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**The Interplay between Status and Social Proximity in Peer Evaluation:**

**A Socio-Cognitive Perspective on Reward Allocation**

Erik Aadland

Department of Strategy and Entrepreneurship

BI Norwegian Business School

Nydalsveien 37  
0484 Oslo

+4746410496

[erik.aadland@bi.no](mailto:erik.aadland@bi.no)

Gino Cattani \*

Department of Management & Organizations

Stern School of Business – NYU

40 West 4th Street

Tisch Hall Suite 7-14

New York, NY, 10012

Phone +1 212 998 0264

[gcattani@stern.nyu.edu](mailto:gcattani@stern.nyu.edu)

Denise Falchetti

Department of Strategy & Innovation

Questrom School of Business - Boston University

595 Commonwealth Avenue

Boston, MA, 02215

Phone +1 617 353-2000

[dfalchet@bu.edu](mailto:dfalchet@bu.edu)

&

Simone Ferriani

Department of ‘Scienze Aziendali’

University of Bologna

Via Capo di Lucca, 34

40126 Bologna (ITALY)

Tel: +39051 2098073

Fax: +39051 2098074

[simone.ferriani@economia.unibo.it](mailto:simone.ferriani@economia.unibo.it)

\* Corresponding author

**The Interplay between Status and Social Proximity in Peer Evaluation:**

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**Abstract**

It is reasonable to assume that candidates’ status and social proximity (e.g., direct ties) to members of the evaluating audience interact to shape recognition in peer-based evaluative settings. Yet, how exactly these two forces interact is unclear: alternative theoretical perspectives that point to different explanatory mechanisms coexist in the literature. Our objective in this study is to shed light on this question by adopting a mix-method approach. We first examined field data on the conferral of prestigious awards in a peer-based evaluative contest – “The Silver Tag” – one of the most prestigious digital advertising awards contests inNorway. The field study revealed the existence of a negative interaction between status and social proximity on the allocation of awards. We then conducted two experiments to probe the causal mechanisms responsible for this finding. In the first experiment, we replicated the main pattern observed in the field study. In the second experiment, we showed that the interaction effect is contingent on the nature of the evaluative setting. When audience members’ decisions were not in the public domain, social proximity did not temper the effect of status on candidates’ recognition, but it did when decisions were in the public domain (i.e., audience members had to justify them before other members). We conclude by discussing several implications of our study for research on the socio-psychological processes underlying evaluative outcomes in tournament rituals.

**Keywords:** Peers, audiences, status, social proximity, rewards, intellectual distance, tournament rituals, field study, experiments, advertising.

**INTRODUCTION**  
In the sociological and organizational literature, tournament rituals operate by selectively allocating recognition among competing candidates. [1,2]. Well-known examples of ceremonies in the cultural domain that signal creative achievement epitomizing peer-based recognition are the Academy Awards in motion picture [3], the Grammies in music [2], the John Bates Clark Medal in economics [4], the Nobel Prize for advances in culture and science [5], and so on. Operating as markers of distinction, these ceremonies shape a cultural field’s status ordering [6]. As such, they have received significant attention from scholars interested in understanding the socio-cognitive mechanisms underlying these evaluative efforts [7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12]. Paramount among such research endeavours have been those exposing the roles of status and social networks as pervasive forces producing and reproducing attributions of distinction in art’s and science’s evaluative settings.

Extensive evidence across cultural fields as diverse as academic publishing [13], wine tasting [14], film industry [15], advertising [16], and screenwriting agencies [17] reveals the role of status as a key driver of evaluation and choice. Prevailing explanations for the positive association between status and evaluative outcomes posit that status serves as a source of information about an actor’s unobserved quality. In this vein, one’s relative standing in a social system [18] positively affects others’ expectations on as well as behaviour toward the object of evaluation. Indeed, high-status actors are assumed to be more competent [19], more frequently attended to [18], and usually granted more recognition for their performance relative to low-status actors even for equivalent performance. By contrast, low-status actors are more likely to be devalued or simply ignored [20, 21]. This explanation has found further support in a few recent studies – more sensitive to the role of the evaluative context – that have shown how the choice of high-status actors is also more easily defensible before other evaluators because it is based on what is publicly recognized as high quality [22, 23, 24]. Accordingly, evaluators concerned with the reaction of others may see high-status actors as privileged targets of recognition, often times despite their personal convictions.

Social networks are also widely recognized as important drivers of evaluative outcomes. A rich body of empirical research – albeit perhaps not as systematic as the scholarship on status beliefs – supports this view across different evaluative settings in both art and science. Parsons and Shils [25] were among the first to highlight the impact of social relationships between evaluators and candidates in shaping reward allocation decisions, and how these relationships may compromise universalistic standards of evaluation. Similarly, Blau [26, p. 265] pointed at possible social intercourses between evaluators and candidates emphasizing how “the differentiating criterion is whether the standards that govern people’s orientation to each other are dependent on or independent of the particular relationships that exist between them.” One of the first studies to find empirical support for this intuition is Wenerås and Wold’s [27] analysis of the peer-review system of the Swedish Medical Research Council: the authors found that postdoctoral fellowship applicants who had relationships with reviewers (e.g., they came from the same academic institution) were judged to be more competent than those who had no such affiliation, but nevertheless were equally productive.

Several subsequent studies of academic settings have confirmed the existence of a positive association between audience-candidate network proximity and favourable evaluative outcomes – including promotions, publications and prizes. Godechot [28], for instance, offered compelling evidence of a remarkable increase in the odds of recruitment for candidates with ties to members of the selection committee. Zinovyeva and Bagues [29] likewise found that within the centralized selection exams in Spain applicants for an academic job position were significantly more likely to be promoted when they were evaluated by an acquainted evaluator. Also consistent with this effect is the evidence of Teplitskiy et al. [30] that connections between authors and reviewers of neuroscience manuscripts are associated with more favourable judgments. The attribution of awards of distinction to creative professionals in fields of artistic production appears to map on the connectivity between candidates competing for recognition and members of the evaluating audience. Evidence supportive of this claim includes jurors’ preferential allocation of prizes to professionals sharing their networks within the feature film industry [10, 31], as well as recent findings in the context of the advertising industry exposing the patterning of award allocation choices along relational lines [16].

Network-based explanations for recognition rest primarily on two types of arguments. First, when quality is non-observable then ties, just like status, operate as a judgment device mitigating uncertainty in social evaluations through tie-specific information. The second argument hinges on self-serving incentives: because status spills from one actor over to another through social networks [18], audience members have an incentive to confer status on someone to whom they are connected. Under such circumstances, in fact, audience members enjoy greatest reflection of glory from the award [32, 33], so leading to tie-based preferential allocation of recognition [16, 34]. In short, there is significant evidence that points to the role of status and social proximity in driving audiences’ preferential allocation of attention and recognition across competing candidates. Not surprisingly, two of the most widely used truisms to characterize the way cultural markets channel resources, honours and attention to cultural producers reflect precisely the essence of these two mechanisms: “You are as good as your last credit” and “It’s Not What You Know. It’s Who You Know.”

Although we know a great deal about the role of status and social proximity in producing and reproducing comparative advantages in social evaluations, we know much less about how status and social proximity combine to produce evaluative outcomes. In particular, social ties could either dampen or amplify any positive effect that status has on recognition. On the one hand, given the universal nature of status seeking [35], any positive effect that candidates’ status may have on their recognition should be even stronger when high-status candidates have ties to members of the evaluating audience. If recognition flows through the network [18], audience members will devote greater attention to high-status candidates who are connected to them because accolades (prizes, awards, etc.) render neighbourhoods synonymous with the activity of those who win them [12]. This logic implies that, all else being equal, the marginal effect of candidates’ status on their recognition will increase monotonically with their social proximity to audience members. On the other hand, the existence of social ties between audience members and candidates should reduce the saliency of status as a signal of the quality of candidates and their work. In line with this idea, for example, prior research has established that dyadic business relationships, which firms maintain with their customers, and status are *substitutive* drivers of market entry decisions. Both types of social resources facilitate entry into a new market, but the importance of status diminishes in the presence of market ties, which “represent a more direct mechanism than […] status to reduce market uncertainty and increase exchange value” [36, p. 467]. Hence, assuming that status serves as a quality signal, we should expect social proximity to reduce the marginal effect of status on recognition.

Recent findings by Aadland, Cattani and Ferriani [16] imply similar expectations but rely on different interpretations. While providing substantial evidence supportive of the general stratifying effect of audience-candidate ties on candidates’ recognition, the authors also point to the plausibility of negative returns of social proximity to recognition – particularly at high levels of audience-candidate social proximity. They attribute this possibility to what they call “intellectual distance,” a term introduced to indicate audience members’ attempt to project their “interest in disinterestedness” [37, p. 112, see also pp. 87–88]. The general intuition is that the audience-candidate proximity in the social network might give rise to morally problematic interpretations of audience members’ true intentions and thus yield reputational concerns that inhibit favourable evaluations of socially proximate candidates. To the extent that audience members’ choices are visible and audience members care about the reactions of others, overt reliance on relational-based allocative criteria may threaten their reputation. It is then plausible to expect audiences’ reliance on status cues in making rewards allocation to diminish as social proximity increases significantly, i.e., to the point where intellectual distance kicks in. In this case, audience members who are very close to the candidates they evaluate are less sensitive to candidates’ status because they are worried that any elevation of status would signal unequivocally their pursuit of self-serving interests, de facto turning the recipients’ status boost into their own stigma. Thus, these arguments too are suggestive of a negative interaction effect between status and social ties, but rather than being the result of substitutive dynamics, such an effect here stems from reputational concerns. In summary, how candidates’ status and social proximity to audience members interact in evaluative settings is unclear because of the coexistence of alternative perspectives that point to different explanatory mechanisms. Which of these perspectives best characterizes the interaction effect between status and social proximity on evaluative outcomes?

Our objective in this paper is to shed light on this theoretical question. To do so, we collected data on the conferral of prestigious awards to competing candidates in a peer-based evaluative contest in the advertising industry and examined how candidates’ status and audience-candidate proximity in the underlying social network contribute to explaining awards allocation decisions. We offer external validity to the field study as well as evidence on the causal mechanism responsible for the field study’s results by supplementing them with two experiments. In the first experiment, we replicate the main pattern of the effects observed in the field study, which indicate a negative interaction between status and social proximity. In the second experiment, we document how the interaction effect is contingent on the nature of the evaluative setting. In so doing, we seek to distinguish – theoretically and empirically – processes associated with reputational concerns from alternative explanations that imply the same empirical patterns but rely on different assumptions about the interplay of status and social ties. We show that when the ‘evaluation’ is private (i.e., not in the public domain) and audience members do not have to justify their decisions before the other members, social proximity does not temper the effect of status on candidates’ recognition; however, it does when those decisions are in the public domain and, therefore, potential violations of the meritocratic ideal in social evaluation are more likely detected and stigmatized, if not punished. We conclude by discussing the implications of this study for research on the socio-cognitive processes underlying the evaluation of peers in ostensibly meritocratic settings, and identifying avenues for future research.

**OVERVIEW OF STUDIES**

To examine the interplay of status and social ties in peer-based evaluative settings, and with the aim of balancing both the internal and external validity of our studies, we conducted one field study (Study 1) and two experimental vignette studies (Study 2 and Study 3). We therefore used a mix-method approach to probe the socio-cognitive drivers of recognition. We conducted the field study in a setting where both status and social ties are likely to exert influence in peer audience evaluations, but neither the status of the candidates nor the social ties between them and the members of the evaluating audience were manipulated. The field study allows us to establish whether status and social ties are additive – reinforce each other’s effect – or non-additive – the effect of one is reduced in the presence of the other. We then conducted the two experiments to further probe the interaction effect and the conditions under which this effect is more or less likely observed. In Experiment 1, we explored the joint effect of status and social ties on the probability of rewarding cultural works by manipulating the status of the candidates and the social ties between the candidates and the members of the evaluating audience. Experiment 1 replicates the findings of the field study, though with stricter controls. In particular, one crucial strength of employing an experimental approach is the possibility of holding project quality constant. In fact, the true quality of cultural producers’ offers is typically unobservable and difficult to infer unequivocally even after consumption. The challenge, therefore, is to adopt an approach that enables the researcher to ascertain the presence of evaluative drivers independent of the true quality of the producer’s offer. In Experiment 2, we probed the mechanism responsible for the interaction effect by holding constant the presence of social ties between candidates and audience members, and manipulating the candidates’ status and the transparency of the evaluation process. Experiment 2 sheds light on the circumstances under which the negative interaction is more or less likely to operate thus offering precious insights into the nature of the mechanism underlying what we observed in the field data.

**STUDY 1**

We conducted a large scale empirical field study within the context of the Norwegian advertising industry to investigate the interplay between status and social ties in peer audience evaluations. We also sought to gain greater insight into the context by interviewing key industry informants. Like in other fields of cultural production, in advertising it is customary to establish excellence in awards contests [38, 39]. In these contests, the jury members are professional peers who have won awards contests in the past. As such, they are likely to embrace and reproduce the field’s dominant canons in the field [40]. Since the advertising industry is project-based it is not uncommon for jury members to evaluate peers with whom they collaborated in the past.

**Interviews with key informants**

In order to get a better sense of how social mechanisms enter into the jury’s awards allocation choices, we interviewed a panel of field insiders that consisted of élite advertising professionals, advertising professionals struggling to make their mark, advertising awards contest jurors and representatives from industry associations. Although these interviews did not constitute a representative sample of industry participants’ opinions, a considerable range of views was expressed, and noteworthy themes emerged that helped inform our understanding of the award contests’ evaluative dynamics. Table 1 reports descriptive data on the sampled agencies and respondents. Our industry informants suggested that professionals’ social standing in the professional status hierarchy represents a signal of uncertain professional qualities. The status information in turn influences jury evaluations as illustrated by the following quote by a copywriter and former juror in an advertising agency:

*“It’s a bit like that [well known high status creative teams] have a tendency to score incredibly well on work that is really only average. And that is because you are positively biased, because they make a lot of nice work. And you are a bit positively biased to begin with. You really want that the work they do is of high quality. And, sure, if you come in [to an awards contest], if you send in something from [an out of town agency] that is not highly regarded in the industry, then you will struggle a lot.”*

**< Insert Table 1 about here >**

Our informants were also aware of the fact that jury deliberations are enveloped into “interpersonal patterns of value commitments” that channel attention, energy and information, subtly shaping attributions of ability [16, p. 21]. The following quote [16, p. 11] from an account manager is quite telling:

*“If two projects are equally good, then the project where project members and jurors know each other will win […] these people share the same opinion about what is “important” and “not important,” as well as what is “right” and not “right.” They (the projects by candidates previously tied to the jurors) might therefore score higher on the criteria valued by the jurors who ‘administer the truth’ about what is good and not so good.”*

Our informants recognized the influence of professionals’ status and ties to jury members in shaping jury’s evaluations of their work. However, they were also keenly aware that the identity of the jury members is public information available to industry peers, and that professional relationships between members of the jury and candidate producers is relatively transparent to other members of the industry, most notably other jury members partaking in award allocation decisions. In this type of socio-relational context, a jury member’s social tie to a candidate can sometimes translate into more of a liability than an advantage. Our informants emphasized how susceptibility to claims against impartiality in evaluations also bring to bear on the outcomes of jury deliberations. In particular, an experienced jury member suggested how voicing a genuine preference for a particular project could raise reputational concerns due to prior collaborations with some project-team members [16, p. 12]:

*“It is a big problem if they (i.e., the members of the industry) come to believe you have a vested interest. If you favour that project […] you may end up in big trouble. I usually keep quiet or alternatively try to mention what is good about other projects in such situations.”*

In summary, our interviews appear to reveal a fundamental evaluative ambivalence caused by actors’ strong susceptibility to claims against their authenticity. Avoiding conflicts of interests may in fact be a matter of moral conviction or adherence to epistemic values. Jury composition is in the public domain; likewise, the existence of professional relationships between jury members and candidate producers is relatively visible to other members of the industry as professionals have a rather good sense of who has worked with whom. Lurking suspicions of deliberations along these relational lines can therefore easily surface and call one’s moral character into question, even when the jury members genuinely endorse those deliberations.

**Secondary data**

We investigate the interplay between status and social ties in peer audience evaluations using the novel “The Silver Tag” dataset first described in Aadland [41]. The dataset includes all projects entered into “The Silver Tag” – the monthly Norwegian digital advertising awards contest – from May 2003 to April 2010. The data comprise a total of 1,734 distinct individuals, 350 distinct organizations and 902 projects. The Norwegian interactive marketing interest organization responsible for the contest, INMA, combined the contest months June and July each year into one contest generation. 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, and a total of 75 contest months. The data contain all winners, recipients of honorable mentions, and losers. The data also track all jury members serving on juries in “The Silver Tag” awards contest from May 2003 to March 2010. 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, the dataset contains 7 juries, whose size over the study period varied from 4 (for the first jury) to 11 (for the last jury) members.

**Dependent variable**

Following Aadland et al. [16], the dependent variable measures the bestowal of an accolade (honourable mention or award) to projects competing in a given contest month. We coded the dependent variable 0 if a project did not receive any accolade; 1 if a project received an honourable mention; 2 if a project reached the 1st place (i.e., won the award). These ordered levels of recognition mirror the stratification of the contestants in the field. The dependent variable, therefore, is categorical and ordered in terms of levels, or intensity, of peer recognition.

**Independent variables**

***Status****.* We relied on network centrality to measure status in line with previous research (for a review see [42]). We created the *status* variable using Bonacich beta-centrality [43]. 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. We calculate dour centrality measure based on a 24-month long 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 [44]) – which yielded very similar results.

***Social ties***. We captured the effect of social proximity between audience members and candidates on the likelihood of receiving an accolade by looking at the impact of direct ties. We observed direct ties in our setting, direct ties when project and jury members had worked on the same project(s) in the past. We computed this variable by first generating bipartite project affiliation network matrices based on the monthly “The Silver Tag” digital awards contest using Ucinet, version 6 for Windows [45]. We created the adjacency matrices with a 24-month long moving window that we updated monthly. Following Aadland, Cattani and Ferriani [34, p. 140], we adopted “a shorter (one year) or longer (3 years) moving time window yielded very similar results. Using these matrices, we then calculated the proximity between each advertising project member and the jury members.” Because our unit of analysis is the project, for each project we created the variable *Social ties* by counting only the number of jurors with direct ties to project members [16]. We also looked at the impact of having mediated (i.e., indirect) ties to jury members on the likelihood of being rewarded by calculating the median geodesic distance between project and jury members (see below).

**Control variables**

To rule out alternative explanations for the hypothesized relationships, we included several control variables in our models.

***Project sophistication.*** In “The Silver Tag”, jury members typically emphasize whether the advertising projects competing in a given contest month use new technology. The creative use of technology is percei**v**ed as a sign of technical sophistication and innovativeness. Accordingly, the variable *project sophistication* differentiates projects looking at the type of technologies that are being. Following Aadland et al. [34, p. 141], “the variable counts the number of agencies specializing in 3D-animation, film production, radio production, or back-end streaming involved in a given project.” While not capturing directly the use of new technologies, this variable identifies projects for which those technologies in principle could have (and most likely were) employed.

***Project size.*** We controlled for the total number of individuals on each digital advertising project because the number of project participants serves as a proxy for larger project budgets, therefore, more available resources to invest, including a higher number of working hours per project.

***Conflict of interest****.* Jury members are not allowed to partake in the evaluation of a project whenever they have a conflict of interest in that project., like when, for instance, project and jury members work for the same firm, or jury members are involved in projects under evaluation. Accordingly, we 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 [16, 34].

***Prior positive co-experience.*** Some jurors may have collaborated with candidates and won with them on projects in the past. If prior candidate-juror interactions have resulted in the achievement of a positive outcome they are likely to affect evaluators’ disposition towards the work of their past collaborators when the juror in question casts her votes over the competing candidates [16]. Previous social network research has shown how social ties can be a source of social benefits (e.g., more favorable evaluations) or social liabilities (e.g., less favorable evaluations) depending on whether relationships between evaluators and candidates are positive or negative [46]. We therefore identified The Silver Tag projects in which a current candidate and a juror collaborated and won the award during the prior 24 months. We created the indicator variable *prior positive co-experience*, which takes on the value of 1 if there were one or more such instances for a given project, and 0 if there were no such instances.

***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. Following Aadland et al. [16, 34], we measured project members’ past experience by tallying the number of projects prior to the focal project each producer had submitted to “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 [16]. We controlled for *competitive intensity* by counting the number of projects competing for recognition in each contest month.

***Reciprocity***. 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 [47]. As Sherry [48, p. 158] observed, “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).” Accordingly, we created the *reciprocity* variable that “captures the extent to which jury members reward project whose members were jurors in the past and who – in that role – had rewarded one or more of the current jury members” [16, p. 15]. For each project, the measure counts the number of current jurors who won or received an honorable mention by project members serving as jurors over the previous two years and whose work happened to be under evaluation during the focal contest month.

**Method**

We modelled the probability of each project receiving more favourable evaluations by the jury members in a given contest month, using generalized linear models [49, 50]. In line with Aadland et al. [34], we estimated our models with the glm command in Stata 14, specifying the binomial family and setting the binomial denominator equal to the number of jurors evaluating the competing projects in each contest month. We also specified the logit link and estimated our models with maximum likelihood. We clustered the projects on contest month to obtain robust standard errors. For each contest month, we modelled the probability of jury members assigning an outcome for each project of either no placement (0 points), honourable mention (1 point), or winning the award (2 points). We also clustered projects on firm, but the results were qualitatively similar to those reported here.

**Results and Discussion**

We report descriptive statistics and correlation values for our measures in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. We first checked for collinearity and found the condition number [51] for the matrix of independent variables to be 6.28 – well below the suggested threshold of 30. Thus, multicollinearity is not likely to be an issue in our models.

**<Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here>**

We began by estimating a model with robust standard errors in which the onlypredictor was *status*. 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 4, the coefficient for status was 1.062 (*p*<.01). We then estimated a model with *social ties* only. In Model 2, the coefficient for *social ties* was .322 (*p*<.01). The pattern and significance of the two predictors remained stable when both variables were included together (Model 3). We then proceeded to estimate the interaction between *status* and *social ties* and the main effects for the interaction term components. In Model 4, the coefficient for the *status* \* *social ties* interaction was -.420 (*p*<.01), while the coefficient for *status* was 1.189 (*p*<.01) and the coefficient for *social ties* was .208 (*p*<.01). The negative joint effect of status and ties suggests that jury members are less inclined to reward high-status candidates who are socially close to them. Specifically, while jury members favour projects created by high-status professionals if they are not connected to them, they favour projects created by low-status professionals to whom they are connected.

Next, we introduced our control variables (Model 5). While *project size*, *project sophistication*, *competitive intensity*, and *reciprocity* were significant and the sign of their coefficient in the expected direction, *median experience,* c*onflict of interest*, and *prior positive co-experience* were not statistically significant.

When all these variables were controlled for (Model 6), the coefficients for *status* and *social ties* remained positive and significant. Model 7 presents the results of the full model including the controls, the interaction components and the interaction effect. Again, the pattern in our data remained stable and highly significant. Specifically, the coefficient for the interaction term was -.466 (*p*<.01), while the main effect coefficient for *status* was 1.030 (*p*<.01) and the main effect coefficient for *social ties* was .489 (*p*<.01). We also calculated the marginal effect of *social ties* for representative values of *status* to further explore their interplay. Figure 1 plots this marginal effect. The plot reveals a positive marginal effect of *social ties* that decreases for higher levels of *status* and eventually turns insignificant for very high levels of *status*. Similarly, Figure 2 plots the average marginal effect of *status* at representative values of *social ties*. As the proportion of project members with direct ties to members of the jury increases (i.e., the value of the variable gets closer to 5), the marginal effect of *status* on receiving an honorable mention or winning (i.e., outcomes 1 and 2) decreases, suggesting that direct ties to jury members become increasingly important in shaping their rewards allocation decisions. For values of *social ties* greater or equal to 2, the marginal effect of *status* is not significant.

We also calculated the adjusted predictions for the number of *social ties* at representative values of *status* holding the other variables constant at their means. Figure 3 plots the adjusted predicted probabilities. When *social ties* = 5 and *status* = 0, the adjusted predictive margin is 1.657 (*p*<.01). Conversely, when *social ties* = 5 and *status* = 1, the adjusted predictive margin is .513 (*p*<.01). The adjusted predicted probabilities suggest that the likelihood of reward is high for projects with higher levels of *social ties* and low levels of *status*. The likelihood of reward for projects with higher levels of *social ties* decreases when *status* increases. By contrast, when *social ties* = 0 and *status* = 0, the adjusted predictive margin is .169 (*p*<.01). When *social ties* = 0 and *status* = 1, the adjusted predictive margin is .460 (*p*<.01). The adjusted predicted probabilities suggest that the likelihood of reward is low for projects with lower levels of *social ties* and low levels of *status*. The likelihood of reward for projects with lower levels of *social ties* increases a little bit, however, when *status* increases.

**<Insert Table 4 and Figures 1, 2 and 3 about here>**

Overall, these results identify an important boundary condition that may alter the saliency of status cues. On the one hand, social ties appear to reduce the need to rely on status-based evaluation, as encoded in a publicly observable status hierarchy. Conversely, social ties become less salient in driving recognition as status increases. These results, in other words, suggest that status and social ties are not additive, pointing instead to a substitution effect between them.

**Robustness Checks**. We conducted additional analyses to gauge the validity of our findings. First, we looked at the impact of having mediated (i.e., indirect) ties to jury members on the likelihood of being rewarded. Following Aadland et al. [34, p. 140], we first calculated the median geodesic distance between each project member and the jury members. In accordance with the six degrees of separation theory [52], we then grouped together individual producers with a degree of separation from jurors equal to or greater than 6, and assigned them the value 6. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, we measured the variable in terms of nearness between jury members and producers. We measured nearness by computing the reciprocal of the median geodesic distance between each project member and the jury members. As our unit of analysis is the project, we created the *social proximity* variable by taking the median of each project member’s median distance from jury members. We then re-estimated the full model (Model 8) by interacting this alternative measure of *social proximity* with the *status* variable. The pattern and significance levels in the model remained stable. Specifically, the coefficient for the interaction term was -10.052 (*p*<.01), while the main effect coefficient for *status* was 3.079 (*p*<.01) and the main effect coefficient for *social proximity* was 9.446 (*p*<.01), thus confirming the existence of a substitution effect between status and social (direct and indirect) ties.

**STUDY 2**

The advertising field insiders we interviewed emphasized how, during our observation window, projects of high quality were likely to exhibit certain measurable attributes besides the un-measurable idiosyncratic aspects of the creative idea underlying each project. Accordingly, in the field study we controlled for some of these project-level attributes. Yet, other unobserved characteristics not captured in our analysis might of course affect jury members’ perception of project quality thereby affecting the chances of a project being rewarded. In Study 2 we tried out to alleviate this concern by replicating our effects in a well-controlled lab study. By asking participants to evaluate the same advertising project – thus keeping its quality constant and varying only descriptions of candidates’ status and their social ties to evaluators – Study 2 helps rule out quality differences among projects as an explanation for our results. In order to replicate the field study, we primed all participants to think that their evaluations were in the public domain by informing them that the jury selected the winners collectively. We developed vignettes to describe an award competition – i.e., a fictional Digital advertising competition – in which we asked participants to serve as jury members and bestow an award on a commercial. In the vignettes, we used different cues to manipulate the status level (status vs. no-status) of the commercials’ creators, and the presence of social ties (direct ties vs. no-direct ties) between the experiment participants (i.e., jury members) and the creators of the commercial. We used *award propensity* as the dependent variable.

**Method**

***Participants****.* Six hundred and fourteen participants were recruited online using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. They received $1.00 dollars for completing the study. Potential participants were restricted only to US residents with a 95% or greater approval rating on MTurk. To ensure that participants read and completed the questionnaire carefully, we introduced attention checks so as to exclude from the final analysis participants who missed more than one correct answer. Since we required participants to watch a commercial that lasted 55 seconds, we removed those participants who did not watch and/or spent too much time watching the video. Accordingly, we recorded the time each participant spent on the page with the commercial and then we computed the percentiles for the time variable. In the analysis, we used the data on the participants included in the 5th and the 95th percentile – which corresponded to 50 and 122 seconds, respectively. All these procedures are strongly recommended to ensure data quality and remove inattentive responses when online tools such as Mechanical Turk are used [53, 54, 55, 56, 57]. The final sample consisted of 552 participants (52.7% female, *Mage*=36.48 years, 74.6% Caucasian).

***Material and Procedure***. We randomly assigned participants to one of the four conditions in a 2 (status: status vs. no-status) x 2 (social ties: direct ties vs. no- direct ties) between-subjects experiment. Participants first read a vignette that informed them about a competition in digital advertising, where they had to serve as jury members. Then, they were asked to assign an award to a commercial after evaluating its aesthetic beauty and animation features. We chose these two evaluative criteria because they represent the qualities evaluated by the jurors in our field study. Also, to replicate the evaluative process of the field study, we informed the participants that “The jury selects the winner collectively thereby disclosing the vote cast by each jury member.” This important clarification allows us to (a) induce participants to think that their personal vote will be publically disclosed to the other jury members during a collective evaluative stage; and (b) activate concerns in the participants’ minds about the impartiality of their evaluations. Specifically, the subsequent vignette was used to describe the evaluative setting:

**Advertising Digital Competition**

“In your community, there are many initiatives, including an annual Competition in Digital Advertising. Everyone in the community can participate in the competition by submitting a commercial. Each commercial is judged and has the opportunity to win an award.

Since you participated in the competition in the past, this year the organizers of the competition have asked you to become a **jury member**. As a jury member, you have to assign an award to a commercial after evaluating its **aesthetic beauty** and **animation features**.”

After reading about the evaluative setting, participants received more information concerning the commercial’s creators (*authors* in the vignettes). Specifically, we described the creators of the commercial in terms of their *status* and their *social ties* to the experimental participants. We designed the manipulation of status by varying the creators’ prestige and expertise. This manipulation was developed in line with the observation that expertise assessment is essentially “a status-organizing process” [58, p. 561] because individuals who are seen as more competent have higher status, whereas those who are seen as less competent have lower status [59, p. 216]. In sum, in the status condition, the creators of the commercials were described as well-known experts in advertising, whereas in the no-status condition they were described as non-experts. We designed the social tie manipulation by revealing the presence or absence of prior *direct* ties between the participants of the experiment and the creators of the commercial. Specifically, the social ties manipulation was designed as *the presence or absence of a direct tie* to ensure consistency with the field study. Based on our manipulation, we informed the participants that they knew the commercial’s creators and had collaborated with them in the past (i.e., direct ties condition), or that they did not know any of the commercial’s creators and had never collaborated with them in the past (i.e., no-direct ties condition). Participants in the status and social ties condition read the description below (if assigned to the no-status and no- direct ties conditions participants read the text in italic):

“In addition to the video, the organizers provide you with some information about the authors of the commercial. Looking at this information, you realized that all the authors of the commercial are **well-known experts** (***non*-*experts***) in advertising, and that you **know** some (*don’t know any*) of them because you **collaborated with** them (*never collaborated with them*) on commercials in the past.”

After reading the vignettes, participants in all the four conditions watched and evaluated the same commercial on a new financial service. We selected this commercial from an actual Internet advertising contest where leading industry experts serve as judges in assigning various awards to commercials. Specifically, the commercial we chose for the experiment was recognized as the *Best Computer: Software Online Video*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***Award Propensity***. Our dependent variable measures the extent to which the experiment participants are willing to assign an award to the commercial based on a 7-point scale (1 = “Definitely no”, 7 = “Definitely yes”; the question was the following: “Would you assign an award to the commercial?”).

***Manipulation Checks***. We included both a status and social tie’s manipulation check. For the status manipulation check, we asked participants to answer the following question: “How much prestige do you think the authors have in advertising?” They rated the authors’ prestige on a 7-point scale (1 = very low prestige, 7 = very high prestige). For the social ties manipulation, we asked the participant the following question: “How familiar do you feel with the authors?” Participants reported their answer on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all familiar, 7 = extremely familiar).

**Results and Discussion**

*Pre-analysis*. We first checked the presence of outliers for our dependent variable (award propensity) and identified ten outliers based on the Z-scores threshold of 2.5 SD [57, 60]. We removed these subjects from all subsequent analyses. Award propensity is (moderately) correlated with ethnicity (r = -.144; p = .001). We measured ethnicity as follows: 1 = Caucasian, 2 = African American, 3 = Hispanic, 4 = Asian, 5 = Pacific Islander, 6 = Mixed and 7 = Other. We used this variable as covariate in our 2 (status) x 2 (direct ties) ANCOVA on award propensity. In the paper, we report the adjusted means for all the analyses including the ethnicity covariate.

*Manipulation checks***.** First, we assessed whether the participants perceived the status manipulation by running a 2 (status: status vs. no-status) x 2 (social ties: direct ties vs. no- direct ties)between-subjects ANOVA on the rating of the creators’ prestige. The analysis showed a significant main effect for status (F (1, 538) = 60.35, p < .001): participants in the *status* condition rated the commercial’s creators as more prestigious than participants in the *no-status* condition (Mstatus = 4.65, *SD*status = 1.22; Mno status= 3.78, *SD*no status = 1.33). No other significant effects were observed in the results. Similarly, to test the social tie manipulation, we ran a 2 (status: status vs. no-status) x 2 (social ties: direct ties vs. no- direct ties)between-subjects ANOVA on the rating of the creators’ familiarity. The analysis showed a significant main effect for direct tie (F (1, 538) = 26.81, p < .001): participants in the direct ties condition rated the commercial’s creators as more familiar than participants in the no-direct ties condition (Mdirect ties = 2.83, *SD*direct ties = 1.58; Mno-direct ties= 2.16, *SD*no-direct ties = 1.39). No other significant effects were observed in the results.Thus, we concluded that the manipulations of our two independent variables were successful.

*Award Propensity.* We runa2 (status: status vs. no-status) x 2 (social ties: direct ties vs. no-direct ties)between-subjects ANCOVA on award propensity controlling for ethnicity (F (1,537) = 12.67, p < .001). Consistently with our field study, the results showed a significant two-way interaction (F (1,537) = 13.09, p < .001). The main effects of status and social ties did not reach significance levels. In support of this finding, simple effects tests revealed that participants with direct ties to the commercial’s creators were less willing to assign the commercial an award when creators with status (M = 4.32) rather than no-status (M = 4.79; F (1,537) = 9.74, p < .01) were involved. In contrast, participants with no direct ties to the commercial’s creators were more willing to assign the commercial an award if status (M = 4.57) rather than no-status (M = 4.28; F (1,537) = 3.94, p < .05) creators were involved. Figure 4 graphs the lines and Table 5 reports the results.

**<Insert Figure 4 and Table 5 about here>**

These experimental findings offer causal evidence of the concomitant influence of status and social ties in shaping individual evaluative outcomes thereby substantiating our results from the field study. The joint effect of status and ties is negative, confirming that audience members are less inclined to reward high status candidates who are socially close to them. In the case of no ties, on the contrary, no deterrent to recognition is present and the positive effect of status on award propensity prevails. Study 2 offers strong validation of the negative interaction effect because we controlled for any potential difference in the quality of the project by manipulating status and social ties holding the project’s quality constant. Doing so significantly mitigates the possibility that project level features may account for the effects observed in Study 1.

**STUDY 3**

Study 2 increases the internal and external validity of our findings from Study 1 but does not allow us to isolate the precise mechanism responsible for the negative interaction. Two equally plausible explanations could explain such empirical pattern. The first is based on the understanding of status and social ties as substitutive judgment devices, namely the idea that social ties may substitute for status in conveying inferential information on evaluative targets, which in turn may guide evaluative decisions. To the extent that social ties channel private information on the evaluation target, then audience members with ties to candidates who are in the consideration set should be less sensitive to status information. Conversely, the signaling effect of status should be significantly stronger for audience members who lack such ties and thus have no first-hand information on which to rely in their evaluation. The second explanation relies on reputational arguments, namely on audience members’ concern to be perceived as fair and disinterested in their evaluation as favoring candidates that are both high status and socially proximate to them can easily evoke suspicions of departure from the disinterestedness ideal. Indeed, the reflected glory an evaluator enjoys through her personal connection to the winner of the tournament may predispose peers towards a morally problematic interpretation of that evaluator’s motives. Thus, while both mechanisms could account for the same results’ pattern, the underlying explanations are profoundly different. In the first case, audience members who are socially close to the candidates arguably are less likely to use status information to reduce their evaluative uncertainty because social ties represent a more direct mechanism to temper evaluative uncertainty. In the second, audience members who are socially close to the candidates they are expected to evaluate are less sensitive to candidates’ status because any elevation of status might signal unequivocally their pursuit of self-serving interests, even when this preoccupation entails overruling a genuine assessment of merit.

In Study 3 we seek to unravel this duality by manipulating the evaluative context. In particular, we reasoned that if the interaction effect reflects evaluators’ reputational concerns then the outcome of the evaluation should depend significantly on whether individual choices are private or in the public domain – and hence subject to others’ scrutiny. Note that in the field study the decisions of each jury member are collectively socialized and therefore known to the other jury members. In fact, while this is often the case in peer-based evaluative settings in cultural fields (e.g., Cannes Film Festival, NSF evaluations), there are also evaluative settings in which decision makers remain oblivious of each other’s deliberations (e.g., Grammies, Oscars, etc.). Study 3 reproduces the previous studies as closely as possible; however, evaluators are explicitly told whether their evaluations are in the public domain (i.e., known to other evaluators). We then varied only the description of candidates’ status, keeping constant their ties to evaluators. Accordingly, we asked all the study participants to evaluate a commercial created by peers with whom they were directly connected, and manipulated both the status of the authors of the commercial and the transparency of the evaluation process – i.e., whether or not evaluators’ decisions are openly and collectively debated.

We manipulated status using the same descriptions as in Study 2, and the transparency of the evaluation process by telling the participants that their evaluations are either in the public domain or not. Specifically, we developed two distinct descriptions of the contest: one in which the participants are told that their vote will be disclosed, and the other in which participants are told that their vote will not be disclosed to the other jury members – which we label *public* evaluation and *non-public* evaluation, respectively. These manipulations allow us to ensure that only the participants asked to evaluate status peers in the public condition are susceptible to reputational concerns. If one’s urge to pre-empt potential reputational concerns shapes evaluative considerations, then the propensity to reward any given commercial should decline when the (socially proximate) author of the commercial is high-status and the evaluator’s assessment is public. Stated differently, we should expect the probability to bestow an award on status peers – as opposed to no-status peers – to decline only when the vote is public. By contrast, when the vote is not in the public domain, we should not expect status peers to differ from no-status peers in terms of award propensity.

**Method**

***Participants****.* A sample oftwo hundred and thirty-nine participants was recruited with Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. The participants were compensated $50 cents for completing the study. As in the prior study, the recruitment was limited to only participants in the United States with a 95% or greater approval rating. Again, we used attention check questions to exclude participants from the survey. Since in our vignettes we used the same commercial as in Experiment 1, we ensured consistency with the first experiment by including in the analysis only the participants who watched the commercial for more than 50 second and less than 122 seconds. Overall, we excluded twenty-seven participants from our sample. As explained earlier, these methods are recommended to remove inattentive responses from online surveys increasing data quality. The final sample consisted of 212 participants (50.0% female, *Mage*=36.19 years, 79.2% Caucasian).

***Material and Procedure***. We randomly assigned participants to one of the four conditions in a 2 (status: status vs. no-status) x 2 (public domain: public evaluation vs. non-public evaluation) between-subjects experiment. Participants were asked to read the same vignette used in Experiment 1 to introduce the advertising competition, with the exception of the information concerning evaluation’s public domain. In particular, to manipulate the public domain of the evaluation, participants in the public evaluation condition read: “Your **vote** will be **publically** disclosed to the other jury members to collectively select the winner.” Otherwise, in the non- public evaluation condition, participants read: “Your **vote** will not be disclosed to the other jury members to collectively select the winner.” Like in Experiment 1, participants received more information regarding the commercial’s creators. In all four conditions, we held direct ties between the creators of the commercial and the experimental participants constant by telling the participants that they knew the commercial’s creators and had collaborated with them in the past. We then manipulated the status of the creators by using the manipulation of Experiment 1. Finally, participants were asked to watch and evaluate the commercial already employed in Experiment 1.

***Award Propensity***. The same questions from Experiment 1 were used to measure the propensity to award the commercial.

***Manipulation Checks***. We included both a status and public domain’s manipulation checks. Consistently with Experiment 1, we used the same manipulation check for status by asking participants how much prestige they think the authors have in advertising on a 7-point scale (1 = very low prestige, 7 = very high prestige). For the public domain’s manipulation, we asked the participant the following question: “Do you think the award decision is anonymous?” Participants reported an answer on a 7-point scale (1 = definitely no, 7 = definitely yes).

**Results and Discussion**

*Pre-analysis*. Following the same approach of Experiment 1, from an analysis of outliers on our dependent variable, award propensity, we identified three outliers based on the Z-scores threshold of 2.5 SD [57, 60]. We removed these subjects from subsequent analyses. Consistently with the first experiment, we tested the effect of status and evaluation transparency on award propensity while controlling for ethnicity, even if the two variables were not significantly correlated in this study (r = .033; p = .631). Ethnicity was measured as in Experiment 1.

*Manipulation checks***.** We tested the effectiveness of the status manipulation with a 2 (status: status vs. no-status) x 2 (public domain: public evaluation vs. non- public evaluation)between-subjects ANOVA on the rating of the creators’ prestige. The result revealed only a significant main effect for status (F (1, 205) = 19.11, p < .001): participants in the status condition considered the creators of the commercial more prestigious than participants in the no-status condition (Mstatus = 4.98, *SD*status = .95; Mno status= 4.24, *SD*no status = 1.43). We found no other significant effects. To test the public domain’s manipulation, we ran a 2 x 2 ANOVA on decision’s anonymity. As indented, the analysis showed a significant main effect for public domain (F (1, 205) = 60.99, p < .001): participants in the non-public condition perceived the decision to be anonymous with respect to the public condition (Mnon-transparent = 4.90, *SD*non-transparent = 1.55; Mtransparent= 3.08, *SD*transparent = 1.78). Again, we found no other significant effects in the results.Thus, our manipulations of the two independent variables worked well.

*Award Propensity.* A two-ways ANCOVA on award propensity revealed a marginally significant main effect of status (F (1, 204) = 3.49, p = .063) and a marginally significant effect of public domain (F (1, 204) = 3.43, p = .065). No other effect was significant including the covariate ethnicity (F (1, 204) = .68, p > .05). Yet, more importantly, the results of planned contrasts analysis showed the expected pattern. Meyvis and van Osselaer [57] argued that “requiring authors to demonstrate a reliable main effect before allowing the testing of planned contrasts (which more precisely test the hypothesis) is not a statistically sound argument” [57:1171-1172]. In addition, Keppel and Wickens [61] stated “when an experiment has been designed to investigate a particular planned contrast, it should be tested regardless of the significance of the omnibus F statistics” [61:116]. Since we did not expect some of the experimental conditions to differ from each other, the planned contrasts analysis is more precise and powerful than the omnibus F test.

First, we examined the effect by comparing the “status and public condition” vs. the “no status and public condition.” As expected, the planned contrast revealed that participants were less likely to assign an award to a commercial created by status peers (Mstatus and public = 4.18) compared to commercial created by no status peer when their vote was public (Mno status and public = 4.62), *t* (204) = -1.98, p < .05). To test the other planned contrast, we compared the “status and non-public condition” to the “no status and non-public condition.” As expected, this contrast was not significant, *t* (204) = -.56, p > .05 (Mstatus and non-public = 4.62, Mno status and non-public = 4.75). Overall, the contrast tests confirmed previous findings, further supporting our speculation that a reputational mechanism is at play because the likelihood of a commercial to receive an award declined significantly only when jurors evaluated the work of status peers directly connected to them and their vote was public. The fact that no such effect was observed when the evaluation occurred privately rules out the alternative explanation that status and social (ties) information operate as substitutive information devices. Figure 5 graphs the lines and Table 6 reports the results.

**<Insert Figure 5 and Table 6 about here>**

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The ostensibly meritocratic evaluation of cultural producers and their offers often occurs within the context of peer-based tournament rituals where the allocation of symbolic capital among competing candidates, typically in the form of status-enhancing accolades, constitutes an important form of recognition. Unlike prevailing research that focuses on the status-enhancing effect of an accolade on its recipients, we shifted our analysis from award winners to the socio-cognitive mechanisms underlying audience members’ allocation decisions. In particular, our research objective was to analyze the combined effect of candidates’ status and audience-candidate proximity in the social network in shaping those decisions. Although a number of studies have documented the importance of either status or social networks across a variety of domains of cultural production, very limited research has focused on how the two mechanisms operate in tandem to shape evaluative outcomes.

We argued that proximity in the social network could moderate the almost universal association between status and recognition. Specifically, social ties to members of the evaluating audience could either increase or decrease any positive candidate’s status effect. In a field study of award conferrals in advertising contests, we found that the social proximity between advertising professionals and jury members stifled the positive association between status and recognition. Conversely, social ties between audience members and candidates were particularly beneficial in fostering recognition for candidates who lacked status credentials. Supplementary online experiments aimed at further corroborating this finding and clarifying the underlying mechanism confirmed the negative interaction effect. It is indeed reassuring that we observe the same pattern of effects in the real world (Study 1) as we did in the lab (Studies 2–3), which supports the external validity of our results, an important criterion for impactful research in social science [62].

Study 3 also exposed the role of the social-evaluative context as a critical boundary condition. In particular, we demonstrated that when audience members do not have to justify their decisions before other members – i.e., their decisions are not in the public domain and thus they are not exposed to morally problematic suspicions about their personal interests in benefiting from those decisions – status candidates are equally likely to receive an award as no status candidates. On the contrary, when audience members’ decisions are in the public domain, no status candidates are more likely to receive an award than status candidates. Since in the experiment audience members have ties to candidates, the results give less credence to the alternative interpretation that social ties operate as information devices that substitute for status information. In other words, social proximity tempers the effect of status on candidates’ recognition when decisions are in the public domain and, therefore, potential violations of the meritocratic ideal in social evaluation are more likely detected and stigmatized, if not punished. We take this evidence as reflective of the “front stage” – “back stage” [63] tension that may envelope audience members’ evaluative efforts. When decisions are in the public domain, the suspicion that audience members might perform their role for the sake of implicit personal gains, rather than authentic adherence to the rules and practices that signal disinterestedness, is likely to elicit efforts to project such disinterestedness and hence deflect attention away from any signal that would render their choices overly susceptible to sceptical scrutiny. In our case, insofar as audience–candidate social proximity heightens vulnerability to public criticism for alleged pursuit of self-serving interests, audience-candidate relationships that may be publicly perceived as structuring the awarding process also dampen the signalling saliency of status. This presumption seems particularly pertinent to ostensibly meritocratic cultural settings characterized by strong vocational drive and professional ethos [64], where the suspicions stemming from alleged transgressions of the disinterestedness ideal may be particularly severe for one’s reputation, calling her moral character into question.

The findings of this study are important because they shift the emphasis away from status or social network explanations for recognition, and refocus the attention on how these two mechanisms can combine in the creation of prestige hierarchies and how such combinatory effect may itself vary with the specific relational context in which the evaluative activity occurs. In particular, the negative interaction effect between status and social ties has interesting implications for the dynamics of cumulative advantage. The finding that marginal returns to status diminish with social network proximity adds another piece of evidence that there might be endogenous constraints to the Mathew effect [65]. It is often assumed that the self-reinforcement of status and networks unavoidably leads to “winner-take-all” dynamics as cumulative benefits accrue mostly to those who, even by small margins, are in superior positions [66, 67]. This assumption needs to be qualified especially if, under certain conditions, status considerations may lose saliency in the eyes of audience members in charge of relinquishing material and symbolic resources to competing candidates. Further research should elucidate which conditions are worthy of future inquiry.

We believe that our paper makes an important step towards a more precise articulation, in both theoretical and empirical terms, of the role of evaluating audiences in explaining status-based mechanisms of recognition. A better understanding of how audiences shape status dynamics is important to temper the tension between achievement and ascription that lies at the core of meritocratic evaluative settings – whereby audiences are supposed to justify their deliberations based on standards that can be articulated independently of the available options [23]. In addition, understanding how audience evaluations may change with the degree of scrutiny to which they are amenable seems crucial in light of ever-increasing calls for transparency in public life. In this respect, probing the interaction between candidates’ status and audience-candidate connectivity is especially important if only one considers that social proximity between producers and audience members is a constitutive feature of peer-based evaluative settings. Because of the role-switch structure of these settings, in fact, audience members are also members of the same community as the candidates they evaluate, even though they take on different roles [68], and so – more often than not – they may have few degrees of separation from each other [69, 31].

More broadly, our findings also speak to prior work attentive to the role of the social relational context in shaping assessments of merit. Ridgeway and Correll [70] consider a social relational context any situation in which an actor must take the expected reactions of others into account in establishing how to perform, because those reactions will be consequential to her interests. Other lines of scholarship point to how personal preferences often seem to fade in salience relative to what is publicly endorsed in a status hierarchy [23, 24]. This is especially apparent in research on “politics of dissimulation” – e.g., Norbert Elias’ [71] scholarship on authoritarian systems – whereby public displays of allegiance to the official credo may mask a great deal of private disagreement. Likewise, research on social evaluation [72] shows that the seeming social validity of something powerfully shapes individual decision-makers’ evaluations, independent of the personal assessments of quality held by decision-makers. Our study adds conceptual as well as empirical nuance to these lines of research by showing that the way such crucial social cues as status and ties inform an evaluator’s choices may well depend on the degree of interdependence of her evaluation with other consequential others who can infer key motivational premises from those choices. Accordingly, we might posit a variety of peer-based evaluative contexts, from those akin to our setting where individual choices are collectively socialized and visible to other decision makers (e.g., Cannes Film Festival, National Science Foundation); to those where individual choices remain private (e.g., Grammies, Academy Awards).

Several questions merit further attention. Our data do not capture the process by which jury members collectively make their decisions, in particular how their (often) conflicting opinions are reconciled and consensus on which projects to reward is reached. The combination of archival and interview data offered some suggestive insights, but the use of an ethnographic approach would be better suited to gain a more nuanced understanding of the processes by which rewards allocation decisions are collectively made. One could then compare the processes involved when these decisions are made at individual level with the processes involved at the group/collective level in order to probe more deeply the conditions under which the desire to distancing oneself from morally dubious evaluations is in fact driving those decisions, independently from the evaluator’s actual personal beliefs. Also, in this paper we focused on the recognition bestowed on cultural producers shortly after they produced their work, when evaluators are more likely to rely on judgment devices to ascertain the quality of such work. This type of contemporaneous recognition still enhances the prestige of cultural producers, and their ability to gain access to the resources they need to continue and further develop their work [2, 73]. Yet, it doesnot entail the same level of cultural recognition as ex post or retrospective consecration [74], which attests that producers and products survived the test of time [75, 40]. Studying the relationship between status and social proximity in retrospective consecration decisions would help clarify whether the patterns we found are more or less temporally bounded. These are but some of the many questions that future research could explore in greater depth.

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**Table 1. Descriptive Data on Agencies Sampled for Interviews**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Agency** | **Agency size** | **Services** | **Digital awards** | **Respondent’s role** |  |
| Advertising | 75-100 | Full servicea | Yes | Digital advisor |  |
| Advertising | 75-100 | Full service | Yes | Copywriter; Managing director | |
| Advertising | 50-75 | Full service | Yes | Digital advisor |  |
| Advertising | 40-50 | Mass communication | Yes | Copywriter |  |
| Advertising | 10-20 | Mass communication | No | Copywriter |  |
| Advertising | 10-20 | All media | No | Art director |  |
| Digital | 20-30 | Digital | Yes | Art director |  |
| Digital | 5-10 | Digital | No | Digital advisor |  |
| Digital | 5-10 | Digital | Yes | Digital advisor |  |
| a Full-service agencies typically offer a wide range of services such as mass communication, direct marketing, digital, design, and sometimes media brokering. | | | | | |
|

**Table 2 – Descriptive Statistics**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Mean** | **Std. Dev.** | **Min** | **Max** |
| 1. Allocation of rewards | .408 | .631 | 0 | 2 |
| 2. Project size | 7.034 | 3.818 | 1 | 30 |
| 3. Project sophistication | .225 | .559 | 0 | 5 |
| 4. Median experience | 3.540 | 3.990 | 0 | 30 |
| 5. Competitive intensity | 15.364 | 5.968 | 3 | 30 |
| 6. Conflict of interest | .436 | .496 | 0 | 1 |
| 7. Prior positive co-experience | .261 | .440 | 0 | 1 |
| 8. Reciprocity | .281 | 1.208 | 0 | 7 |
| 9. Status | .441 | .402 | 0 | 1 |
| 10. Social ties | 1.024 | 1.179 | 0 | 5 |

**Table 3 – Correlation Coefficients**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** |
| 1. Allocation of rewards | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Project size | .32 | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Project sophistication | .25 | .38 | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Median experience | .10 | -.08 | -.04 | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5. Competitive intensity | -.21 | -.06 | -.01 | -.01 | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 6. Conflict of interest | .19 | .23 | -.03 | .17 | -.09 | 1 |  |  |  |  |
| 7. Prior positive co-experience | .19 | .27 | .16 | .20 | -.03 | .55 | 1 |  |  |  |
| 8. Reciprocity | .34 | .18 | .06 | .15 | -.15 | .21 | .22 | 1 |  |  |
| 9. Status | .27 | .35 | .17 | .26 | -.05 | .28 | .38 | .17 | 1 |  |
| 10. Social ties | .28 | .35 | .15 | .27 | -.07 | .59 | .71 | .23 | .50 | 1 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Condition number = 6.28 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 4. Generalized linear models (clustered on contest/month)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 | Model 8 |
|  | Coeff. | Coeff. | Coeff. | Coeff. | Coeff. | Coeff. | Coeff. | Coeff. |
| Project size |  |  |  |  | .065\*\* | .047\*\* | .044\*\* | .046\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  | (.02) | (.02) | (.02) | (.01) |
| Project sophistication |  |  |  |  | .312\*\* | .301\*\* | .332\*\* | .263\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  | (.07) | (.08) | (.08) | (.06) |
| Median experience |  |  |  |  | .023 | .002 | .008 | .006 |
|  |  |  |  |  | (.01) | (.01) | (.01) | (.01) |
| Competitive intensity |  |  |  |  | -.048\*\* | -.047\*\* | -.046\*\* | -.049\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  | (.01) | (.01) | (.01) | (.01) |
| Conflict of interest |  |  |  |  | .257 | .126 | .050 | .032 |
|  |  |  |  |  | (.14) | (.15) | (.14) | (.14) |
| Prior positive co-experience |  |  |  |  | -.021 | -.343 | -.297 | -.127 |
|  |  |  |  |  | (.15) | (.18) | (.17) | (.15) |
| Reciprocity |  |  |  |  | .137\*\* | .139\*\* | .144\*\* | .134\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.02) |
| Status | 1.062\*\* |  | .740\*\* | 1.189\*\* |  | .546\*\* | 1.030\*\* | 3.079\*\* |
|  | (.14) |  | (.18) | (.25) |  | (.19) | (.25) | (.72) |
| Social ties |  | .322\*\* | .208\*\* | .503\*\* |  | .161\* | .489\*\* |  |
|  |  | (.04) | (.05) | (.09) |  | (.07) | (.10) |  |
| Status \* Social ties |  |  |  | -.420\*\* |  |  | -.466\*\* |  |
|  |  |  |  | (.13) |  |  | (.13) |  |
| Social proximity |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 9.446\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | (1.60) |
| Status \* Social proximity |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | -10.052\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | (2.44) |
| Constant | -3.727\*\* | -3.582\*\* | -3.824\*\* | -4.066\*\* | -3.379\*\* | -3.495\*\* | -3.758\*\* | -5.602\*\* |
|  | (.12) | (.07) | (.11) | (.15) | (.21) | (.21) | (.22) | (.43) |
| N | 654 | 654 | 654 | 654 | 654 | 654 | 654 | 654 |
| Log pseudolikelihood | -516.94 | -517.81 | -509.68 | -505.09 | -482.31 | -474.53 | -469.57 | -463.75 |
| AIC | 1037.87 | 1039.61 | 1025.37 | 1018.18 | 980.63 | 969.06 | 961.13 | 949.51 |
| \*\**p* < .01, \*p < .05 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Point counts clustered on contest month | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 5. Results for Experiment 1**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Status | | No Status | | | |  |
|  | Social  Ties  (A) | No  Ties  (B) | | Social  Ties  (C) | No  Ties  (D) | Interaction  F (1, 537) | Simple Effects |
| Award Propensity  M a | 4.32 (4.33) | 4.57  (4.56) | | 4.79  (4.78) | 4.28  (4.29) | 13.09  (p < .001) | B > D (p = .048)  C < A (p = .002) |
| N | 130 | 135 | | 134 | 143 |  |  |
| a Reported unadjusted means in parenthesis | | | | | | | |

**Table 6. Results for Experiment 2**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Status | | No Status | | |  | |
|  | Non  Public  (A) | Public  (B) | | Non  Public  (C) | Public  (D) | | Planned Contrasts | |
| Award Propensity  M a | 4.62 (4.62) | 4.18  (4.19) | | 4.75  (4.76) | 4.62  (4.61) | | B < D (p = .048)  A < C (ns) | |
| N | 52 | 52 | | 49 | 56 | |  | |

a Reported unadjusted means in parenthesis

**Figure 1. Average Marginal Effects of *Social Ties***

******

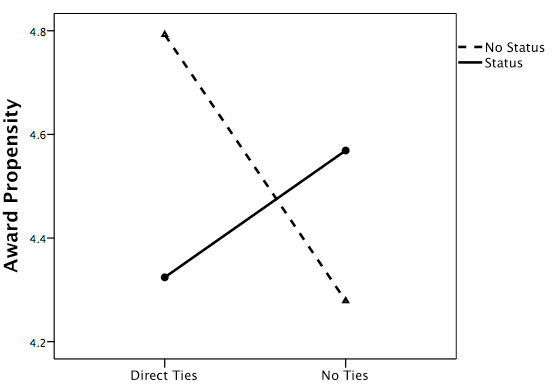
**Figure 2. Average Marginal Effects of *Status***

****

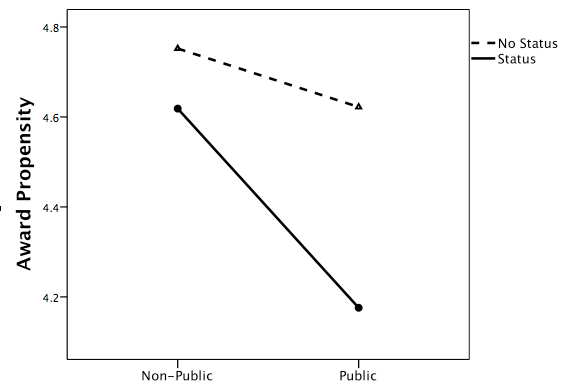
**Figure 3. Adjusted Predictions for the number of *Social Ties* at representative values of *Status***

****

**Figure 4. Experiment 1: The effect of *Status* and *Social Ties* on *Award Propensity***

****

**Figure 5. Experiment 2: The effect of *Status* and *Public Domain* on *Award Propensity***

****

1. Link to the competition site: [http://www.iacaward.org/iac/medium/Online-Video/best-online-video.html#](http://www.iacaward.org/iac/medium/Online-Video/best-online-video.html). Link to the commercial site: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHpVhEjufyA>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)