The Social Structure of Consecration in Cultural Fields:

The Influence of Status and Social Distance in Audience-Candidate Evaluative Processes

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Abstract

Building on sociological research that examines the allocation of rewards in peer evaluations, we argue that the recognition of cultural producers' work varies with their status and social distance from the audience members who evaluate them. We study the influence of these two mechanisms within the context of the Norwegian advertising industry. Specifically, we looked at how cultural producers' status and social distance from jury members affect their chances of being honored in "The Silver Tag" – one of the main digital advertising awards contests in Norway – during the period 2003-2010. While our findings provide support for status-based rewards allocation, the positive effects of status may be more circumscribed than previously thought. When accounting for the existence of previous connections between audience members and cultural producers, we find that cultural producers are more or less likely to receive an accolade depending on their degree of separation from the audience members. By exposing network-based determinants of consecrating decisions, and suggesting that the positive effects of status may be more circumscribed than previously thought our findings shed important light on the social foundations of evaluation and, more broadly, the mechanisms of reward allocation in cultural fields.

Keywords: Peer evaluation, status, social distance, awards, tournament rituals, consecration, advertising.

INTRODUCTION

The reception of cultural producers and their offers has long been center stage in sociology. In any cultural field, whether art or science, cultural producers are engaged in an ongoing struggle to secure notoriety, prestige, and esteem. In this struggle to define what counts as culturally legitimate, acts of cultural consecration are critical because they identify a select few individuals and products that deserve special esteem and approbation by conferring honors, awards and prizes (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1993; Cole & Cole, 1967; Crane, 1976; Goode, 1978; Lamont, 1987; Merton, 1957). Consecration is important in virtually all fields of cultural production where distinctions are made to separate "individuals and their achievements that are worthy of admiration and respect from those that are not" (Allen & Lincoln, 2004: 872). These distinctions are typically revealed during tournament rituals in which field audiences with the authority to dispense symbolic capital disclose their preferences (Allen & Parsons, 2006; Rossman, Esparza, & Bonacich 2010; Cattani, Ferriani, & Allison, 2014). Tournament rituals operate as a crucial mechanism for social stratification because they "construct prestige hierarchies that both enable and constrain actors' abilities to form relationships with others in a field" (Anand & Watson, 2004: 76).

Although acts of consecration should be governed by universalistic criteria associated with merit, achievement and performance, many studies have problematized this ideal by pointing to how socially derived criteria come to play a key role in evaluative processes (Cole, Cole, & Simon, 1981; Lamont, 2009; Karpik, 2010). Paramount among such accounts are those that emphasize the influence of "status beliefs"—beliefs that are discussed as valid in public displays of honor, and which rank individuals, types of people, or objects according to their expected ability to contribute to valued outcomes. By subtly shaping behavior, status beliefs create inequalities in attributions of ability, influence and situational rewards between otherwise equally deserving candidates (Ridgeway, 2014). There is vast evidence supporting this effect. In science, for instance, eminent scientists receive the

lion's share of recognition often at the expense of lesser-known peers even for equivalent contributions—a misallocation of credit that Merton (1968) called "the Matthew Effect." Field audiences, in fact, usually over-reward those of "considerable repute" and withhold credit from those who have "not yet made their mark" (Merton, 1968: 58). The same patterns of misallocation of credit can be observed across many fields of cultural production whenever high-status actors are seen as being preferred targets of interaction beyond the level that their superiority in quality truly deserves.

In our view, belying the massive evidence that emphasizes the role of status beliefs in shaping audiences' allocative choices is the comparative absence of scholarly work on the stratifying effects of interpersonal distance between audience members and candidates in the underlying social structure. Perhaps only a "sociological babe in the woods" (Granovetter, 1985: 502) would dispute the importance of social distance in catalyzing recognition. At least since Parsons and Shils' (1951) characterization of universalism in terms of the social relationship that exists between evaluators (henceforth audience members) and prospective candidates, social ties have been considered central to our understanding of the mechanisms shaping resource allocation decisions. Surprisingly, though, the influence of these relationships has remained unattended in extant sociological research on consecration. Inattention to this dimension could be partly explained by a data issue: detailed information about underlying relationships between audience members and candidates is difficult to obtain. As a result, though openly recognizing it, the literature has largely downplayed the role of the audience-candidate social structure as a basis for the allocation of valued symbolic and material resources and – to the best of our knowledge – has failed to investigate it empirically.

This shortcoming appears especially critical in peer-evaluation settings in which efforts to expose status-based inequalities tend to dominate the scene. First, since in peer evaluation settings social networks are profoundly shaped by one's status, it is difficult to avoid situations where one is evaluating the work of someone with whom she is directly or indirectly affiliated (Cattani and Ferriani,

2014). An account of identity construction that relies solely on status–based processes, therefore, would be fundamentally incomplete. Second, high status could actually suggest that the candidate is an insider to the élite group responsible for the allocation of rewards. In academic evaluation systems, for example, evaluators are usually established and highly embedded scholars who "often favor their own type of research while being firmly committed to rewarding the strongest proposal" (Lamont, 2009: 9). Third, insofar as social audiences' reliance on status reflects their attempt to deal with the uncertainty of judging the quality of their peers' work, social ties should mitigate the saliency of such a judgment device. They do so by rendering audience members less sensitive to signals encoded in publicly observable status hierarchies (as revealed, for instance, by the attainment of previous honors or network position).

Thus, several unattended questions require more careful consideration among scholars concerned with the social foundations of evaluation and the mechanisms of reward allocation in cultural fields. To what extent does social distance between audience members and cultural producers affect the allocation of symbolic capital? Do ties to audience members enhance cultural producers' likelihood of receiving an accolade? What is the impact of cultural producers' status relative to their social distance from audience members?

To address these questions, we collected data on the Norwegian advertising field from 2003 to 2010. According to the IRM Institute for Advertising & Media Statistics, the Norwegian advertising field was the fifth largest in the world in terms of investments per capita in 2000 and the second largest in terms of investments per capita in 2009. Like in other fields of cultural production (e.g., Cole & Cole, 1967; Cattani & Ferriani, 2008), advertising excellence in this context is assessed in awards competitions by juries of professional peers. Advertising contests underscore the creative and aesthetic nature of advertising and enhance the cultural capital of the winners (Alvesson, 1994). The jury members are typically accomplished advertising professionals who specialized in the same advertising

categories as the contest participants. In this role, jury members not only judge the work of their peers but also contribute to defining the criteria by which their work eventually is evaluated. Becoming a jury member thus provides an opportunity to shape the criteria guiding the allocation of symbolic capital and the offers (here advertising projects) that are rewarded. And because the industry is project-based, we can infer interpersonal ties indirectly, by studying secondary yearly data on collaborations of individuals across projects. Following this approach, we use collaboration data for competing advertising projects eligible for one of the most coveted prizes in the industry to construct a rich longitudinal database of interpersonal connections among all advertising professionals since 2003. This forms the basis of creating a social proximity graph for almost 2000 unique individuals, which is then used to gauge the social distance between any two professionals. We capitalize on these industry features to test the often suggested, but yet untested, hypothesis that the social distance between audience (jury) members and producers (project participants) matters for reward decisions. Finally, we examine the relative impact of producers' status when controlling for social distance.

Our analyses reveal the existence of status advantages in rewards allocation contests. This is our baseline hypothesis. Even though previous studies have shown the importance of status in shaping evaluative outcomes, establishing whether it holds also in our setting is important for meaningfully investigating the relative influence of social distance. Besides, unlike prevailing accounts of status-based mechanisms that look at advantages originating from preferential treatment of high-status producers before observing their performance (i.e., pre-consumption evaluation), we focus instead on the case in which audience members evaluate producers (including high-status producers) *ex post*, namely after observing their performance (the quality of the advertising project competing in a monthly contest). Next, we find that social distance matters in shaping the outcome of audiences' evaluations; in absolute terms, its effect is also greater than the effect of status. Further explorative analyses suggest that the likelihood that producers are rewarded tends to diminish as the social distance

between them and members of the evaluating audience continues to decline. Although not originally hypothesized, we believe that this result should stimulate researchers to further probe the nature and consequences of social distance for consecration decisions in peer-based tournament rituals. We conclude by speculating on the theoretical and the empirical basis for this unexpected curvilinear effect in the discussion.

THE ALLOCATION OF SYMBOLIC CAPITAL IN TOURNAMENT RITUALS

In cultural fields, acts of consecration usually take place in award ceremonies known as tournaments rituals where awards are conferred upon cultural producers through the selective judgment of worth. Tournament rituals have a distinct and recognizable symbolic structure that, in some culturally defined way, is removed from the routines of economic life, usually taking the form of a public spectacle (Appadurai, 1986). By channelling ceremonial judgments through honors and awards, these rituals operate as arenas in which struggles for peer recognition between established and emergent actors unfold. What is at stake in such rituals, however, is not just rank, fame or reputation, but "the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society in question" (Appadurai, 1986: 21) or, in other words, the very definition of what constitutes 'value' in a field. As a ritualistic representation of a field's value, conferring honors represents a powerful mechanism of control and social reproduction (Anand & Watson, 2004: 60). As Taylor (1987: 145) notes, the formal conferring of honor is "especially important for maintaining legitimacy of the élite" and reinforcing the status position of its members. Similarly, Goode (1978) argues that the allocation of honors reflect conscious decisions by an élite whose members devote preferential attention to high-status individuals or individuals to whom they are connected. By rewarding actors with whom they have prior network contacts, in fact, élites reproduce their own power.

Status and Rewards

Status shapes audience members' expectations about the performance of candidates, especially when ascertaining the quality of this performance is surrounded with uncertainty (e.g., Benjamin & Podolny, 1999; Sauder et al., 2012). To deal with this uncertainty, audience members tend to rely on status markers – e.g., network position, deference patterns in relationships, rankings or the reward choices of prior decision-makers – that are believed to correlate with quality when they make allocative choices. Research on status characteristics and expectation states has found supporting evidence for this effect in experimental studies (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Indeed, these studies suggest that status-based advantages accumulate when certain status characteristics "invoke expectations of performance from evaluators, which in turn shapes the perception of the candidates being judged so that evaluators 'see' quality" (Kim & King, 2014: 2620).

The previous studies emphasize how audience members tend to rely on status as a signal of quality to reduce the uncertainty of their evaluations before observing candidates' performance (i.e., pre-consumption evaluation). Here, we focus instead on the case in which audience members observe that performance before assessing it and yet remain uncertain about its underlying quality. This type of uncertainty is common to all those situations where different evaluators interpret the same output differently, due to the coexistence of diverse subjective attributes of quality. For instance, consider the difference between search and experience goods (Darby & Karni, 1973). In the case of a search good (e.g., a computer), prospective buyers can assess all the features about which they care prior to purchasing that good. By contrast, buyers can only evaluate experience goods (e.g., movies) through consumption and still defining what constitutes a good movie post-consumption is open to interpretation due to the variety of subjective dimensions used to assess cinematic quality. Like in the case of pre-consumption evaluation, audience members may rely on status signals to alleviate the post-consumption uncertainty that shapes evaluation under the circumstances just described.

A few recent studies seem to support this view. For example, Waguespack and Sorenson (2011) show that rating boards tend to privilege movies (post-consumption evaluation) from high status studios by rating them more favorably. Kim and King (2014) further demonstrate that high status baseball players are more likely to benefit from umpires' (referees') judgment calls. Because subjectivity is likely to evoke accountability concerns among members of the evaluating audience as to how their judgments are perceived, anchoring on status markers makes it easier for them to justify their judgments, so leading to patterns of preferential rewards allocation. Regardless of audience members' (subjective) view of quality, the choice of high-status candidates is more easily defensible in front of other peer evaluators because it is based on what is publicly recognized as high quality (Correll et al., 2017). In situations such as those described above, status provides a means by which audience members can coordinate their evaluations. Accordingly, our baseline hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: In peer (post consumption) evaluation, cultural producers' work is more likely to be honored when their level of status increases.

Social Distance and Rewards

Peer audiences have the authority to determine the legitimate definition of a given type of work by selectively allocating prestige (e.g., resources, awards and honors) to some works but not others (Cattani et al., 2014). Our central argument is that the outcome of these peer-based evaluations is likely to map on the social structure underlying the interface between the audience and the producers under evaluation. Because peer audiences are élite representatives of a given field they tend to define excellence as "what is most like me" (Lamont, 2009) and concede a disproportionate amount of symbolic (as well as material) resources to those members of the field who are more likely to embrace the same canons, even when they have no intention to favor them. Thus, to the extent that social distance affects the emergence of a common identity and the transmission of shared canons (Cattani, Ferriani, Negro & Perretti, 2008), it then follows that audience members will be more inclined to

reward candidates with whom they have few degrees of separation. For instance, in academic panels for research funding the influence of social ties cannot be totally eliminated from the evaluation process because panelists "are frequently asked to adjudicate the work of individuals with whom they have only a few *degrees of separation*" (Lamont, 2009: 8-9; emphasis added). While the formal rules of funding agencies explicitly require panelists to abstain from participating in funding decisions when the work of close colleagues, friends, or collaborators is evaluated, some panelists may still volunteer information – e.g., "this student's mentor is a close collaborator of mine" or "I know this applicant's adviser very well and trust her letter" (Lamont, 2009: 126-127).

Additionally, social distance may act as a judgment device (e.g., Karpik, 2010; Lamont, 2012) that affects uncertainty in social evaluations. Judgment devices are tools that are crucial for understanding the construction of value, particularly in the case of unique products that escape easy evaluation. Drawing from affect heuristic theory, some psychologists explain this form of social inference arguing that the brain encodes expectations that alleviate the cognitive burden of evaluating ambiguous situations analytically (e.g., Zajonc, 1980). This is, for instance, the case when the object of evaluation is characterized by technical and/or artistic complexity (Lang & Lang, 1988; Podolny & Stuart, 1995) or when there is considerable disagreement on quality standards (Greenfield, 1989). In light of the previous arguments, we thus hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: In peer (post consumption) evaluation, cultural producers' work is more likely to be honored as their social distance to members of the evaluating audience decreases.

Empirical Setting

We tested the previous hypotheses on the allocation of symbolic capital within the context of the Norwegian advertising industry. Like in many other fields of cultural production, advertising excellence is usually assessed in awards contests. The contestants competing in these tournaments are

evaluated by juries whose members are professional peers who specialize in the same advertising categories as the contestants. Typically, jury members are professionals who were consecrated (won) in previous competitions and so are the 'custodians' of the dominant field canons (Bourdieu, 1993). Given the project-based nature of the advertising industry – with many freelance professionals transitioning from project to project over time – it is not uncommon for jury members to have collaborated with peers whom they end up evaluating later on (Jones, 1996; Ferriani, Cattani, & Baden-Fuller, 2009). Jury members are in fact part of the field's collaborative network structure and more closely connected to some peers than others. As a result of these interpersonal relationships, the identity of the contestants is likely to affect jury deliberations.

"The Silver Tag" is one of the main digital advertising award contests in the Norwegian advertising field. The contest is organized by INMA, a non-profit interest organization that works for the advancement and utilization of digital advertising media. Submitting projects to the contest is free of charge and open to all as long as the work is produced in Norway. Contestants can submit online their project to a given contest month via INMA's "The Silver Tag" website. All projects must be submitted with the following information: advertising agency identities, team participants' identities, participants' occupational titles, client name, a brief description of the project and its goals, media mix and advertising placements. All participants and their projects are broadcast industry-wide and subject to scrutiny by any interested party. Consequently, this monthly contest provided the opportunity to gather very detailed data and track interpersonal relationships in the field at a fairly high level of accuracy over time. As the submission deadline for a given monthly contest expires, the jury members have a few days to inspect the competing projects individually before they convene to deliberate and identify the winner—usually in the middle of the subsequent month. The winner is then announced and celebrated in industry media. "The Silver Tag" website also serves as an archive of previous

contest months, where any interested party can browse both winners and losers for all previous months.

"The Silver Tag" is set up with a jury consisting of professionals primarily from advertising agencies. INMA changes the composition of the jury members in May each year. INMA also sets the evaluation criteria the jury members are expected to use to award projects for digital advertising campaigns. Specifically, winning projects should be selected "based on solid creative ideas, exploiting opportunities in the media, innovative work that transcends boundaries, ideas that engage and involve the user and that create enthusiasm, aesthetics, use of advertising formats, choice of technology, relevant use of interactivity and strategy, and how it all relates to the brand" (www.solvtaggen.no). The jury evaluation process proceeds as follows. All jury members produce a personal shortlist of their 5 favourite projects. These shortlists are subsequently compiled to identify the jury's shortlist of 5 projects. Next, each project on this shortlist is discussed by the jury where each jury member argues for his or her preferred winner. The jury president manages the discussion. Qualities that jurors value in an advertising campaign are: funny, original and innovative; revealing good craftsmanship in terms of aesthetic appearance; using interactive media technologies.

After discussing the shortlist, the jury members assign points to the different projects and the ranking is established by adding up the jurors' points and averaging them. If necessary, the winner is identified with several decimals. Besides identifying the winner, the jury has the "opportunity to bestow an honorable mention to work that in its opinion it has solved or contributed something in a very good way, to which it is desirable to grant extra attention" (www.inma.no). Honorable mentions are typically bestowed in rank order from two (2^{nd} place) to five (5^{th} place). Whenever jury members have a conflict of interest – e.g., they were involved in a project that was submitted to the contest or an advertising agency for which they were working submitted a project – they are not allowed to partake in the evaluation of that project: they have to exit the jury room and wait in the hallway while

the project is being discussed. For this project, the score of the juror with a conflict of interest is set equal to the average of the other jurors' scores. Once the jury members determine the ranking and agree on the winning project, the jury issues a justification – drafted by the jury president – that accompanies the announcement in industry media.

Data

To identify organizations and professionals competing for symbolic recognition in the Norwegian digital advertising field, we collected data on all projects entered into "The Silver Tag" from May 2003 to April 2010. The data were available from the online "The Silver Tag" archive published by INMA. The dataset is truly unique and comprises a total of 1,734 distinct individuals, 350 distinct organizations and 902 projects over 75 contest months.[1] We collected data on all jury members in "The Silver Tag" awards contest from May 2003 to March 2010 from "The Silver Tag" website and industry press. Each jury served from May to April in the following year during the years 2003-2006 and from April to March during the years 2006-2010. In total, we collected data on 7 juries, whose size over the study period varied from 4 (for the first jury) to 11 (for the last jury) members.

Dependent variable

We used a generalized linear approach to model the jury-project evaluation process, in which jury members bestow an accolade (award or honorable mention) on projects selected from among the larger set of projects eligible in a given month. This approach seems appropriate because we are estimating the outcome of the evaluation process where jurors cast their votes for their preferred candidate competing for recognition. We interpret this process as estimating the number of successes,

[1] June/July each year was combined into one contest generation by the Norwegian interactive marketing interest organization responsible for the contest, INMA. In addition, INMA combined March/April 2004 and August/September 2004 into two distinct contest generations. This practice produces a total of 11 competitions per year – without counting the aforementioned exceptions in 2004.

i.e. favorable juror votes, out of a given set of trials, i.e. the number of jurors voting. This means that for each competing project we estimate the favorable juror votes received, conditional on the number of jurors casting votes. In this process, each project faces a trial from each juror, and may succeed or fail at these trials. For each project facing evaluation trials by the jury members in a given month, we coded the dependent variable 1 if a project reached the 5th place; 2 if a project reached the 4th place; 3 if a project reached the 3rd place, 4 if a project reached the 2nd place, and 5 if a project reached the 1st place (i.e., won the award). For all remaining projects in the same contest month, we set the dependent variable equal to 0.

It is worth remembering that, even though the accolade goes to the project, all individuals involved receive it as well. This scale for our dependent variable represents an approximation of the underlying voting process in which a fixed number of jurors cast their votes on each project, and some projects are favored by one or more jurors while others are not. The number of jurors in a given month defines the number of voting trials that each project faces. The actual jury evaluation process in "The Silver Tag" justifies this interpretation. In this process, all projects face a trial by each juror who individually scrutinizes each project. Each judge then compiles a shortlist of projects he or she favors. The jury the compile each jury members' shortlist to make up the jury's top 5 shortlist. The jurors then proceed to cast their votes to the projects on the jury's shortlist. The preferred winner receives 5 points, the preferred second place receives 4 points, and so on from each juror. The jury then adds up the points awarded by each juror and divides the sum by the number of jury members. The projects that do not make the shortlist receive zero votes and hence zero points.

Independent variables

To test our hypotheses, we measured the status of the project members and their social distance from jury members, respectively. Previous research has used network centrality to measure status (for a

review see Sauder et al., 2012). While awards reflect social esteem and respect, i.e., some form of public valuation, centrality pertains to a position of importance in a network. We, therefore, tested the first hypothesis by creating the variable *status* using Bonacich beta-centrality (Bonacich, 1987). The measure counts the number of individuals in the project with a Bonacich beta-centrality above the median in the global "Silver Tag" network over the total number of individuals working on the same project in a particular month contest based on a 24-month moving affiliation network window (see below). We also chose a more conservative cutoff to define high-status – i.e., values greater than .85 (for a similar approach see Jensen 2008) – which yielded very similar results.

We tested our second hypothesis by computing the social distance measure between jury members and the individuals working on the same advertising project by first generating bipartite project affiliation network matrices based on the monthly "The Silver Tag" digital awards contest using the UCINET VI package (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). A well-known issue in establishing the existence of a social connection is how long this connection should persist. Assuming no relationship decay over the study period would imply an overestimate of the number and duration of connections in the network by maintaining false ties to inactive professionals. However, given the fast-pace nature of the industry and, in particular, after our interviews with industry participants, it was unclear whether a professional not involved in any advertising projects for about 2 years should still be considered an active member of the industry. Accordingly, we created our adjacency matrices adopting a 24-month moving window that was updated monthly.[2] Using these matrices, we calculated the median geodesic distance between each individual advertising project member and the peer jury members. This is tantamount to measuring degrees of separation in studies on small worlds. We grouped together individual producers with social distances from jurors equal to or greater than 6, and assigned them the value 6. This operationalization follows the six degrees of separation theory

[2] Adopting a shorter (one year) or longer (3 years) moving time window yields very similar results.

according to which, by means of introduction, everyone is six degrees or fewer away from any other person in the world (Milgram, 1967). Thus, a chain of "a friend of a friend" statements can be made to connect any two people in a maximum of six steps. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, we measured social distance in terms of proximity between jury members and producers. We did so by computing the reciprocal of the median geodesic distance between each individual advertising project member and the peer jury members. As our unit of analysis is the project, we created the *social proximity* variable as the median of each project member's median distance from jury members.

Control variables

To rule out alternative explanations for the hypothesized relationships, we included several control variables in our models. The main empirical challenge to test the actual effects of status, social distance and positive ties lies in disentangling their effects from those of other stratifying variables (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001) such as the quality of the project under evaluation. Controlling for quality is also particularly important to determine the influence of personal bias in guiding evaluators' decision (Lee et al., 2013). In contexts such as tournament rituals, where multiple candidates compete for the same award, one would expect candidates with direct ties to evaluators (jury members) to have better chances of being recognized. Controlling for quality would therefore attenuate the influence of such bias because the influence of our variables of theoretical interest is estimated net of project quality. However, our data do not allow us to measure project quality directly. During our interviews, field insiders pointed out how high-quality projects usually exhibit certain measurable characteristics that are strongly correlated with quality. First, high-quality projects tend to be technologically advanced and innovative in terms of technological application. With the diffusion of broadband technology and increasing downloading speeds, digital advertising professionals have now the opportunity to create more sophisticated creative solutions with visually appealing interactive content based on video/film,

sound, 3D animation and streaming technologies. Second, high-quality projects make use of ample resources in terms of budget size and work hours in order to develop more ambitious solutions. Larger projects, proxied by the number of project participants, also increase the likelihood that there are social ties between jury members and members of the project team. Although other unobserved characteristics might affect project quality, the technical sophistication of a project and the number of people working on it represent a reasonably good approximation of a project's underlying quality.

Project sophistication. Following the INMA criteria and jury statements, jury members typically emphasize whether the advertising projects competing in a given contest month use new technology. The creative use of technology is in fact perceived as a sign of technical sophistication and innovativeness. During our observation period, the application of technologies such as film, sound, 3D and streaming enabled producers to develop more advanced, innovative and aesthetically pleasing projects. We thus created a variable – *project sophistication* – that differentiates projects based on the type of technologies that they employed. The variable tallies the number of agencies specializing in 3D-animation, film production, radio production, or back-end streaming involved in a given project. Although this variable does not capture the actual use of new technologies, it discriminates projects for which the producers had at least the opportunity to leverage those technologies from projects for which this opportunity was unavailable. In other words, the variable captures the 'potential' technical sophistication of a project. Also, the variable does not simply reflect jury members' perceived level of sophistication, which then reduces the risk that purely subjective considerations might be driving jury members' decisions.

Project size. A larger number of project participants serve as a proxy for larger project budgets and a higher number of hours available in the project to create more ambitious solutions. This variable also controls for the likelihood that social connections between jury members and cultural producers

may increase with the size of the project team. Accordingly, we controlled for the total number of individuals on each digital advertising project.

Conflict of interest. As we mentioned before, whenever jury members have a conflict of interest, they are not allowed to partake in the evaluation of that project. One such case is when both project and jury members work for the same firm. Another case is when jurors are participating in projects they are supposed to evaluate. In this case, they literally wear two hats: one as jurors, the other as contest participants. To control for possible bias in the jury, we then generated an indicator variable that is equal to 1 if one or more project members had a colleague in the jury or a juror was a member of the project, and 0 otherwise. It is worth noting that the variable does not measure prior collaborations but only employment in the same firm or project co-membership.

Median experience. Project members' past experience with digital advertising projects might account for their differential ability to contribute to the project as well as understand what exactly jury members are looking for in a project. We then tallied the number of projects prior to the focal project that each producer entered into "The Silver Tag" contest. For each project, we then calculated the *median experience* of all producers involved.

Competitive intensity. The more projects compete for recognition in a given contest month, the more intense the competition and the lower the likelihood that a given project will win. We therefore counted the number of projects competing for recognition in each contest month to control for project concentration.

Prior jurors on project. As mentioned before, jurors serve in their position on average for 12 months (i.e., 11 monthly contests). As active members of the advertising field, upon terminating their mandate former jurors typically continue participating in the contest. The presence of one or more former jurors on a project might affect the odds that such a project will receive an accolade depending

on how favorably those jurors evaluated the projects in which the newly appointed jury members were involved.

Prior positive co-experience. The second hypothesis suggests that the allocation of rewards does not occur in a social void, but is instead embedded in patterns of connections between audience members and the producers they evaluate. As they convey information about producers and their work, those ties can be positive or negative and, therefore, a source of social benefits or liabilities (Labianca & Brass, 2006). Individuals occupying the same structural position (e.g., same degree of separation from members of the evaluating audience) might in fact have different odds of recognition depending on whether their ties are positive or neutral (if not negative). Especially when such ties stem from prior experience working together, the success of previous collaborations might enhance positive affect in interpersonal relationships and so shape future evaluative interactions. Positive ties can thus give rise to a 'content-based' bias (Lee et al., 2013: 8), whereby evaluators assess more favorably the work of producers with whom they co-created successful material in the past. For instance, this form of cognitive particularism or 'cognitive cronyism' (Travis & Collins, 1991) in peer review occurs more subtly than simply evaluation in bad faith, like when manifest personal interests affect evaluation. In subjective contexts, where objective assessment criteria are often lacking or disputed, we therefore expect audience members to be more likely to honor the work of candidates with whom they have positive ties over the work of proximate candidates who do not have such ties. We computed the prior positive co-experience measure between current jury members and project members on each project subject to jury evaluation by tracking their past successful collaborative experiences in "The Silver Tag" over the past 24-months. Specifically, we counted the number of current jurors who had worked together with current project members on digital advertising projects in "The Silver Tag" in the past and won the contest. We created the indicator variable *prior positive co-*

experience for which we assigned a value of 1 if there were one or more such instances for a given project and 0 if there were no such instances.

METHOD

We modeled the probability of each project receiving more points, i.e., more favorable evaluations by the jurors in the jury in a given contest month, using generalized linear models (McCullagh and Nelder, 1989; Hardin and Hilbe, 2012). We estimated our models with the glm command in Stata 14, specifying the binomial family and set the binomial denominator equal to the number of jurors evaluating the competing projects in each month. We also specified the logit link and estimated our models with maximum likelihood, clustering the projects on each contest month to obtain robust standard errors. We modeled the probability of peer jury members favoring a given project creating an aggregate outcome for each project of either no placement, 5^{th} place, 4^{th} place, 3^{rd} place, 2^{nd} place or 1^{st} place in a given contest month. We also clustered projects on firm, but the results were qualitatively similar to those reported here (see below).

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics and correlations for our measures are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. We first checked the correlations among all independent and control variables and found no evidence of multicollinearity. The condition number (Belsley, Kuh, & Welsch, 1980) for the matrix of independent variables was 9.90. This value as well as the singular values ranging between 1 and 9.90 were all well below the suggested threshold of 30. The low condition numbers suggest that multicollinearity is not likely to be an issue in our models.

<Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here>

We began by estimating a model with robust standard errors in which the *only* predictors were, respectively, *status* and *social proximity* (the two variables of theoretical interest). The model stratifies by

contest month, so each stratum corresponds to a choice set for the jury in a particular month. In Model 1 of Table 3, the coefficient for *status* was 1.088 (p<.01), while in Model 2 the coefficient for *social proximity* was 5.270 (p<.01). These results suggest that jury members favor projects created by higher status professionals as well as projects created by professionals with whom they are socially proximate.

Next, we introduced our control variables as shown in Model 3 of Table 3. While *project size*, *project sophistication*, *competitive intensity*, and c*onflict of interest* were significant and the sign of their coefficient in the expected direction, *prior jurors on project* and *prior positive co-experience* were not statistically significant.

When all these variables were controlled for (Model 4), the coefficient of the *status* variable was in the expected positive direction (.656) and highly significant (p<.01), suggesting that higher status projects are more likely to receive an accolade. Similarly, the coefficient of the *social proximity* variable (Model 5) was highly significant (p<.01) and in the expected positive direction (4.072): a project is more likely to receive an accolade as the social proximity between project and jury members increases. When the two variables of interest were included in the same model (Model 6), the connectivity measure was highly significant and the sign of its coefficient in the expected direction. The, the status measure was still positive and significant at the 5% level.

To facilitate comparisons across different variables, Figure 1 shows the percentage change in the odds of receiving an accolade after exponentiating the standardized coefficient of the variables used in the analysis for 1-standard deviation variation. Besides confirming the strong impact of the variables *project size* and *project sophistication* that serve as proxies for project quality, the figure shows that the two variables of theoretical interest – *status* and *social proximity* – strongly affect the dependent variable. Increasing *status* by 1-standard deviation increases the odds of receiving an accolade by 22

percent. Similarly, increasing *social proximity* by 1-standard deviation increases the odds of receiving an accolade by 27 percent.

We also explored the possibility that the effect of social proximity may not be linear as hypothesized. If in fact universalistic criteria of merit do shape evaluative outcomes, jury members should be sensitive to situations in which doubts could be cast on the objectivity and fairness of their decisions. Some field participants also insinuated this possibility during our interviews with them. Accordingly, we included the squared term for *social proximity* to probe the existence of a quadratic effect. In Model 7, the main (linear) effect of *social proximity* remained positive and significant (16.00, $p<.05$) and *social proximity (squared)* was negative and significant (-21.243, $p<.05$) indicating the operation of a quadratic effect, while *status* remained positive but only marginally significant (10% level). This result is particularly interesting because it seems to suggest that being too close to members of the evaluating audience might prove less advantageous for producers and even reduce their likelihood of being rewarded. We surmise that when audience members perceive that doubts could be cast on the fairness of their judgments and their reputation is then at stake, they actually refrain from rewarding producers who are socially very close to them. Especially in context like ours where small world features can be observed (e.g., most of the advertising firms are located in Oslo and professionals interact at multiple levels besides and beyond working together), alleged vested interest in rewards allocation decisions is likely to have enduring negative reputational effects. Although this is beyond the scope of the present study, future research might find this issue worthy of further investigation. In the discussion section, we further elaborate on this unexpected finding and suggest directions for fleshing out its implications.

Finally, we investigated the influence on the allocation of rewards of *status* and *social proximity* by estimating the average treatment effect of these three mechanisms on the likelihood of being rewarded in our advertising project population. We estimated the average treatment effect (ATE) from

our observational data using the nearest-neighbor matching technique. This technique imputes the missing potential outcome for each subject (here project) using an average of the outcomes of similar subjects (projects) that received the treatment. The average treatment effect is then computed by taking the average of the difference between the observed and imputed potential outcomes for each subject (project). To match projects, we calculated the Mahalanobis distance similarity measure for all projects based on our set of covariates excluding for each treatment model the variables for the competing mechanisms. We first defined the treatment level for each project based on our *status* variable. Specifically, each project was treated using .2 cut-off rule. All projects with a value of *status* >= .2 were assigned the value of 1 (treated) while those with *status* < .2 were assigned the value of 0 (untreated). To adjust for sample bias when matching on more than one continuous covariate, we specified a bias-corrected estimator to ensure consistent nearest neighbor estimations (Abadie & Imbens, 2006, 2011). We then estimated the average treatment effect using robust standard errors.

The results presented in Table 4 show a significant positive ATE for treatments greater than the chosen cutoff value. In Model 8, the ATE for *status* >= .2 is .633 (p<.01). We also estimated the ATE of the *social proximity* variable using the cutoff rule of .5 to identify the treatment group. The results are reported in Model 9 and show a positive (2.379) and significant (p<.01) ATE for *social proximity* >= .5. Although we cannot claim causality, the results of these analyses strengthen the confidence in the finding that our variables of theoretical interest influence the allocation of rewards.

<Insert Table 3 and 4, and Figure 1 about here>

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A growing body of research following the Bourdieuian tradition suggests that acts of consecration do not occur in a social void, but are instead embedded in patterns of relationships and shaped by

audiences (e.g., peers, critics, etc.) that grant or deny distinction to competing candidates (Allen & Parsons, 2006; Rossman et al., 2010; Cattani et al., 2014). In line with this view, the present study demonstrated how the consecration of cultural producers' work in advertising award ceremonies is a function of their status and their social distance from the audience members who evaluate them—an idea that has been advanced (e.g., Lamont, 2012) but has remained largely unattended by social scientists. Especially in settings in which the assessment of quality is uncertain, audience members rely on judgment devices to discriminate among candidates.

The present study exposes two such devices, status and social capital, thus contributing to the scholarly debate on social evaluations in organizational life (George et al., 2016: 10). First, unlike prevailing accounts of status-based mechanisms that look at pre-consumption preferential treatment of high status candidates, we show how preferential allocation of rewards may also result from audience members' post-consumption assessment of high-status candidates. Status considerations, in other words, remain salient even after audience members observe candidates' performance and its quality (Washington & Zajac, 2005). Second, we show that the outcome of the evaluation of candidates' work is also a function of their distance to the audience members who evaluate them—an idea that has been previously advanced but, surprisingly, has remained largely unattended among social scientists. Contrary to our expectations pointing to the prestige catalyzing effect of audience-candidate proximity in the underlying social structure, the analyses brought attention to the potential occurrence of countervailing proximity-related processes. Although we found that for the majority of projects consecration choices are patterned along relational lines, our evidence also shows that the probability of consecration choices favoring the "connected candidates" declines as the social distance between audience members and producers diminishes significantly. We offer two tentative observations to interpret this unexpected result, which seems to suggest the existence of alternative mechanisms to those consistent with a purely Bourdieusian account of peer-based evaluative outcomes. First, social

proximity might operate as a double edged-sword if the audience-candidate relationship becomes so salient to raise suspicions of authenticity, thus yielding reputational concerns that inhibit rather than promote favorable evaluation on the part of the audience. This point dovetails with Bourdieu's classic understanding of the "disinterestedness" ideal as a key driver of authenticity in cultural fields (Shymko & Roulet, 2017). In ostensibly meritocratic cultural settings characterized by strong vocational drive and professional ethos (Heinich, 2009), the suspicions stemming from alleged transgressions of this ideal may be particularly severe for one's reputation, thus explaining the observed marginally decreasing and ultimately negative effect of audience-candidate social proximity on recognition outcomes. Second and related to the previous point, one crucial characteristic of all recognition processes – and of award-based consecration choices in tournament rituals in particular – is that the capacity to consecrate "the best" will itself be considered more credible if recognition is granted based on undisputable criteria, however subjective they may be. In fact, ideally, as pointed out by Heinich (2009, p. 94), "In a 'sphere of justice' based on merit, solidarity grounded on proximity (be it that of family, friendship, community) should have no place at all: excellence would be the only criterion for choice." To the extent that decreasing audience-candidate social distance heightens vulnerability to criticism, relationships that may be publicly perceived as structuring the awarding process can jeopardize the authoritativeness of the award as a fair form of recognition, so threatening the viability of the tournament ritual itself. This too might account for the existence of negative returns to social proximity. While of course these observations are no more than conjectures at this stage, we are persuaded that it is important for future investigations to become attentive to the potentially non-monotonic dynamics underlying the relationship between social distance and recognition in peer-based evaluative settings such as the "rite of consecration" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 117) examined in the present study.

Evaluation is an important aspect of knowledge production because standards of excellence are defined and reproduced through evaluative processes (Bourdieu, 1984). Since audience members' evaluations construct prestige hierarchies and are also consequential for field evolution, the processes by which cultural producers are selected and rewarded embody rules of merit as well as vested interests, social objectives as well as identity-based motifs (Lamont, 2009). Our findings extend work on the social processes of evaluation by demonstrating that social distance between audience members and cultural producers is important to understand how audience members allocate symbolic capital—a hypothesis suggested but heretofore under-investigated empirically by social analysts. Our results suggest that far from just error or statistical discrimination (e.g., gender, race, etc.), the residual term of reward allocation decisions in tournament rituals also contains social connections between audience members and candidates. Incorporating measures of these relationships may help account for some unexplained variance in models that seek to predict the recipient of the material or symbolic resources through which audiences routinely honor deserving cultural producers. As we noted before, data issue could partly explain why more systematic investigation of the influence of interpersonal relationships is still lacking: precise information about relationships between audience members and candidates is very difficult to obtain, especially for large samples and even more so over time. The challenge for any study that aims to track direct and indirect connections through prior joint experience – the approach pursued in our study – is to collect detailed information on the career histories of both audience (jury) members and candidates (advertising professionals). In this sense, the unique nature of our data represents an important strength of the paper.

In cultural fields, the allocation of rewards often takes place in ceremonies known as tournaments rituals (Appadurai, 1986; Lukes, 1975) where awards and honors are bestowed on cultural producers through the selective judgment of worth. Tournament rituals have a distinct and recognizable symbolic structure that, in some culturally defined way, is removed from the routines of

economic life, usually taking the form of a public spectacle (Anand & Watson, 2004). Participation in tournament rituals is both a privilege granted to influential social actors in an organizational field and an instrument of status contests among them. By employing social network theory and analytic tools to expose the influence of social distance between evaluators and candidates on the outcomes of these ceremonies, our study also seeks to respond to recent calls from tournament theorists who have voiced the need to be more sensitive to the social context in which tournament rituals take place. As Connelly et al. (2014: 36) noted, incorporating "constructs and relationships from social network theory could help place tournaments more squarely into their contexts." Many other evaluative contexts beyond award competitions such us employee promotion, compensation decisions, grant proposals, staffing choices resemble tournaments (Jensen & Kim, 2015). Our analysis illustrates the importance of focusing more explicitly on the social fabric that shapes the rewards allocation processes that operate within these settings. Future studies could further unpack the structure of this fabric, providing more granular measures of the different types of "social intercourses" (Blau, 1977) that may envelope the audience-candidate evaluative interface. For example, focusing on approaches based on structural cohesion – i.e., co-presence of audience and candidate members in structurally cohesive regions of the collaborative network (absent direct collaboration) – seems a viable possibility. Another interesting research opportunity afforded by the type of data we employed would be to examine the extent to which awarding choices map onto reciprocation dynamics. Reciprocity, the giving of gifts to another in return for gifts received, is also a distance-reducing mechanism between any two parties involved in a social exchange. As summarized by Sherry (1983, p. 158), "The giving of gifts can be used to shape and reflect social integration (i.e., membership in a group) or social distance (i.e., relative intimacy of relationships)." As an example, take the hypothetical audience-candidate dyad composed by A(udience) and C(andidate). If A rewards C, C's perception of the benevolence of A's action increases. As such, C will feel closer to A, thereby fostering social bonding and reciprocation.

Examining the extent to which this and/or other similar finer-grained manifestations of social distance shape consecration choices in peer-based tournaments is a fruitful avenue for future inquiry.

Several questions merit additional investigation. First, while we focused on peer-based recognition, recognition can also originate from public acclaim or critical evaluation (Bourdieu, 1993). For instance, in the U.S. feature-film industry, peers and critics are organized into distinct awarding organizations that reveal their preferences in annual ceremonies that play a critical role in constructing prestige hierarchies. The allocation of honors and awards, therefore, reflects the selective judgments of two distinct aesthetic logics embedded in the world of professional criticism and the world of film (Cattani et al., 2014), with obvious implications for how honors and awards are allocated, and prestige hierarchies created. This raises the question of whether and how the network effects are likely to change when multiple audiences, each applying different evaluation criteria, evaluate candidates' work. Second, the finding that candidates' distance and positive ties to audience members have a combined stronger effect on the likelihood of being rewarded than does their status suggests that the positive effects of status may be more circumscribed than previously thought. An interesting extension of our study would be to establish whether status and social ties interact, particularly whether social distance to audience members attenuate the importance of status as a judgment device in peer evaluation. These are but some of the many questions that future research could explore in greater depth.

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Table 1 – Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Allocation of rewards	1.078	1.730
2. Project size	7.024	3.816
3. Project sophistication	.226	.559
4. Median experience	3.529	3.990
5. Competitive intensity	15.369	5.960
6. Conflict of interest	.436	.496
7. Prior jurors on project	.113	.344
8. Prior positive co-experience	.261	.439
9. Status	.439	.402
10. Social proximity	.255	.075

Table 2 – Correlation Coefficients

Variables	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
1. Allocation of rewards	1									
2. Project size	.29	1								
3. Project sophistication	.23	.38	1							
4. Median experience	.07	-.08	-.04	1						
5. Competitive intensity	-.22	-.06	-.01	-.01	1					
6. Conflict of interest	.19	.18	-.03	.17	-.09	1				
7. Prior jurors on project	.08	.14	.01	.13	-.07	.24	1			
8. Prior positive co-experience	.19	.27	.16	.20	-.03	.55	.16	1		
9. Status	.24	.35	.17	.26	-.05	.28	.14	.38	1	
10. Social proximity	.24	.28	.17	.34	.02	.44	.23	.53	.57	1

Condition number = 9.90

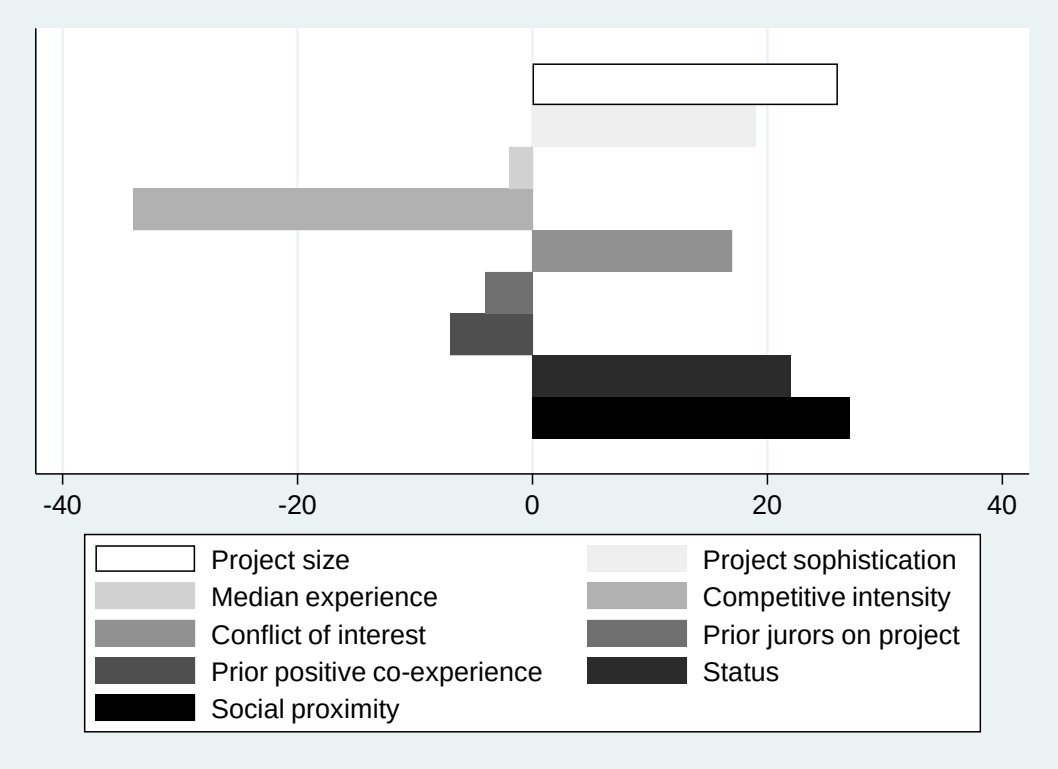
Table 3. Generalized linear models (clustered on contest/month)

	Model 1 Coeff.	Model 2 Coeff.	Model 3 Coeff.	Model 4 Coeff.	Model 5 Coeff.	Model 6 Coeff.	Model 7 Coeff.
Project size			.075**	.060**	.071**	.061**	.056**
			(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
Project sophistication			.362**	.348**	.310**	.310**	.283**
			(.09)	(.10)	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)
Median experience			.026	.008	.005	-.004	-.005
			(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
Competitive intensity			-.069**	-.066**	-.070**	-.069**	-.069**
			(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Conflict of interest			.399*	.364*	.306†	.310†	.270
			(.17)	(.17)	(.17)	(.17)	(.17)
Prior jurors on project			-.088	-.080	-.140	-.123	-.149†
			(.14)	(.15)	(.14)	(.15)	(.14)
Prior positive co-experience			.102	-.011	-.124	-.164	-.146
			(.15)	(.16)	(.16)	(.17)	(.17)
Status	1.088**			.656**		.490*	.433†
	(.17)			(.20)		(.22)	(.22)
Social proximity		5.270**			4.072**	3.201**	16.000*
		(.81)			(1.02)	(1.06)	(6.35)
Social proximity (squared)							-.21.243*
							(10.73)
Constant	-2.689**	-3.544**	-2.182**	-2.297**	-2.987**	-2.900**	-4.593**
	(.12)	(.23)	(.24)	(.25)	(.29)	(.29)	(.79)
N	654	654	654	654	654	654	654
Log pseudolikelihood	-1185.30	-1190.49	-1099.59	-1084.77	-1082.72	-1075.53	-1068.27
AIC	2374.61	2384.98	2215.18	2187.55	2183.45	2171.06	2158.53

**$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, †$p < .10$

Point counts clustered on contest month

Figure 1. Percentage Change in Odds of Receiving an Accolade (Exponentiated Standardized Coefficients) for 1 StdDev Variation in the Variables



Note: Changes in the odds of receiving an accolade are shown for a one-standard deviation change in the variables. The changes in odds are calculated based on exponentiated standardized coefficients from Model 8 in Table 3 with all control variables, the status variable, the social distance variable, and the positive ties variable to allow for comparison.

Table 4. Matching Using Near Neighbor Estimation

	Model 8	**Model 9**
	Status	Social proximity
	>= .2	>= 0.5
ATE	.633**	2.379**
	(.18)	(.82)

AI robust standard errors

*p < .05, **p < .01