratification of library use by wealth shown in Figure 1 suggests that, net of income stratification, wealth stratification is a relevant axis of taste stratification. Figure 1 also shows that even elite groups (e.g., the top 1%) use libraries. This means that the sample of library users we use in the following analyses on literary tastes are not selected to the point where there are no library users from elite groups.[4] This is important, as existing research based on survey data is ill-suited for capturing the tastes of elite groups.

[4] In our data, we have 16,739 individuals from the top 1% of the wealth distribution who have used libraries in 2020-2021 and 15,315 library users from the top 1% of the income distribution.

Figure 1. Social Stratification of Library Use and Number of Books Borrowed



Notes: Left axis shows the estimated share of the adult Danish population (in percent) that has borrowed at least one book from the adult library collection in 2020 or 2021. Right axis shows the estimated average number of books borrowed. All estimates are based on OLS regressions. For education and occupation, the categories on the *X* axis is scaled relative to population share.

Social Stratification of Popular and Highbrow Tastes

Now we turn to the social stratification of literary tastes. As explained earlier, the results we show pertain to the 23% of library users that borrowed at least one book. Figure 2 shows the average number of books borrowed for the five most popular genres and the three highbrow genres. As explained earlier, we standardize the number of books borrowed within each genre to facilitate interpretation. We hypothesize in *H1* and *H2* that wealthier and higher educated individuals engage with highbrow genres more voraciously than people with less wealth and less education. Relatedly, we also argue that wealthier and more educated people should consume relatively more highbrow books than popular books. Based on *H3* and *H4*, we hypothesize low social stratification in the taste for highbrow and popular books based on income and occupation.

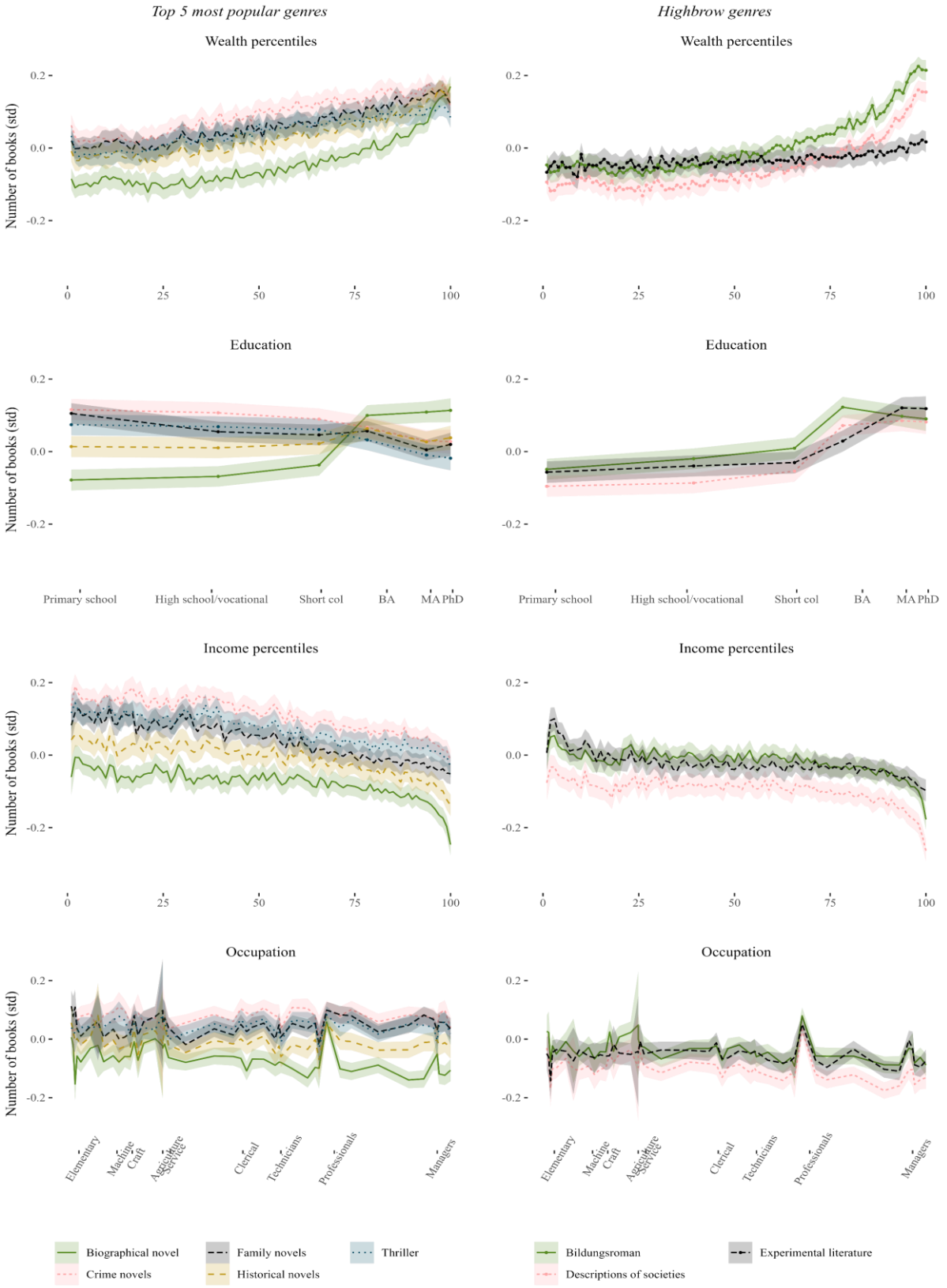
In line with *H1-H4*, we find that taste stratification is mostly present with respect to wealth and education. Importantly, Figure 2 suggests that wealth, in addition stratifying library use, also stratifies literary tastes. High-wealth groups borrow more books from both the popular and highbrow genres. The evidence supports *H1* with respect to the taste for highbrow books, but we do not see a clear rejection of popular books. Wealthier individuals then appear to have a taste both for highbrow and lowbrow genres.

For education, the pattern is, broadly speaking, as we would expect. Highly educated individuals borrow fewer of the most popular genres (which is remarkable considering that they borrow more books overall[5]) and they borrow more of the highbrow genres. The one exception to this trend is borrowing of biographical novels, where the educational pattern is more similar to the highbrow genres. While biographical novels are among the most popular genres, it is also one of the five popular genres that score highest in terms of perceived literary quality (though historical novels score slightly higher – see Appendix A3).

It is only for education that we see some evidence of a distaste for the popular genres. For education, the preference for highbrow genres increases almost linearly across the educational distribution. This result indicates clear taste stratification by education (as expected, based on *H2*), but also that there is nothing distinct about the very top of the distribution – the educational elite (i.e., those with university education) does not stand out in particular. In contrast, for wealth, the preference for highbrow books is clearly non-linear. While there is a generally positive trend, it is particularly the top 10-20 percent or so of the wealth distribution who prefer highbrow books. We note that the same pattern does not entirely seem to hold for the experimental literature category (a possible explanation is that borrowing of this genre is rare: crime has about four million loans during the study period, while experimental literature only has about 20 thousand).

[5] See also Appendix A7 where we express results as shares of total fiction borrowing.

Figure 2. Social Stratification of Borrowing of Popular and Highbrow Books



Notes: The figure shows the estimated number of books borrowed, standardized within each genre. All estimates are based on OLS regressions. For education and occupation, the categories on the *X* axis is scaled relative to population share. See Appendix A3 for definitions and measurement of highbrow genres.

In terms of income, Figure 2 shows that the number of books borrowed of both popular and highbrow genres decreases slightly with income, especially at the top. This suggests that rather than high-income groups having a dis-preference for popular books – high-income groups simply borrow fewer books of all genres. Hence, these patterns suggest little taste for highbrow or popular genres. This interpretation is supported by Appendix A7, which shows that the composition (share) of fiction genres borrowed varies only little by income. The evidence then supports *H3* in that stratification of literary tastes by income is low.

Finally, in terms of occupation, results from Figure 2 support *H4* in that there is no uniform pattern of stratification. Individuals in higher occupations have neither a preference nor dis-preference for popular or highbrow book genres. Occupation then seems to have little relation to using libraries, number of books borrowed, or genres of books borrowed. This result is in line with work by Sokolov and Sokolova (2018), which suggests that, to the extent that stratification by occupation exists, this stratification is between micro-groups rather than between aggregated occupational groups.

In line with the proposed hypotheses, and in the context of Denmark, we find that taste stratification is heavily dependent on the dimension of social stratification under study. There is substantial stratification by wealth and education, but no clear pattern of stratification by income and occupation. Results for wealth are consistent with the idea that wealthier individuals, and especially those at the very top of the wealth distribution, develop a stronger taste for highbrow books in part because they are able to cultivate a form of "aesthetic disposition". Indeed, it is only for the wealthy that we see anything resembling a particular elite taste for highbrow genres. In Appendix A8, we replicate the analyses reported in Figure 2 with non-fiction genres, and results are similar. In Appendix A9, we replicate the analyses in Figure 2 using the supplementary measures of popular and highbrow genres described above. First, we look at books by the top 10 most popular crime authors. Second, we look at books that have won major awards or books written by award-winning authors. Our results show that individuals with more education have a stronger taste for consecrated books that have won awards or books written by award-winning authors, while they have a distaste for crime novels by popular crime authors. Wealthier individuals borrow more of both popular and consecrated books, while there is little consistent taste stratification by income and occupation. Results are similar to those reported in Figure 2. Finally, in Appendix A10 we analyze if groups located towards the top of either dimension of stratification have more diverse cultural tastes, conditional on number of loans (Peterson and Kern 1996). We study two measures of diversity

in cultural tastes: the number of genres per fiction book loaned and the number of crime authors per crime book. A higher score for each of these would indicate that individuals tend to spread the books they borrow across more genres/authors (i.e., more diversity). The figure in Appendix 10 suggests that while there is substantial social stratification by number of genres (reflecting stratification in number of loans, i.e. voracity), there is only little stratification across the distributions of wealth, education, income, and occupation in terms of the diversity in book borrowing, conditional on number of fiction/crime books loaned. Consequently, we find little evidence that omnivorous tastes have replaced the distinction between highbrow and popular tastes.

Library Borrowing and Broader Cultural Tastes

In this paper, we argue that library borrowing is a relevant case for studying the social stratification of taste. For this argument to be credible, library borrowing should correlate with individuals' broader literary and cultural tastes. In Appendix A11-A13, we merge registry data on library borrowing with survey data on literary tastes and cultural participation based on a representative sample ($N = 20{,}575$). In Appendix A11, we report positive correlations between the genres of books individuals borrow from the library (measured in the registry data) and their self-reported literary tastes (measured in the survey data). This result corroborates the idea that library use is a valid proxy for literary tastes. In Appendix A12, we report positive correlations between borrowing at least one book from the library in 2020 or 2021 and individuals' broader cultural consumption, for example visiting a library, reading/buying books, attending museums and highbrow art (e.g., opera and ballet), and having a taste for a wide range of literary genres. Consequently, individuals who borrow books from the library tend also to be culturally active in other areas and to have a taste for highbrow culture. In Appendix 13, we map the social stratification of cultural participation similarly to how we display our earlier results in Figures 1 and 2. Instead of using library use and literary taste as dependent variables, we instead use the survey measures of cultural participation. As shown in Appendix A13, social stratification of highbrow cultural participation is strongest by education and wealth, whereas there is little stratification by income and occupation. Consequently, social stratification of cultural participation is similar to social stratification of library use and literary tastes.

Discussion

In this paper, we use exceptionally rich registry data to map the social stratification of library borrowing and literary tastes for the entire adult population of Denmark. Although we know that cultural tastes are socially stratified, existing research relies on small sample surveys that are ill-suited for capturing social stratification in any great detail. We map the social stratification of literary tastes along the entire distribution of wealth, education, income, and occupation. The data, which include groups often not included in surveys, make it possible to analyze if elites and the poor have different tastes than the rest of the population. Finally, we demonstrate that individuals' library use, a measure of their *actual* cultural tastes, is positively correlated with their *self-reported* literary tastes and cultural participation. In other words, library use appears to be a valid proxy for broader cultural tastes.

We find that, even in the egalitarian Danish setting and in the context of library borrowing (where barriers to cultural participation are low), cultural tastes are still socially stratified. Wealthy and highly educated people are more likely to use libraries and, when they do, they borrow significantly more books. But this is not just about usage or voracity. For the over one million individuals who used libraries at least once, we can identify gradients in tastes via genre preferences. Very wealthy and highly educated people also borrow more highbrow books – classical literature, experimental literature or social descriptions and critique. This does not mean, however, that cultural tastes are socially stratified on every dimension. Intriguingly, library use and literary tastes are not stratified by income and occupation in Denmark.

Two key takeaways emerge from our analysis. The first is that we still find no reason to doubt the ubiquity of cultural stratification, but this analysis puts the importance of wealth to cultural stratification on a similar level to education, income, and occupation. This is a crucial insight as there is barely any research on wealth stratification in the context of cultural tastes. Our results thus contribute to a growing body of research on the importance of wealth as an axis of social stratification that cannot be reduced to income, education, or occupation (Hällsten and Thanning, 2022; Wiborg and Hansen 2018). While our analysis focuses solely on book borrowing, our results should be read in the context of an extensive literature on social stratification in almost all the main areas of cultural taste and participation. Indeed, the stratification of library borrowing is especially important in this regard because it contains less obvious economic and cultural barriers than most other domains of culture. This does not imply that library borrowing is so different that we can learn nothing from it, however. As discussed

above, merged registry and survey data show that library borrowing is correlated with self-reported literary tastes and cultural participation.

The second takeaway from our analysis is that the social stratification of library use and literary tastes appears to follow broader patterns of economic and social stratification within a particular context. Library borrowing (along with other forms of cultural participation) in Denmark is more strongly stratified according to wealth and education than income and occupation. Cross-national work on taste and social stratification, both quantitative and qualitative, has increasingly drawn attention to the ways that this relationship can vary (Chan, 2010; Lamont, 1992; Reeves 2019; van Hek and Kraaykamp, 2013). At one level, it is not that surprising that a country with moderate wealth inequality and low income inequality sees a greater degree of social stratification in library use and literary tastes by wealth rather than by income. And yet, it is important to stress that while Denmark is more egalitarian in terms of income, there is still a non-trivial amount of income inequality in the Danish context. Acknowledging this fact brings into focus something quite provocative about our findings. It could be that earlier work on occupation and income has revealed high levels of cultural stratification simply because it failed to account for wealth. But it is also possible that the very nature of this cultural stratification is most closely connected to the steepest facets of the social hierarchy. In other words, while taste may always be stratified, the nature of that stratification could be contingent on the nature of the wider "inequality regime" (Acker, 2006: DiPrete, 2002) within which it operates.

From a theoretical perspective, one way that inequality regimes may structure cultural stratification is by creating non-linearities in the relationship between taste and some measure of social stratification. The tastes of elites, for example, have historically been distinct from others in the population but they have also, at times, been the vanguard of changes in patterns of cultural distinction. It was a group of elites in the UK, for example, who sought to supplant "the old aristocracies of blood and business" with an "aristocracy of the arts" in the early 20th century (Friedman and Reeves 2020). And yet, in recent years, we have seen certain elites adopt a more populist orientation to cultural taste, seeking to position themselves within the cultural sphere of the ordinary and the everyday (Hahl et al 2019; Jarness and Friedman 2017; Reeves and Friedman, 2024). Indeed, elites may be more ordinary in their tastes than some members of the upper middle class and these potential non-linearities need to be examined in more detail in future work. At the bottom of the wealth and income distribution, there is evidence that some groups explicitly reject the dominant aesthetic modes of the society, and this might produce some clear differences in how they approach cultural participation that,

again, potentially produce non-linear patterns in participation of some cultural forms. Uncovering these non-linearities will require both large data sets covering the whole of the society and detailed data on cultural tastes and participation. Availability of large-scale datasets increasingly makes unpacking non-linearities in the relationship between cultural taste and location within the social hierarchy feasible. This also means quantitative research can increasingly draw on, test, and connect with qualitative research on sub-group cultural practices. While we cannot fully resolve this issue here, our results clearly imply the need for more research incorporating wealth into studies of taste stratification. On top of this, there is a need for more theoretical work exploring how economic stratification, cultural institutions and taste hierarchies are interrelated.

There are, of course, important limitations to our analysis. First, it might be that the books you borrow from the library are different from the books you have on the shelf at home. We cannot be entirely sure either way, but our linked registry-survey data suggest this is unlikely to explain our results here. We find, for example, that the genres people borrow from the library match those that they say they prefer in a survey (and presumably buy for themselves; cf. Appendix A11). Second, the social stratification we observe may be driven entirely by cohort effects that are going to change as the older and more socially stratified groups are replaced by younger and more culturally egalitarian groups. We do find, for example, that the social gradients among high-wealth and high-education individuals are strongest among the older population (results available upon request). Our results do not vary when we control for age, but this does not resolve the issue of whether these differences are in part due to cohort effects or age effects. It could be, for example, that cultural stratification becomes more accentuated with age in part because wealth inequality increases with age too. Third, it is possible library borrowing is an idiosyncratic form of cultural taste and consumption not directly comparable to more traditional measures of cultural stratification. Our supplementary analysis of survey data linked to library borrowing undermines this concern, finding that cultural taste and consumption map onto measures of actual behavior. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, while our results suggest that wealth and education are the main sources of cultural stratification in Denmark, this finding only applies to *what* books people borrow. It does not tell us *how* people engage with or consume the books they read – their *style* of cultural consumption – which is arguably a telling marker of cultural distinction (Flemmen et al 2018; Jarness 2015; Friedman, 2014).

Going forward, we hope the approach adopted here will prompt researchers to pursue work that flows from our analysis. First, we encourage research that traces how distinct

cultural political economies (and the institutions that create and reinforce them) shape the social stratification of taste (Friedman et al. 2024). We know a great deal about how cultural tastes are connected to experiences within certain social institutions or formations, such as family life, schools, and social networks (Edelman and Vaisey, 2014; Fishman and Lizardo, 2013; Klokker and Jæger, 2022). These social institutions are almost certainly accentuating taste stratification, but how they do it, and in which directions, may vary from place to place, and are likely rooted in wider norms that are emblematic of the country's wider political economy (e.g., liberal market economy) and the ideas in which that political economy is embedded within (e.g., aspirational individualism). We do not yet have a good handle on these issues but pursuing these questions will be critical if we are to understand why, for example, wealth and education stratifies taste in some settings but not others.

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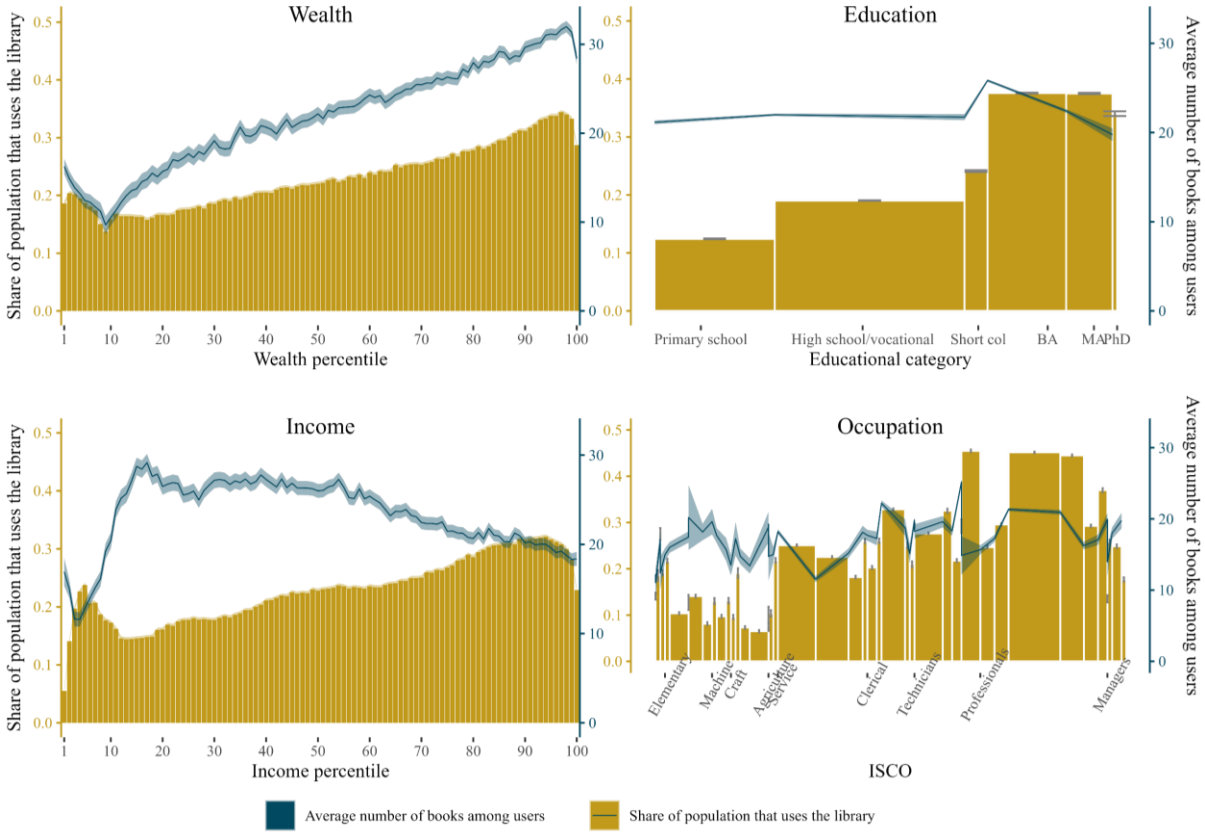
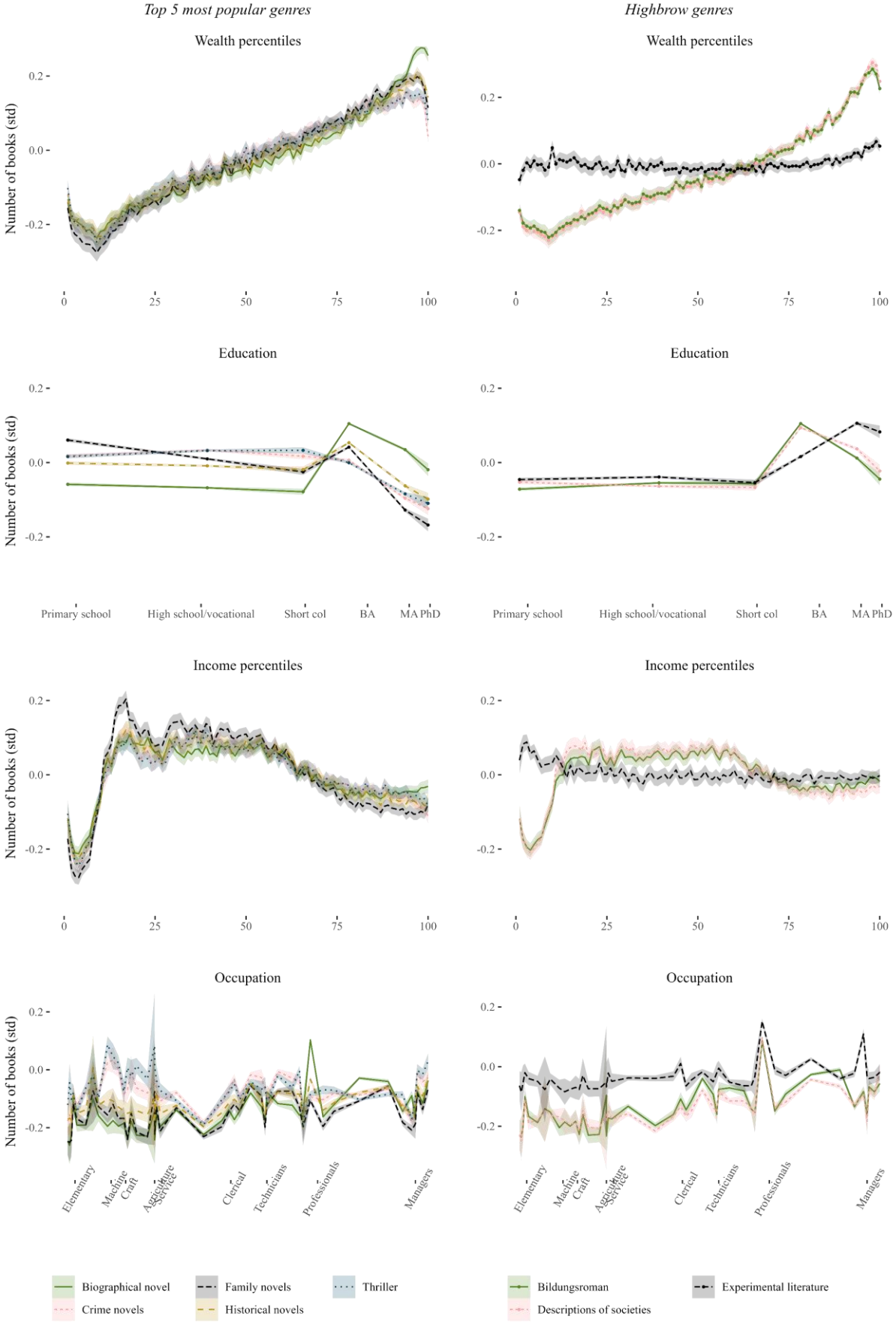
Appendices for "How Are Cultural Tastes Stratified? Evidence from Library Borrowing for the Entire Population of Denmark"

Appendix A1. Social Stratification of Library Use and Number of Books Borrowed, Not Conditioning on Control Variables



Appendix A2. Social Stratification of Borrowing of Popular and Highbrow Books, Not Conditioning on Control Variables



Appendix A3. Ranking of Literary Quality

Rank	Genre	Points (literary critics)	Points (librarians)	Total points
1	Developmental novels/Bildungsroman	20	281	301
2	Experimental novels	21	234	255
3	Descriptions of societies	4	199	203
4	Critique of society	11	140	151
5	Historical novels	6	113	119
6	Magical realism	10	99	109
7	Biographical novels	3	104	107
8	Collective novels	0	55	55
9	Fantasy	0	53	53
10	Dystopian novels	11	38	49
11	Science Fiction	3	44	47
12	Humor	1	24	25
13	Crime	5	19	24
14	Gothic	4	19	23
15	Family novels	0	22	22
16	Thriller	4	16	20
17	Rural life	2	3	5
18	Chick lit	0	4	4
19	Domestic noir	0	3	3
20	Femi-crime	0	0	0

Notes: Results from surveys with literary critics and librarians. We sent the survey to all national Danish newspapers and asked them to distribute it to their literary critics. We advertised the survey with librarians on librarian Facebook groups and in relevant newsletters. In total, we collected data from 7 literature critics and 98 librarians. First, we asked respondents in both surveys to select the five genres they believe have the highest literary quality (among the 20 most common genres in our data). Second, we asked them to rank the chosen genres according to literary quality. If a book was ranked first, we coded this as five points and if it was ranked fifth we coded this as one point. We calculated sum scores reflecting (a) whether a book was chosen among the top five (meaning it got at least one point) and (b) its rank among the five chosen categories. The total score is the sum across all replies, both from literary critics and librarians.

Appendix A4. Regression estimates using coarsened predictors (deciles rather than percentiles and one digit ISCO rather than two digit ISCO).

	Any loan	Number of loans
Constant	0.06*** (0.00)	-5.66*** (0.72)
Wealth: 2 (ref = 1st decile)	0.00. (0.00)	0.30 (0.20)
Wealth: 3 (ref = 1st decile)	0.01*** (0.00)	1.40*** (0.20)
Wealth: 4 (ref = 1st decile)	0.02*** (0.00)	2.40*** (0.20)
Wealth: 5 (ref = 1st decile)	0.04*** (0.00)	3.16*** (0.20)
Wealth: 6 (ref = 1st decile)	0.06*** (0.00)	4.38*** (0.21)
Wealth: 7 (ref = 1st decile)	0.08*** (0.00)	5.22*** (0.21)
Wealth: 8 (ref = 1st decile)	0.10*** (0.00)	6.27*** (0.21)
Wealth: 9 (ref = 1st decile)	0.12*** (0.00)	7.25*** (0.22)
Wealth: 10 (ref = 1st decile)	0.15*** (0.00)	8.75*** (0.24)
Income: 2 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.23 (0.22)
Income: 3 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-1.65*** (0.21)
Income: 4 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-2.26*** (0.22)
Income: 5 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-3.59*** (0.22)
Income: 6 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-4.40*** (0.23)
Income: 7 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-5.54*** (0.24)
Income: 8 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-6.66*** (0.24)
Income: 9 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-7.51*** (0.25)
Income: 10 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.09*** (0.00)	-10.04*** (0.26)
ISCO08: 1 (ref=0)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-1.15 (0.72)
ISCO08: 2 (ref=0)	0.06*** (0.00)	1.24. (0.67)
ISCO08: 3 (ref=0)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.55 (0.68)
ISCO08: 4 (ref=0)	0.03*** (0.00)	2.33*** (0.69)
ISCO08: 5 (ref=0)	0.00 (0.00)	0.83 (0.68)
ISCO08: 6 (ref=0)	-0.05*** (0.00)	3.37** (1.23)
ISCO08: 7 (ref=0)	-0.05*** (0.00)	0.80 (0.73)
ISCO08: 8 (ref=0)	-0.02*** (0.00)	1.20 (0.76)
ISCO08: 9 (ref=0)	-0.02*** (0.00)	1.45* (0.70)
ISCO08: No occ (ref=0)	-0.01*** (0.00)	1.91** (0.67)
High school or vocational (ref=Primary)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.26* (0.13)
Short college (ref=Primary)	0.10*** (0.00)	0.93*** (0.21)
BA college (ref=Primary)	0.18*** (0.00)	3.43*** (0.14)
MA college (ref=Primary)	0.21*** (0.00)	4.49*** (0.16)
PhD (ref=Primary)	0.18*** (0.00)	3.40*** (0.38)
Student	0.13*** (0.00)	1.00*** (0.16)
Age	0.00*** (0.00)	0.46*** (0.00)
Sex (ref = male)	0.14*** (0.00)	7.40*** (0.09)

Region Midt Jutland (ref = Northern Jutland)	0.01*** (0.00)	-1.55*** (0.15)
Region Southern Denmark (ref = Northern Jutland)	0.00** (0.00)	-2.27*** (0.15)
Region Capital (ref = Northern Jutland)	0.00 (0.00)	-3.77*** (0.14)
Region Zealand (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-3.49*** (0.16)
Second gen immigrant	-0.03*** (0.00)	-1.49*** (0.31)
Immigrant	-0.11*** (0.00)	-6.02*** (0.17)
Retired	0.02*** (0.00)	1.88*** (0.16)
Lives with partner	0.00** (0.00)	1.49*** (0.11)
Has child living at home	0.06*** (0.00)	-1.31*** (0.10)
Observations	4,600,129	1,057,286

Appendix A5. Regression estimates using coarsened predictors (deciles rather than percentiles and one digit ISCO rather than two digit ISCO).

	Crime fiction	Family novels	Thriller	Biographical novel
Constant	-0.44*** (0.02)	-0.59*** (0.02)	-0.37*** (0.02)	-0.64*** (0.02)
Wealth: 2 (ref = 1st decile)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Wealth: 3 (ref = 1st decile)	0.01** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01. (0.00)
Wealth: 4 (ref = 1st decile)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Wealth: 5 (ref = 1st decile)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.00)
Wealth: 6 (ref = 1st decile)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Wealth: 7 (ref = 1st decile)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Wealth: 8 (ref = 1st decile)	0.10*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Wealth: 9 (ref = 1st decile)	0.12*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.10*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)
Wealth: 10 (ref = 1st decile)	0.12*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.18*** (0.01)
Income: 2 (ref = 1st decile)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Income: 3 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.01** (0.01)
Income: 4 (ref = 1st decile)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Income: 5 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Income: 6 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Income: 7 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Income: 8 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.10*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)
Income: 9 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Income: 10 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.01)	-0.10*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)
ISCO08: 1 (ref=0)	0.04* (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)
ISCO08: 2 (ref=0)	0.04* (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.03* (0.02)
ISCO08: 3 (ref=0)	0.06*** (0.02)	-0.05*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)
ISCO08: 4 (ref=0)	0.06*** (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)	0.03. (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
ISCO08: 5 (ref=0)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.09*** (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
ISCO08: 6 (ref=0)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
ISCO08: 7 (ref=0)	0.03. (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.03. (0.02)
ISCO08: 8 (ref=0)	0.06** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
ISCO08: 9 (ref=0)	0.04* (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
ISCO08: No occ (ref=0)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
High school or vocational (ref=Primary)	-0.01** (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)
Short college (ref=Primary)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
BA college (ref=Primary)	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	0.18*** (0.00)
MA college (ref=Primary)	-0.09*** (0.00)	-0.09*** (0.00)	-0.08*** (0.00)	0.20*** (0.00)
PhD (ref=Primary)	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.09*** (0.01)	0.19*** (0.01)
Student	-0.02*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)	0.06*** (0.00)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Sex (ref = male)	0.06*** (0.00)	0.28*** (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.00)	0.21*** (0.00)
Region Midt Jutland (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)

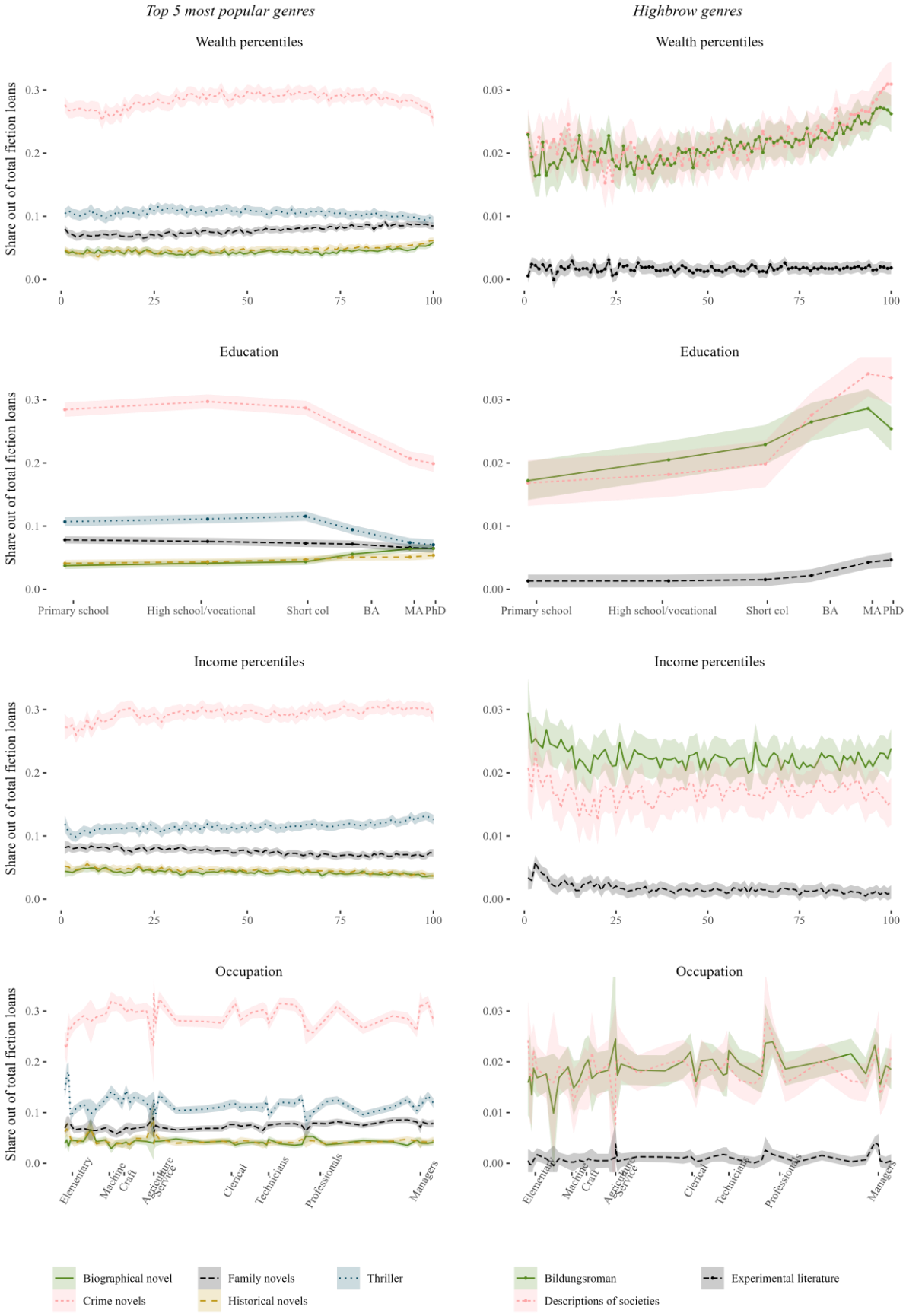
Region Southern Denmark (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.06*** (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Region Capital (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.08*** (0.00)	-0.12*** (0.00)	-0.06*** (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)
Region Zealand (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.06*** (0.00)	-0.11*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.00)
Second gen immigrant	-0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Immigrant	-0.12*** (0.00)	-0.11*** (0.00)	-0.11*** (0.00)	-0.11*** (0.00)
Retired	0.06*** (0.00)	0.22*** (0.00)	0.06*** (0.00)	0.17*** (0.00)
Lives with partner	0.05*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)
Has child living at home	-0.06*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)
Observations	1,057,286	1,057,286	1,057,286	1,057,286

Appendix A6. Regression estimates using coarsened predictors (deciles rather than percentiles and one digit ISCO rather than two digit ISCO).

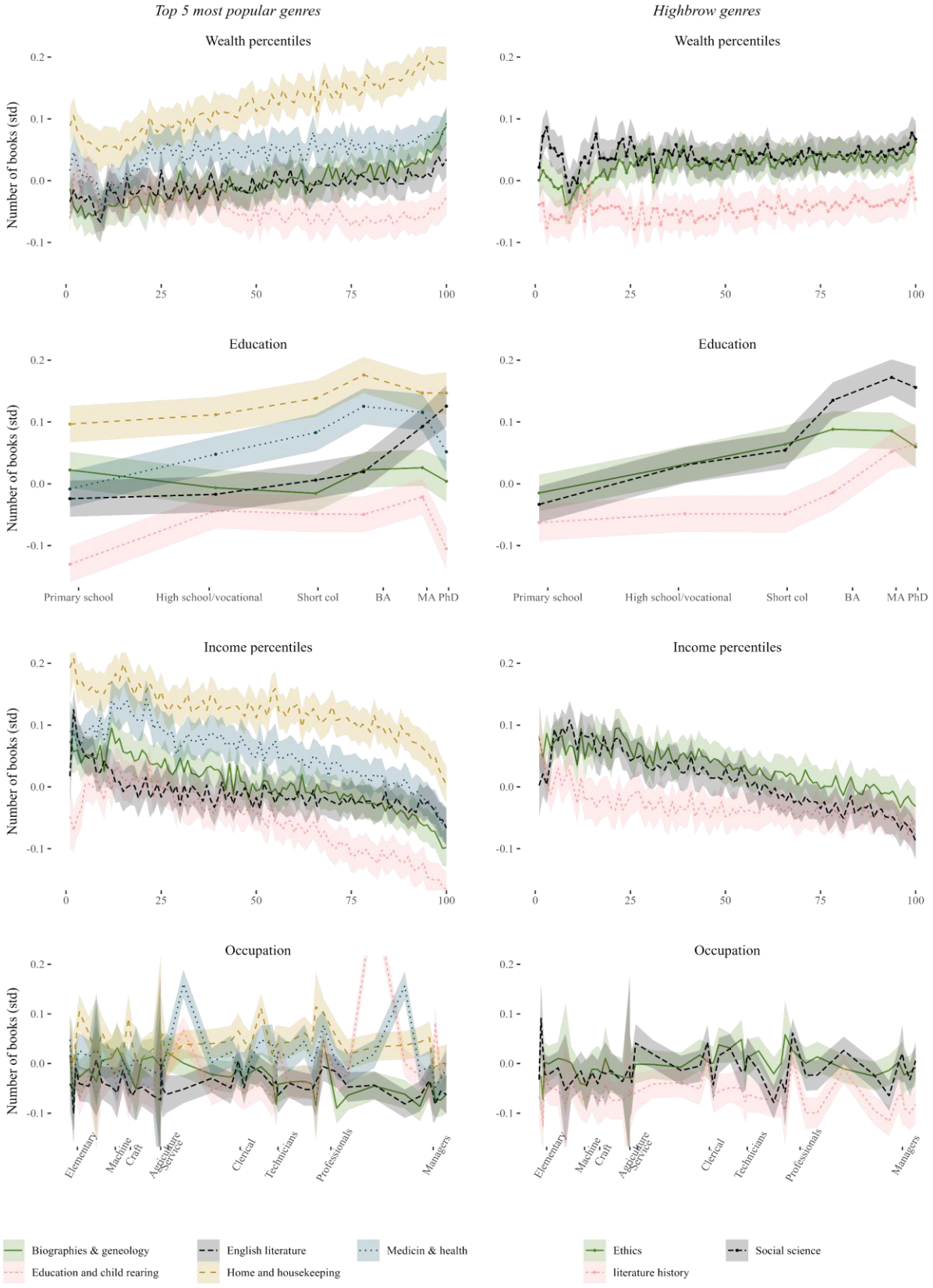
	Historical novel	Critique of society	Bildungsroman	Experimental literature
Constant	-0.47*** (0.02)	-0.59*** (0.02)	-0.58*** (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.02)
Wealth: 2 (ref = 1st decile)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)
Wealth: 3 (ref = 1st decile)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)
Wealth: 4 (ref = 1st decile)	0.01** (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01* (0.01)
Wealth: 5 (ref = 1st decile)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.01. (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)
Wealth: 6 (ref = 1st decile)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)
Wealth: 7 (ref = 1st decile)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
Wealth: 8 (ref = 1st decile)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)
Wealth: 9 (ref = 1st decile)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Wealth: 10 (ref = 1st decile)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.19*** (0.01)	0.22*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Income: 2 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Income: 3 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.01. (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)
Income: 4 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.01** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Income: 5 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Income: 6 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Income: 7 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Income: 8 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Income: 9 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)
Income: 10 (ref = 1st decile)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.10*** (0.01)	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)
ISCO08: 1 (ref=0)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
ISCO08: 2 (ref=0)	-0.04** (0.02)	-0.03. (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	0.03* (0.02)
ISCO08: 3 (ref=0)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
ISCO08: 4 (ref=0)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
ISCO08: 5 (ref=0)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
ISCO08: 6 (ref=0)	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)
ISCO08: 7 (ref=0)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.03. (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.03. (0.02)
ISCO08: 8 (ref=0)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.03. (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
ISCO08: 9 (ref=0)	-0.04* (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
ISCO08: No occ (ref=0)	-0.04* (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)
High school or vocational (ref=Primary)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Short college (ref=Primary)	0.01* (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)
BA college (ref=Primary)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.16*** (0.00)	0.17*** (0.00)	0.08*** (0.00)
MA college (ref=Primary)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.19*** (0.00)	0.16*** (0.00)	0.19*** (0.00)
PhD (ref=Primary)	0.02* (0.01)	0.17*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.17*** (0.01)
Student	0.03*** (0.00)	0.07*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00*** (0.00)
Sex (ref = male)	0.15*** (0.00)	0.15*** (0.00)	0.24*** (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)
Region Midt Jutland (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)

Region Southern Denmark (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Region Capital (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.07*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.06*** (0.00)
Region Zealand (ref = Northern Jutland)	-0.07*** (0.00)	-0.07*** (0.00)	-0.08*** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)
Second gen immigrant	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Immigrant	-0.10*** (0.00)	-0.09*** (0.00)	-0.09*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)
Retired	0.18*** (0.00)	0.19*** (0.00)	0.16*** (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)
Lives with partner	0.02*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Has child living at home	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Observations	1,057,286	1,057,286	1,057,286	1,057,286

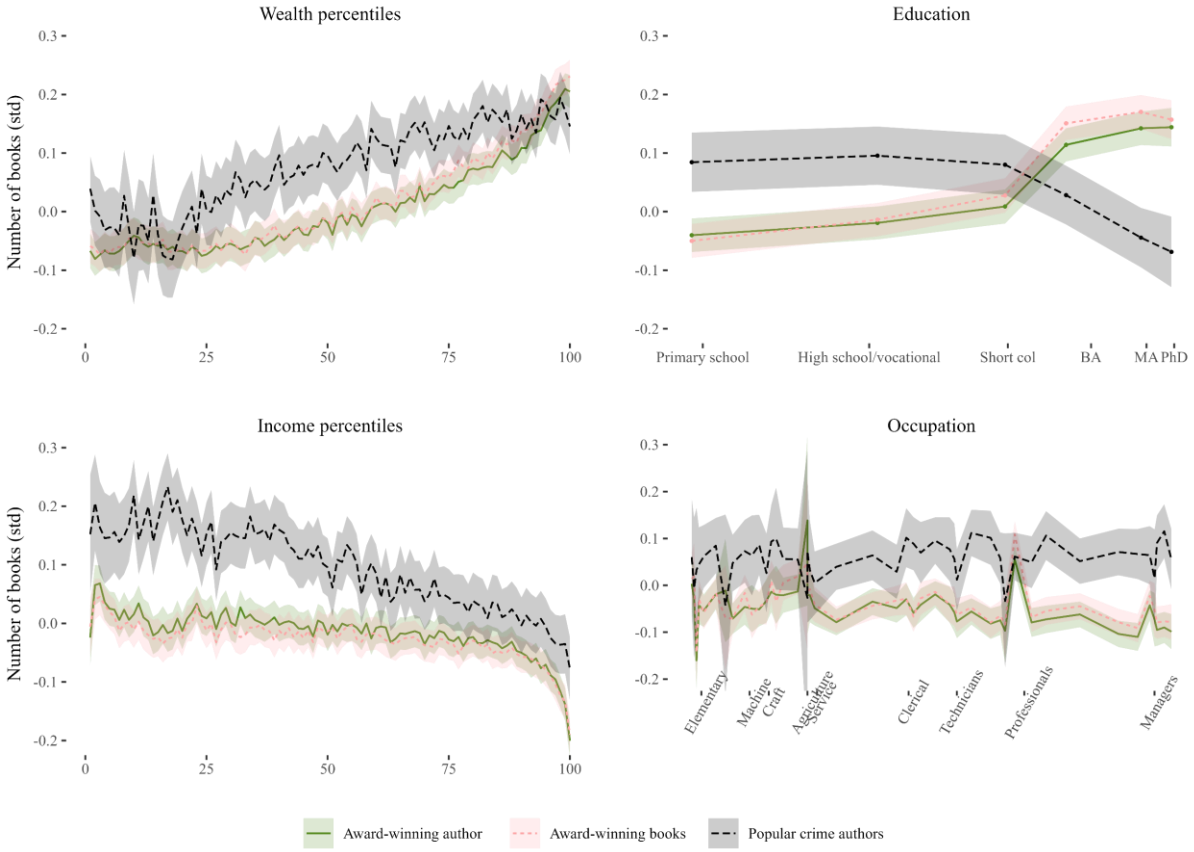
Appendix A7. Social Stratification of Number of Books Borrowed as Share of Total Number of Fiction Books



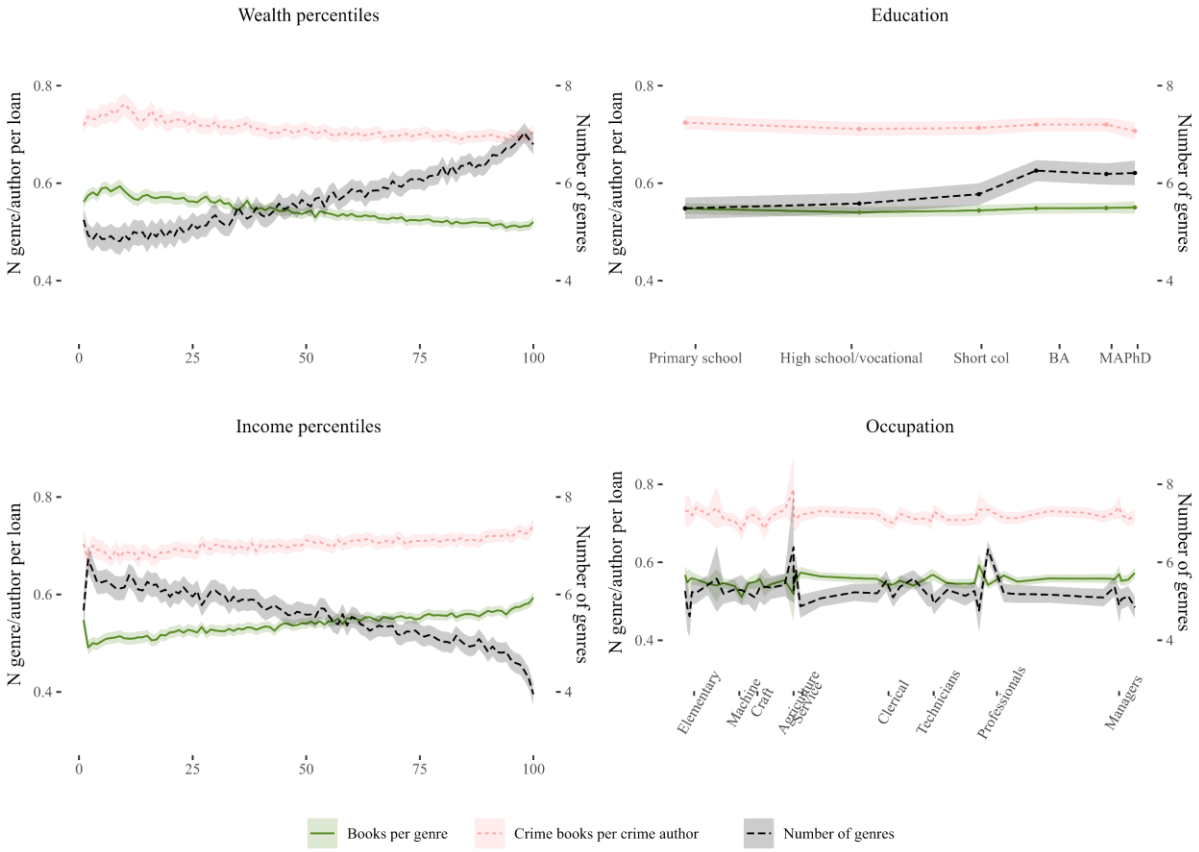
Appendix A8. Social Stratification of Number of Books Borrowed, Popular and Highbrow Non-Fiction Genres



Appendix A9. Social Stratification of Number of Books Borrowed, Supplementary Indicators of Popular and Highbrow Fiction Genres



Appendix A10. Social Stratification of Borrowing of Diverse Genres and Authors



Notes: Figure shows the estimated number of genres per fiction book loaned and average number of crime authors per crime book loaned. Higher values would suggest more diversity as books are spread by many genres. On the second Y axis (line in black) the figure shows gradients in number of genres, which main capture the same trend in voracity as shown in fig. 1. All estimates are based on OLS regression. Wealth and income measured in percentiles [1-100]; educational degrees; and occupation as ISCO08 categories [03 – 11].The X axis is scaled in breadth by population count for education and occupation.

Appendix A11. Pairwise Polyserial Correlations between Book Genres Borrowed from the Library (Registry Data) and Self-Reported Literary Tastes (Survey Data)

	Preferred book genres (survey data)						
Book genres borrowed (registry data):	Crime	Thriller and horror	Historical novels	Poetry	Fantasy	Romance and erotica	Humor
Crime	0.54***	0.12***	0.08**	-0.01	-0.03	-0.07	0.05
Thriller	0.42***	0.18***	0.15***	-0.02	-0.05	0.00	0.05
Historical novels	0.11***	0.06	0.24***	-0.07	-0.07	0.08*	-0.01
Family novels	0.09**	-0.01	0.23***	-0.17	-0.20	0.10**	0.01
Biographical novels	0.01	-0.01	0.19***	0.07	-0.20	-0.01	0.03
Critique of society	0.11***	0.01	0.15***	0.00	-0.13	0.03	0.03
Bildungsroman	0.08*	0.00	0.10***	-0.06	-0.12	0.06	0.00
Experimental literature	0.01	0.03	0.06*	0.13***	0.02	-0.07	-0.01

Notes: We matched individual-level registry on library borrowing in 2020 and 2021 with survey data on literary preferences. Data on preferred genres come from the Cultural Habits Survey – a nationally representative survey on cultural participation run by Statistics Denmark. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Appendix A12. Pairwise Correlations between Libraries Borrowing (Registry Data) and Self-Reported Cultural Participation and Literary Tastes (Survey Data)

	Borrowed at Least One Book in 2020 or 2021 (registry data)				
Cultural participation (survey data):[a]	Total sample	Top 5% wealth	Top 5% Income	ISCO: Managers	MA/PhD
Visits libraries	0.68***	0.75***	0.63***	0.66***	0.62***
Reads fiction	0.43***	0.46***	0.37***	0.40***	0.31***
Buys books	0.18***	0.03	0.13**	0.32***	0.08**
Goes to museum	0.27***	0.25***	0.21***	0.26***	0.17***
Looks at art (museum, public, at home)	0.20***	0.13**	0.14**	0.07	0.10**
Attends highbrow stage art (opera, ballet, theater)	0.19***	0.13**	0.14**	0.15	0.11***
Attends lowbrow stage art (musical, stand-up, revue)	0.11***	0.08	0.06	0.08	-0.03
Goes to cinema	0.21***	0.17***	0.02	0.12	0.07*
Attends sport event (live)	-0.04	0.00	-0.07	-0.07	-0.08
Goes to amusement park	0.09***	0.02	0.06	0.11	-0.01
N	20,575	1,446	1,144	146	2,608
Book genres preferred(survey data):[b]					
Crime	0.25***	0.10	0.24**	-0.01	0.14*
Thriller	0.15***	0.14	0.21	-0.09	-0.05
Fantasy	0.09**	-0.04	-0.01	0.09	-0.11
Historical novel	0.28***	0.31***	0.24**	-0.27	0.19**
Humor	0.18***	0.04	0.16	0.23	0.03
Romance/erotica	0.27***	0.37***	0.37***	0.20	0.22**
Poetry	0.31***	0.41*	0.28	0.39	0.25**
N	5,654	406	300	146	737

Notes: We matched individual-level registry on library borrowing in 2020 and 2021 with survey data on cultural participation and literary preferences Data on preferred book genres come from the Cultural Habits Survey – a nationally representative survey on cultural participation run by Statistics Denmark (we used the most recently available data from the Cultural Habits Survey but omitted data pertaining to lockdown periods during the COVID-19 pandemic), [a] Dummy variables for reporting having engaged in each cultural activity in the last 3 months, [b] Dummy variables for preferring each literary genre. Question only included in some survey rounds *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Appendix A13. Social Stratification of Cultural Participation, Survey Data (*N*=20,575).