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Preamble

This dissertation comprises three standalone studies. Each pertains to a different problem involving "the moral" within cultural industries.

The first study, "What is taste?," is a theoretical essay that seeks to clarify the semantic ambiguity a well-worn concept in the sociology of culture and the field generally, that of cultural taste. In this essay, I survey contemporary empirical research on cultural tastes and use abductive reasoning from measurements of taste to clarify the semantic ambiguity surrounding taste. I argue that taste should be conceptualized as a person's thick subjectivity in a cultural field, that is to say a fundamentally multidimensional orientation that describes how we feel, consume, and praise in a cultural field.

The second study, "The costliest signals of authenticity? How death inflates artistic reputations in hip-hop," is an empirical project that examines how the death of an artist affects artistic reputations. Drawing on a balanced panel data of audience evaluations from a major online review aggregator, I show how the death of an artist durably inflates the artistic reputations in hip-hop. Audience evaluations of an artist's work improves in the short-term after an artist's death, and these improved evaluations persist in the medium- and long-term after an artist's death. I find that such "death effects" on artistic reputations are mediated by three distinct mechanisms: (a) sympathetic censoring and eulogizing effects, (b) audience shift, and (c) the costly signaling of authenticity, a variety of symbolic capital local to the field of hip-hop.

The third study, "Denunciations and scandals in a cultural market," is an empirical project that examines the sequences of denunciations and scandals (for want of a better expression, "cancel culture") that have become zeitgeist in the cultural industries over the past decade. I examine denunciations and scandals within a particular cultural market, that of Anglophone young adult (YA) fiction, 2015-2019 by constructing a novel scandal event data set that links three disparate types of data: (a) unstructured text and social media metrics from Twitter, (b) newspaper archival data from mass circulation newspapers, and (c) book sales data. After estimating a Poisson fixed effect model, I find that the negativity of

Twitter discourse around a writer is positively associated with media attention to alleged transgressions committed by the same writer. Such associations are moderated by what I term an *anonymity discount* and *agitprop effect*. Finally, I find that the direct effects of scandal are heterogeneous by the types of transgressions involved. Comparing cumulative abnormal returns across relevant cross-sections, I find negative direct effects of scandal to be exclusive to cases involving field-specific norm transgressions.

Essay 1:

What is taste?

Abstract

Taste is central to the sociology of culture and a frequently-invoked explanans in the discipline at large. Yet, it remains a semantically ambiguous polyseme that has been understood and operationalized in often divergent ways by generations of sociologists. In this essay, we survey contemporary empirical research on cultural tastes and use abductive reasoning from measurements of taste to clarify the semantic ambiguity surrounding taste. We argue that taste should be conceptualized as a person's thick subjectivity in a cultural field, that is to say a fundamentally multidimensional orientation that describes how we feel, consume, and praise in a cultural field. We close with a demonstration of the usefulness of such a conceptualization by articulating the analytical form of *complex tastes*. Complex tastes such as guilty pleasures and ironic consumption belong to a family of tastes that all contain inherent antinomies across the modalities of taste.

Key words: *culture*, *taste*, *semantic ambiguity*

Introduction

> Taste is a mixture of qualities that are beyond analyzing, an ear that can hear the difference between a sentence that limps and a sentence that lilts, an intuition that knows when a casual or vernacular phrase dropped into a formal sentence will not only sound right but will seem to be the inevitable choice. – William Zinsser (2006: 166)

What is taste? Some think that taste is about preference and feeling, and sensibility with respect to culture. David Hume (1757), for instance, refers to taste as "the sentiments of men [...] with regard to beauty and deformity of all kinds" ; Levi-Strauss, the "*prend aux tripes*" we get from culture (1969:28). Others like Immanuel Kant aver that taste is about aesthetic judgement, which some are better at than others. Some others still, like Paul Samuelson, think that taste is nothing more than the choices we make — our revealed preferences, so to speak. There seems to be little consensus on the matter.

Taste is the same semantically ambiguous polyseme in sociology. Despite being central to the sociology of culture and a frequently-invoked explanans in the discipline at large, taste is taken-for-granted and rarely defined. We begin by trying to clarify the concept of taste. To do so, we survey recent empirical research on cultural tastes and use abductive reasoning from the measurements of taste to clarify our conception of taste. We find that there are three paradigmatic approaches to the measurement of taste, each of which assumes taste to be a distinct modality of action. One measurement paradigm takes taste to be a kind of *preference*, that is a person's affective response towards a cultural object or activity. Another takes taste to be *consumption*, that is a person's realized participation, engagement, or consumption of culture. The third takes taste to be a kind of *evaluative competence*, most often revealed through a person's evaluation of an article of culture. We ultimately settle on a pluralist conception of taste as a person's thick subjectivity in a cultural field. That is, taste is a kind of orientation ("subjectivity"), expressed through multiple modalities of action ("thick"), that describes how we feel, consume, and praise in a cultural field.

We close with a demonstration of how it can be useful to think of taste in these terms. Recognizing the inherent multidimensionality to taste lets us articulate the analytical form of *complex tastes*.

Some tastes such as guilty pleasures and ironic consumption can be described as complex because they contain inherent antinomies across the modalities of taste. Such complex tastes are a family of tastes that are both mundane yet under-appreciated by sociologists of culture. We provide an elaboration of five such complex tastes using examples drawn from the literature.

Measurements of taste

Taste holds an obvious *prima facie* importance in the sociology of culture, but it is similarly important in the rest of the discipline as an explanans of social phenomenon. On the social psychological level, taste has consequences for our social identities (DiMaggio 1987). Tastes facilitate group identification, and often have a functional role in confirming and denying group belonging (Wohl 2015). Tastes lubricate sociability (Douglas & Isherwood 1979). They ease the creation of social ties, weak and strong (e.g. Lewis & Kaufman 2018). But perhaps more important, tastes have implications for social stratification. Our tastes affect the employment opportunities available to us (e.g. Rivera 2012); individuals have been discriminated against and explicitly denied employment in labor markets because of their tastes (Coleman 1993).

Taste in its most literal form refers to gustatory taste, our perception of sweet, salty, bitter, sour, and savory sensations as mediated by a physiologically-defined chemosensory system. From the 16th century and on, taste acquired a separate metaphorical meaning as an expression of a person's aesthetic orientation towards culture (Williams 2015[1976]; Vercelloni 2016). It is this guise of taste as *cultural taste* that we are concerned with in this essay. The Oxford English Dictionary (2022) reports at least two senses of taste that are relevant for our interests. According to them, taste is often taken to mean "the condition of liking or preferring something" or as the "faculty of perceiving and enjoyment what is excellent in art, literature, and the like." In this essay, we're less interested in what the English-speaking community at large mean what they use taste, and more concerned with how taste as a social scientific concept is defined. Although lexicographic exercises may not suffice for sociological purposes, the OED's recording of these disparate senses give us some idea of the multivocality that may be lurking behind the term taste.

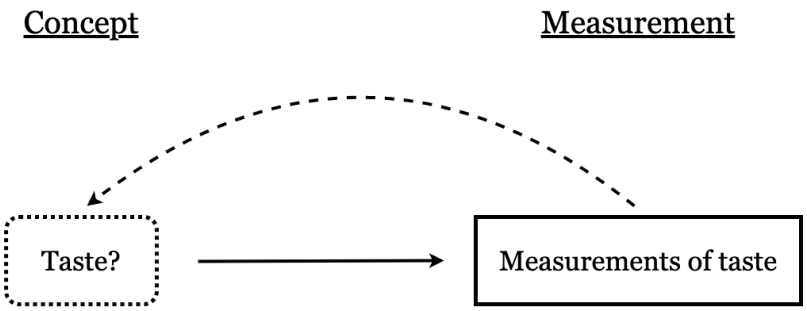
What do sociologists mean when they use the word taste? The answer can be elusive. As we do for kindred concepts, sociologists take it for granted that taste has a common sensical, coherent definition shared by others in our epistemic communities. As a result, we don't often define it. If you were to trawl through the sociological literature looking for such, as we did, you would find definitions wanting. This is the case even in seminal studies of taste. For instance, the closest Herbert Gans comes to giving a

definition of taste in his study of taste cultures in mid-century United States is when he describes tastes in references to "beauty" and "aesthetic urges" (Gans 1975) Pierre Bourdieu, the doyen of sociological studies of taste, equivocates when it comes to the problem of defining taste. There are times where he sides with the Kantian conceptions of taste, referring to taste as the "supreme manifestation of discernment ... [that] reconciles reason and sensibility" (1984:3); sometimes, he refers to taste as "manifested preferences" (1984:49). At others, Bourdieu measures taste the same way economists do, as revealed preferences.

Where definitions of taste are few, measures of taste are prolific. The measurement of culture has become a hugely influential program within sociology, and the measurement of taste features prominently within it (Mohr 1998; Mohr et al. 2020). There is a duality to measures and concepts. In normal positivist science, concepts precede measures. Measures are formal relations that reduce and relate some aspect of social reality to concepts (Abbott 1997). It's generally thought that the clearer our concepts are, the better our measures will be. But what if we have an ambiguous concept and a surfeit of measures? We propose that we can abductive reasoning from the *measurements of taste* to clarify the *semantic ambiguity* surrounding the cultural taste (Figure 1). Following this intuition, we surveyed recent empirical work in sociology that examines cultural tastes in its different guises. We classified the measurements of taste they involve based on their implicit assumptions about the nature of taste. We looked at all published work in prominent sociology journals that mention cultural taste in a substantive way. First, we run a *Web of Science* query looking for articles published from 2011 through 2020 that mention cultural tastes among select generalist and specialist journals in sociology. We also included a selection of prominent work in cultural sociology that engage substantively from cultural taste. These include books published in the same period, as well influential pieces from previous periods (e.g. Bourdieu's *Distinction*.) We include both qualitative and quantitative work in our literature review.

We find that there are three paradigmatic approaches to the measurement of taste. Each measurement paradigm takes taste to be a distinct modality of action. One measurement paradigm takes taste to be a kind of preference, that is a person's affective response towards a cultural object or activity. Another takes taste to be consumption, that is a person's realized participation, engagement, or consump-

Figure 1: Abductive reasoning from measurements



We use measurements of taste to clarify what we mean when we say taste.

tion of culture. The third takes taste to be a kind of evaluative competence, most often revealed through a person's evaluation of an article of culture. We refer to these as the (1) preference paradigm, (2) consumption paradigm, and (3) competence paradigm respectively. Consider a situation where we are interested in a person's taste in music. To get at their tastes, a researcher using the preference approach might ask, "What works of music do you enjoy the most?" A researcher using the consumption approach we might ask, "What is your most played work of music?" A researcher using the competence approach we might ask, "What, in your opinion, is the best work of music?"

In the section to come, we elaborate on each of these paradigms. For each, we explain and articulate what they are, before providing some salient examples of how researchers have sought to operationalize and measure each in empirical studies.

The preference paradigm

Taste is most commonly measured as a person's like, preference, enjoyment, or desire for a cultural object. We refer to research that measures taste in such a way as belong to the *preference paradigm* of taste measurement. The preference paradigm takes taste to be a person's preference or feelings for a cultural object. What we term as feelings can be taken to be any type of automatic sensory response for a cultural object, whether it be euphoria, aversion, or revulsion. Such a conceptualization of taste has a long history dating back to, among others, David Hume and Jeremy Bentham, who understand tastes as "the sentiments of

men ... with regard to beauty and deformity of all kinds" (Hume 1757; Ferguson 2019). Many scholars in the sociology of culture understand taste in similar terms. To taste, as Antione Hennion (2007) puts it, is "to make feel, and to make oneself feel, and also, by the sensations of the body, exactly like the climber, to feel oneself doing; it is to consider the self-regarding sensory, fantasy, and emotive responses we derive engaging with a cultural object (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982). This way of thinking about taste also prevails in much of social theory. In classical game theory, taste as preference is treated as the terminus of all explanations, one of the "unchallengeable axioms of a man's behaviors" (Stigler & Becker 1977): a person who acts on the basis of taste rather than the pursuit of material interests is said to be "irrationally" (Smelser 1992).

Empirical researchers working under the preference paradigm measure taste as a kind of "like." If a person expresses their "liking" for a cultural object, they are said to have a taste for it. This was the approach taken by Schuessler (1948) in one of the earliest empirical studies of cultural taste. In it, respondents were tasked with responding to musical selections along a five-point Likert scale. Schuessler's approach to the measurement of taste remains common today. Many nationally-representative surveys continue to measure taste in such a way. They include the *General Social Survey*, the *Pew American Trends* Panel, the *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (SPPA) in the United States, and the *Understanding Society* survey in the United Kingdom, to name a few. Some of the most influential studies of cultural taste have measured taste in such a way. Consider Richard Peterson and his colleagues' work on cultural omnivorousness in the United States. Cultural omnivorousness refers broadly to a pattern of cultural consumption where an individual consumes a wide diversity of cultural products, and in doing so frequently disregarding symbolic boundaries that might otherwise deter said consumption. Peterson et al.'s pioneering work (e.g. Peterson & Kern 1996) was based on survey data from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, the United States' largest recurring cross-sectional survey of adult participation in arts and cultural activity. In the survey, respondents are asked to provide binary yes/no response to the question, "'Do you like to listen to [music genre, e.g. classical music]?" Peterson measures a person's "omnivorousness" by the total number of "likes" they express when asked about these music genre preferences. This is not limited to quantitative modes of inquiry either. In Lembo's study of music tastes

(2017), she takes an inductive approach to the taste question and finds that her respondents understand taste as a complex affective preference that cannot be captured simply by likes and dislikes. In Silva and Le Roux's (2011) interview study of cultural capital among couples, they try to tap for a respondents' cultural taste by asking questions relating to likes, "[for items on taste, questions include what television programme, or film, or music, or genre of reading, or place of eating out is liked the most and the least, what is the favorite book, or film, what is the least liked sport, and so on."

The consumption paradigm

But tastes are only simply conceived as a type of preference. After our review of the literature, we find that tastes are also often taken to be choices, that is the revealed preferences or behavioral choices a person make. We refer to this approach as the *consumption paradigm*. Under this paradigm, taste is understood as coextensive if not inseparable from the consumption practices a person engages in.

This way of measuring taste is most strongly associated with revealed preference theory in economics (Samuelson 1938), but is also implicitly adopted by many in sociology, most notably Pierre Bourdieu. Revealed preference theory is a part of Paul Samuelson's attempts at building a general theory of the economy. Samuelson had been dissatisfied with standard utility theory and its reliance on non-observable postulates, and so set about proposing a theory of consumer behavior based on the consistency of behavior (Wong 1978). Revealed preference theory asserts that the best way to measure consumer preferences is to observe their purchasing behavior. It relies on the assumption that the price a person is willing to pay for a given item is correlated to the utility they derive from said item. Revealed preference theory asserts that we can map a person's indifference curve from observations of their market behavior, in so doing producing observational counterparts that are closely approximate to those from standard utility theory (Samuelson 1948). This perspective asserts that revealed preferences, our behavioral choices, are the tastes themselves. A taste is an empty gesture if it does not correspond to manifest behavior.

This conception of taste is also orthodox within sociology. In *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu refers to tastes as "manifested preferences [...] the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference" (1984:

49). Manifested preferences in lifestyles such as participation in cultural activities and actual consumption practices feature prominently in Bourdieu's correspondence analyses. When comparing the tastes of teachers against those from the professions (that is Parisian architects, barristers, doctors etc.), Bourdieu points to their differences in revealed preferences and not simply dispositions:

> The ascetic aristocratism of the teachers, who are systematically oriented towards the least expensive and most austere leisure activities and towards serious and even somewhat severe cultural practices — visiting museums, for example, especially in the provinces (rather than major exhibitions, galleries and foreign museums, like members of the professions) — is opposed to the luxury tastes of the members of the professions, who amass the (culturally or economically) most expensive and most prestigious activities, visiting antique dealers, galleries and concert-halls, holidaying in spa towns, owning pianos, illustrated art books, antique furniture, works of art, movie cameras, tape recorders, foreign cars, skiing, playing tennis and golf, riding, hunting and water skiing. (Bourdieu 1984:283-284)

While of the American sociologists who worked with or along Bourdieu operationalize taste in similar ways (e.g. DiMaggio 1982; Lizardo 2006), such a conceptualization of taste is not limited to those who are affiliated in one way or another with Bourdieusian programs of cultural research. To take two particularly influential examples outside of it, consider Stanley Lieberson and Matt Salganik's seminal work on tastes. Lieberson's work (2000) on the endogenous dynamics of naming practices take the manifested choices of parents (i.e. naming) to be taste itself. Salganik et al's study of an artificial music market (2006) is one of the most influential studies of cultural taste in recent years. Salganik's team measures the tastes of listeners through their consumption behavior, by considering what they choose to download upon the conclusion of the experiment.

The competence paradigm

Finally, tastes are often measured through the individuals' evaluations of cultural objects or activities. We refer to such studies as falling under the *competence paradigm* because they treat taste as the referent for

either the products of a person's evaluative competence or a person's evaluative competence entire. The quality of cultural articles is often, if not always, ambiguous. As such, it takes evaluative competence to make an intersubjectively agreeable assessment of them. To do so, we often rely on taste as "the compass that directs our perceptive apparatus on the high seas of sensation" (Vercelloni 2016). It is for this reason that in both academic and popular usages, we refer to such evaluations of quality as judgement of taste.

The differences between viewing taste as preference and as evaluative competence warrants special attention. It is true enough that the two are often intimately related. Evaluative competence in cultural industries is often about knowing how to use and express one's affective preferences when making judgements. As Mears' (2014) study of the fashion industry shows, many of our evaluations are embodied and tied to our affective responses to the cultural objects. In a *60 Minutes* interview, Rick Rubin, a multiple Grammy-Award winning record producer, described attributed his personal success in the music industry to exactly such an evaluative competence:

> I have no technical ability. And I know nothing about music. [But] I know what I like and what I don't like. And I'm decisive about what I like and what I don't like. The confidence I have in my taste and my ability to express what I feel has proven helpful for artists. (Rubin 2023)

But the same, taste as a preference should not be treated as co-extensive with taste as an evaluative competence. We follow Kant's famous distinction between two cognitive faculties of sensibility (*sinnlichkeit*) and understanding (*verstand*) (McLear 2015). The former involves automatic, non-declarative modes of cognition while the latter involves deliberative, declarative modes of cognition (Lizardo 2017; Miles et al. 2019). The distinction between taste as a *preference* and taste as an expression of *evaluative competence* is particularly stressed by philosophers of aesthetics, many of whom define strictly taste as a perceptiveness or capacity for aesthetic discrimination: Kant refers to taste as "our capacity for responding to beauty" (2008[1790]), Frank Sibley a person's "ability to notice or discern things" (2001). Part of the reason aestheticians stress this distinction is because they're interested in the nature, scope, and validity of aesthetic judgements. Aesthetic judgements differ in the plausibility of their claims to universal valid-

ity. Of course, not all evaluations aspire to universal validity, but some do. For the latter to realize that aspiration, they have to become an act of taste that is separable and distant from mere preference. The intuition is that universally valid judgements of taste involve the cool estimating of merit (Dickie 1964). Kant for example distinguishes between judgements of beauty, judgements of goodness, and judgments of agreeability. Kant considers the former to be a "pure judgement of taste in part because they're distant from mere affective preferences or utilitarian goodness, or in other words "disinterested" (Dickie 1964). This disinterestedness is crucial to the universal validity of judgements of beauty. For if the judgement is disinterested, then it does not involve any determinate concepts, and can be cognized universally through *senses communis* as the object of a necessary liking.

It is not only the philosophers that view taste as a competence distinct from preference. Many sociologists too see such evaluative competencies, "the process by which individuals perceive sensory experiences and affectively evaluate those experiences" (Wohl 2015), as taste. Pierre Bourdieu was attentive to taste's quality as a capacity of discernment. Following Kant, he stressed that taste held an evaluative component to it. In his elaborations on the pure and vulgar gaze, he states that the one of the key distinctions between the pure and the vulgar gaze is that the latter only admit affective preferences as a criterion for quality. The pure gaze curates a more extensive selection of evaluative criteria:

> The ascetic aristocratism of the teachers, who are systematically oriented towards 'Pure' taste and the aesthetics which provide its theory are founded on a refusal of 'impure' taste and of *aisthesis* (sensation), the simple, primitive form of pleasure reduced a pleasure of the sense, as in what Kant calls 'the taste of the tongue, the plate and the throat,' a surrender to immediate sensation which in another order looks like imprudence [...] One might evoke the Platonic prejudice, endlessly reaffirmed, in favor of the 'noble senses,' vision and hearing, or the primacy Kant gives to form, which is more 'pure,' over color and its quasi-carnal seduction. (Bourdieu 1984: 488)

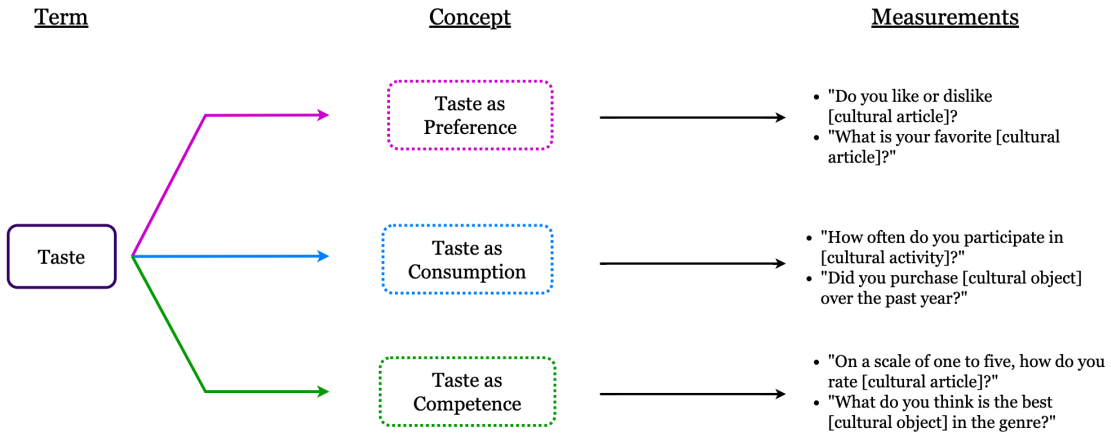
Researchers in consumer research similarly construe taste "as a set of skills that emerge from the relationship between people and things [...] these skills are learned, rehearsed, and continually reproduced

through everyday action (Arsel & Bean 2013). When researchers operationalize taste as a rating (such as a product, album, or movie rating), they are implicitly treating taste as an evaluative capacity. Such studies are common across sociology. In their study of how acts of consecration affect the evaluation of prize-winning books, Kovács and Sharkey (2014) use collaborative filtering of a person's past ratings of other books as a measure of their taste. Goldberg et al. (2016) use user ratings of films and restaurants from major web applications as their measures of taste. Often researchers are interested in tastes as an evaluative competency because they are interested in the consecration processes by which cultural elites confer worth and legitimacy onto cultural objects. Examples of such work include English's (2009) work on taste management by cultural elites adjudicating literary awards, Chong's (2020) study of book critics, Johnston and Baumann's (2007) study of food criticism in major food magazines to name a few.

Taste as a polyseme

To re-iterate, we have found there are three measurement paradigms across empirical research of cultural taste. Each paradigm conceives of taste as a distinct modality of action (Figure 2).

Figure 2: How taste is measured and conceived



The preference paradigm (in purple) takes taste to be a kind of preference. The consumption paradigm (in blue) takes taste to be a person's realized participation, engagement, or consumption of culture. The competence paradigm (in green) takes taste to be a kind of competence, most often revealed through a person's evaluation of an article of culture.

In the interest of clarity, let's consider a person i's taste for a cultural object j.

First, we have the *preference paradigm*. This paradigm takes taste to refer to a kind of preference, that is a person's affective response towards a cultural object or activity. Under the preference paradigm, person i is said to have a taste for cultural object j if person i enjoys, derives pleasure, or otherwise likes j.

Second, we have the *consumption paradigm*. The choices paradigm takes taste to be consumption, that is a person's realized participation, engagement, or consumption of culture. Under the consumption paradigm, person i is said to have a taste for cultural object j if person i choose to participate in or consume j.

Finally, there is the *competence paradigm*. The evaluations paradigm takes taste to refer to

exercises of a person's evaluative capacity in a cultural field. Under this paradigm, person i is said to have a taste for cultural object j if person i evaluates j favorably.

The semantic ambiguity around taste

All of this makes taste a polyseme, a semantically ambiguous lexeme with multiple senses that overlap one another (Riggs 1979; Levine 1989; Tuggy 1993; Abbott 1997). Given the ubiquity and centrality of the term taste, this may not come as a surprise. Words have a tendency to acquire associations through use. In a loosely integrated discipline like sociology (Stinchcombe 1994), words that are central to the field tend to undergo terminological overloading (Riggs 1979). As Donald Levine writes,

> Concepts in which thinkers invest so heavily are bound to carry a number of meanings. This follows from the fact that the more involved persons are with any sort of objects, the more meanings that object will have for them. In the intellectual domain, it stands to reason that the more intense our involvement with a certain idea, the greater the semantic load terms used to carry that idea will have to bear. (Levine 1985: 65)

As far as semantic ambiguity goes, taste find itself good company. We imagine readers may be familiar with the continual (and on-going) contestations over the rightful referents of culture (Kuper 1999), structure (Sewell 1992), cultural capital (Lamont & Lareau 1988), identity (Brubaker & Cooper 2000), generations (Kertzer 1983), theory (Abend 2008), among others. Lest we dismiss semantic ambiguity as a pathology particular to sociology or the social sciences, we want to note that multivocality persists in the mathematical and natural sciences. A number of core concepts such as probability in statistics, mass in physics, genome in biology have resisted assimilation into a univocal ideal (Signorile 1970; Krause 2016).

Ambiguity can be a serious impediment to scientific inquiry. The Sisyphean quest of eradicating ambiguity from our scientific and humanistic thought is often attributed to the Enlightenment, but many of the influential early figures in sociology were champions of univocalism in their own right, most notably Emile Durkheim and Max Weber (Levine 1985). They have good reason for wanting to do so. Among other things, semantic ambiguity can lead to inconsistent measurements and operationaliza-

tions in empirical research, mis-use and mis-readings of the word that are disjoint with their intended discursive context, and failure to adequately appreciate the different senses of polysemous terms (Levine 1985). Many theorists have argued that such ambiguity create a serious tendency to confound and impede progress in the social sciences (Kertzer 1983). It is for these reasons and more that Herbert Blumer labeled semantic ambiguity as a fundamental deficiency in sociological thinking:

> [Semantic ambiguity] hinders us in coming to close grips with our empirical world, for we are not sure what to grip. Our uncertainty as to what we are referring obstructs us from asking pertinent questions and setting relevant problems for research. The vague sense dulls our perception and thus vitiates directed empirical observation. It subjects our reflection on possible relations between concepts to wide bands of error. It encourages our theorizing to revolve in a separate world of its own with only a tenuous connection with the empirical world. It limits severely the clarification and growth that concepts may derive from the findings of research. It leads to the undisciplined theorizing that is bad theorizing. (Blumer 1954:5)

These problems become even more acute in comparative work that spans cultures and languages. Imprecisions in sociologist writing are amplified when they're translated into other languages (Riggs 1979). It is for this reason that many sociologists continue to assert that "[t]he ideal of 'one word, one meaning; and one meaning, one word' [...] must still be a goal for any area of study that justifies the designation of discipline" (Dewey 1969). For one instance of how such ambiguity can impede normal science within sociology, consider again the case of cultural omnivorousness. Since Peterson's introduction of the idea in the late 80s, there has been vigorous debate among sociologists of culture about the prevalence of omnivorousness as well as its social functions (Lizardo & Skiles 2012; Rossman & Peterson 2005; Ma 2020). The knowledge project on omnivorousness of taste can be stymied by confusion over what a particular study *means* when they claim to measure omnivorous taste. Many studies on omnivorousness measure taste as a kind of "liking" (e.g. Goldberg 2011). Yet, it's also not uncommon for studies treat taste as a consumption practice (e.g. Chan & Turner 2017). These two practices, as mentioned above, are related

but different. Conceptual ambiguity makes it easy to erroneously conflate research and draw misleading conclusions. For example, it would be a mistake to think that a finding that demonstrating a rise in omnivorous cultural consumption in a population represents a repudiation of another demonstrating an opposite trend in omnivorous affective preferences among the same group.

At the same time, however, ambiguity isn't all bad. Sometimes, we need it. We will argue that such is the case with taste. We endorse Donald Levine's position that "the proper stance of moderns towards ambiguous language and thought is one of pronounced ambivalence" (1985: ix). To begin, semantically ambiguous concepts are unavoidable. Many social scientific ideas and concepts are "essentially contested because they are internally complex such that any explanation must reference multiple parts if not the whole at the same time (Gallie 1956). No scholars studying such essentially contested concepts can eschew the problem of semantic ambiguity; they must choose a particular meaning out of the possible meanings, and maintain their own use of it against the other possible interpretations.

Ambiguity can also be a strength in its own right. Edward Levi (2013[1949]) famously explores this in jurisprudence and law-making, but the same generative potential exists in the humanities and sciences. Darwinian theory is frequently cited as an example of such generative multivocality. Darwinian theory is "essentially multivalent [...] the unused, or uncontrolled, elements in metaphors such as 'the struggle for existence' take on a life of their own" (Beer 1983: 9). Generations of ethnographers have felt the same. As Deener (2017) recently argued, ethnographers frequently use the ambiguity in shared interaction situations and relationships between subjective experiences and objective properties of social life can help us to extend theories of social life. Semantic ambiguity also brokers intellectual communities, in-so-doing forging social ties and combination that would be absent in their place. Polysemes like taste also serve as boundary objects that intellectual communities that might be otherwise disjoint (Star & Griesemer 1989). Recent work from McMahan and Evans (2018) demonstrates how semantically ambiguous concepts facilitate communication and coordination across subfields, in-so-doing facilitating social and intellectual engagement.

Four approaches to disambiguation

Still, an appreciation for ambiguity should not be mistaken as a warrant for slopping thinking. For ambiguity to live up to its capacity to enrich, we must also have "a willingness and an ability to press towards disambiguation at appropriate moments" (Levine 1985:219). Taste is an example of what Herbert Blumer (1954) calls a *sensitizing concept*. Blumer refers to sensitizing concepts as such because they are "grounded on sense instead of on explicit objective trait." They facilitate scientific inquiry by giving researchers "a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instance" (Blumer 1954:8). Although sensitizing concepts are by nature vague, they can still be refined and extended upon. Like Blumer, we take the semantic ambiguity around taste to be an invitation to theorizing responsibly about a term that is important to so much of the discipline. The next step to theorizing about taste is to disambiguate its three disparate yet overlapping senses.

So, how should we disambiguate a polyseme like taste? There are at least four reasonable approaches for doing so: (1) an "agnostic" approach that surrenders to the impossibility of defining contested polyseme and simply advocates for the use of univocal terms as a replacement in its place, (2) an semanticist approach treats the different senses of polyseme as distinct homographs, (3) a monist approach that tries to impose univocality onto a polyseme by rejecting contending senses of the term, and (4) a pluralist approach that argues that the polysemes with overlapping senses must be understood in a suitably synthetic fashion. We believe that there isn't one best way of disambiguating a polysemous concept; what is right for one theoretical concept might not be so for another. In the section to follow, we consider what an disambiguation of taste would look like under such an approach. We then make our case as to why we should adopt a pluralistic approach in the case of taste.

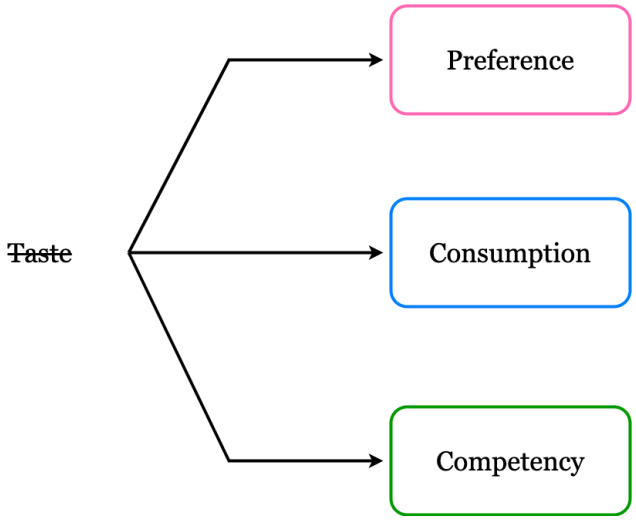
The first disambiguation stratagem is an approach we refer to as the agnostic approach. There is no shame in surrendering to the so-called "pathos of ambiguity" (Levine 1989). We expect some readers to be of the mind that taste is simply irredeemably multivocal, and that the best approach may simply be to abandon its use as a social scientific concept altogether. The agnostic approach to disambiguate would mean replacing a polyseme with univalent referent for each of its sense. This approach. submits to the

conceptual muddiness of a polyseme, that it might not be possible to impose strict univocality onto a polyseme with multiple contested senses. This was the approach advocated by Brubaker & Cooper (2000) with respect to the term "identity." In their view, the concept of identity was so "hopelessly ambiguous [...] riven with contradictory meanings, and encumbered by reifying connotations" that the most sensible thing to do was to adopt "alternative analytical idioms that can do the necessary work without the attendant confusion." In the case of taste, an agnostic approach would involve dropping the term taste altogether. In place of taste, we might select terms that best encapsulates the particular sense of taste we have in mind, whether it be *preference*, *consumption* or *competency* (Figure 3).

The surrender prioritizes disambiguation above all else. Because of this, it makes a set of compromises that make it a less appropriate. While we think that this may be a reasonable way of disambiguating taste, we eschew it for now for three main reasons. First, an agnostic approach is less effective if the different senses of the polyseme overlap in such a way that disentanglement becomes intractable. Second, it also suspends the possibility of synthetic treatment. Different senses of a term are often less disjoint than they first appear, and a high-order synthetic treatment may be possible. Third, taste is a metaphor that is widely used across all of social life; it is not jargon particular to sociology and its sister disciplines. Masses of people use the concept in ways that are intelligible to one another even if its specific meaning seems elusive. Its ambiguity is a theoretical puzzle that has emerged quite naturally. A satisfactory resolution of its ambiguity without giving up on the term itself is a worthy goal in its own right. Because we endorse the possibility of a usefully synthetic treatment of the polysemy, are skeptical of a clean distinction of the different meanings of taste, and think taste isn't quite so irredeemably ambiguous, we table the surrender as a disambiguation approach for now.

The second disambiguation stratagem is the *semanticist* approach. We borrow this term from Wayne Booth's (1978) and Donald Levine's (1989) work on pluralism. Following practices in lexicography, the semanticist approach accepts that all of three main usages of taste as valid. The semanticist approach disambiguates taste by treating it not as one polyseme, but rather as much as three homographs, words that are spelled in the same way but share different meanings: $taste_1$ whose lexical sense connotes

Figure 3: The agnostic approach

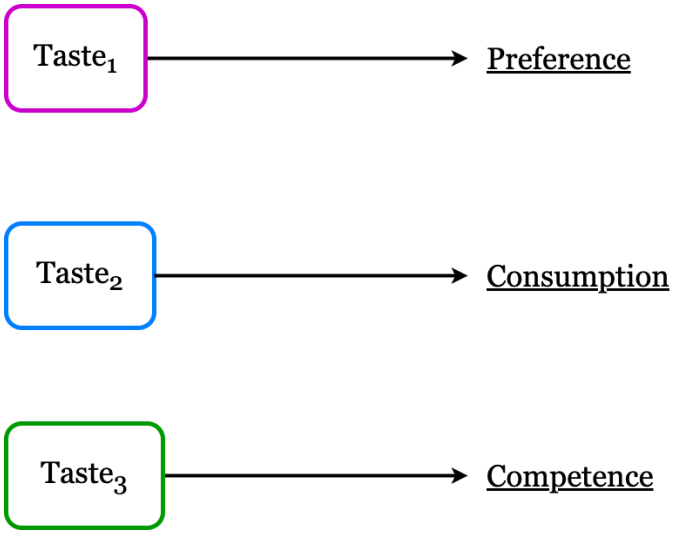


The agnostic approach disambiguates by replacing the polyseme entirely with univocal terms.

preference, $taste_2$ whose lexical sense connotes consumption, and $taste_3$ whose lexical sense connotes competence (Figure 4). Similar to the agnostic approach, the semanticist approach prioritizes the disambiguation of the overlapping senses of a polyseme — the distinction between the two lies in the retention of the polyseme itself. In his paper on the meanings of theory, Gabriel Abend suggests taking such an approach. After engaging in a lexicographic exercise uncovering seven distinct senses to theory in sociology, he recommends a dose of "semantic therapy," proposing that "each time sociologists engage in a debate about 'theory'—indeed, each time they use the word 'theory' in a potentially confusing context—they make it clear whether they mean $theory_1$, $theory_2$, $theory_3$, etc" (Abend 2008:192).

There are strong affinities between the semanticist approach and the agnostic approach. They both abstain from making normative claims about what taste should be, preserving the multivocality observed as is. They both suffer from the same set of drawback. The semanticist approach differs in that it commits to making a different set of trade-offs. By refusing to eschew the polysemous term itself, the semanticist approach preserves the boundary object, but at the cost of conceptual clarity. There is a sense that little is gained, little lost.

Figure 4: The semanticist approach



The semanticist approach disambiguates by treating taste as three homo- graphs with distinct lexical senses.

The third disambiguation stratagem is the *monist* approach. The monist approach makes a normative claim that one of the three senses of taste is valid, and that the others are wrong, unimportant, or misleading.

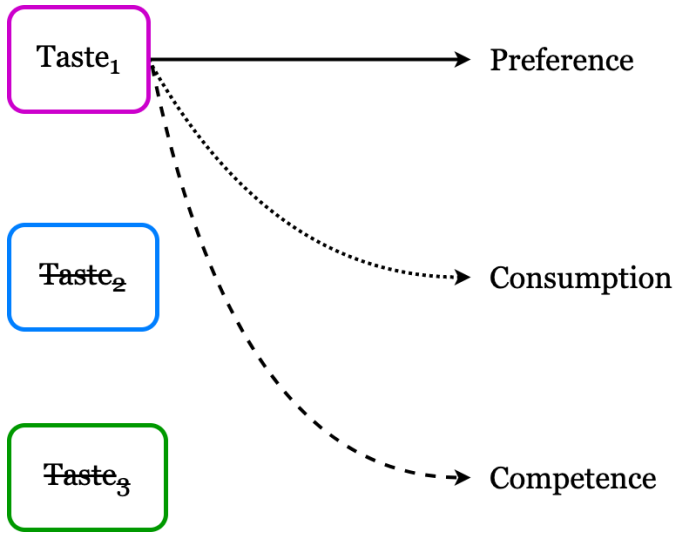
Norman Ryder takes such an attempt to disambiguate the term "generations." The term generations encompasses at least three different senses, some of whom are antipodal to the others. Within sociology and adjacent social sciences, generations can refer to a principle of kinship descent, a birth cohort, or a life stage (Kertzer 1983). To resolve the ambiguity, Ryder argues that we should use the term generations to exclusively refer to the former, and to use other terms when referencing the other senses of the term:

> For the sake of conceptual clarity, "generation" should be used solely in its original and unambiguous meaning as the temporal unit of kinship structure, and the first two ideas should be signified by the terms "cohort" and "relative age status" respectively. (Ryder 1965:853)

From our personal correspondence with peers in the sociology of culture, this is not an uncommon position among sociologists. Very often, the *preference* sense of taste is usually taken to be the true meaning of

taste. Under such a monist approach (Figure 5), cultural taste is univocal: cultural preference is cultural taste *tout court*. So, while consumption and competency may be related to taste, they are not coextensive with taste.

Figure 5: The monist approach



The monist approach disambiguates by imposing one particular sense of taste by theoretical fiat.

We are sympathetic to this approach, but want to point out some drawbacks. First, it is not always obvious that consumption and competency are matters that are tangential or derived from taste-as-preference. Preference-as-taste may not be as easily divorced from consumption as we assume. If a person *i likes* X but *never consumes* X in the absent of constraints, it seems to put a wrinkle into the idea that person *i* has a taste for X (we'll develop this idea fully in the sections to come). This is analogous to debates in moral philosophy between deontology and consequentialism: taste does not seem entire constituted by preference, just as morality is not simply about the intention behind a moral action — the end-state of the act (in taste's case, consumption) is thought by most to matter as well. Neither is preference-as-taste easily separable from cultural competency. If taste is so simply reducible to preference, then it would seem puzzling that we, as a society, spend as much time and energy obsessing over the relative goodness and badness of tastes as we do. As aestheticians from Hume to Kant have noted, there is a well-known paradox to taste: we have a collective tendency to claim taste as subjective while treating it objective. Despite the

obvious subjective dimensions to taste, we seem to intuit there to be some kind of normative dimension to it, as though there *has* to be a way to decide universally if a piece of culture is better or worse than another, even if the rational grounds onto which we arrive at such a judgment seems eternally elusive.

Finally, there are the pragmatic matter of definitional enforcement. It takes an act of symbolic fiat to impose a monist conception of taste on sociology. It means, among many things, telling others that their way of seeing things is wrong. Jules Wanderer, for example, asserts that it is wrong to think of taste as revealed preferences:

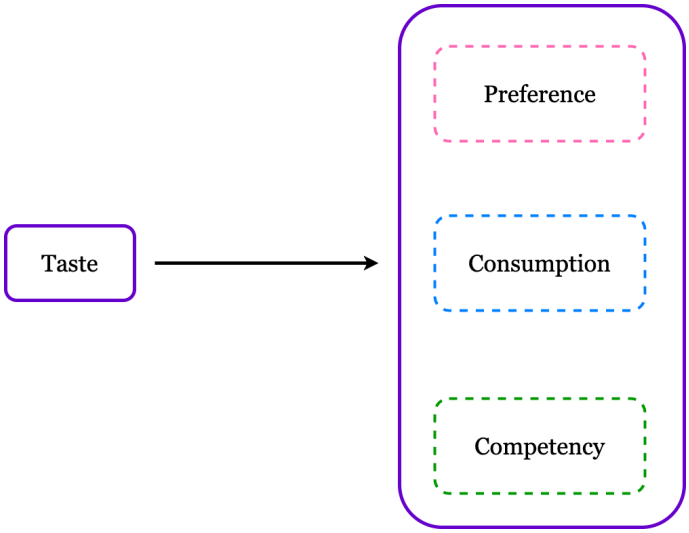
> Another source of [taste] is gleaned from such indirect signposts as box office receipts, fan and crank letters, and television ratings. These signposts are largely inadequate, since merely attending a movie or watching a television program is not tantamount to appreciating it. (Wanderer 1970)

What proportion of scholars today would assent to such a judgement? If we can't muster the authority to do this, then all we end up with are little theoretical fiefdoms where we all claim to know the right and valid. As with before, what have we really gained, and what would we have lost?

Finally, we turn to a fourth and final disambiguating stratagem that we *do* endorse, a pluralist approach that argues that all three overlapping senses of taste contribute to our intuition of what taste "really is." The core idea here, that we will develop further in the rest of the paper, is that taste should be thought of as a person's thick subjectivity in a cultural field. By this, we mean cultural taste is a kind of orientation ("subjectivity") that is expressed through multiple modalities of action ("thick"). In other words, taste is not one of them singly, but rather some gestalt of the different senses (Figure 6). The different senses of taste are related in a complementary way, and all address different parts of a single concept (Levine 1985).

As with other thick concepts (e.g. Williams 1985; Abend 2011), taste is not easily reducible to a single modality of action. Rather, it is a subjectivity is expressed through multiple modalities of action, the most salient of which are a person's sensibility, practices, and evaluative capacities. Just like moral

Figure 6: The pluralist approach



The pluralist approach disambiguates by arguing that the disparate, overlapping senses of taste each contribute to our sense of what taste is.

concepts like guilt and shame can only be described in thick terms, cultural tastes often times can only be appreciated when we describe their them thickly (Ryle 1968; Geertz 1973). Ashley Mears (2014) makes a similar argument in a recent theoretical discussion about the nature of taste. Across her work, she has found the evaluative dimensions of taste to be inseparable from its affective dimensions. Although her studies of tastemakers in fashion were centered on evaluations of quality, she found that much of the evaluations emerged from an affective, embodied plane: "Producers talked about the physical sensations—goose bumps, butterflies, gut reaction—or they refused to elaborate, ending the discussion at, "You just know" (Mears 2014).

One common critique of synthetic treatments of polysemes like ours is that they include too much and as a result the concept becomes too diffuse to be useful (Keesing 1974), or worse, they commit the cardinal sin of *ignotum per ignotius* and become in themselves "conceptually incoherent" (Smith 2016). We want to provide four clear reasons then why we think a pluralistic approach like ours may be preferable in the case of taste. Because it is a catholic approach that emphasizes the multivocality of taste, our preferred stratagem preserves the ability of taste to act as a boundary object that facilitates collabora-

tion and cooperation across academic discipline and even popular culture. Taste is a concept that inhabits many intersecting social worlds from the very many academic disciplines that take it as a central subject (among which are sociology, anthropology, economics, marketing research and so on) to popular and literary criticism in citizen and professional journalism (Star & Griesemer 1989). It is a good thing that taste is plastic enough to adapt to the local needs of each of these social words — but we need to make sure its robustness enough to be translated without being rendered confused or meaningless, hence our proffered characterization.

Second, it complements the multidimensional measures and methods that are adopted by many empirical studies of cultural taste. It is not uncommon for studies to employ and conflate different modalities of taste to produce a composite picture of taste. Consider, for instance, how Bourdieu objectivates taste using survey questions that draw on all three senses of taste:

> [Survey questions fielded] include: all the questions on knowledge or preferences in painting and music and on museum-going, which all measure legitimate competence; all the questions on the likelihood of producing a beautiful, interesting, meaningless or ugly photograph from each of the twenty subjects, which measure the aesthetic disposition, all the questions on the preferred singers, radio programmes and books on knowledge of film actors and directors and on personal photography, which all measure middle-brow culture; all the choices as regards domestic interior, furniture, cooking, clothes, the qualities of friends, through which ethical dispositions are more directly expressed, and so on. (Bourdieu 1984: 257)

This understanding of taste is consistent across Bourdieu's oeuvre. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu interprets taste capaciously, at sometimes referring to them most often as systems of distinction classification, but at times as dispositions, sometimes as manifested preference. Many of the influential scholars before and after Bourdieu do the same. Antoine Hennion asserts that taste is fundamentally affective ("to taste is to make feel, and to make oneself feel, and also, by the sensations of the body, exactly like the climber, to feel oneself doing"), yet in other places treats it as a practice of consumption. In a 2001 study, he takes taste to be a "ceremony of pleasure, a series of little habits and ways of doing things," and tries to

understand taste by examine individual strategies for personal listening, how they become "comfortable" with music" and the musical repertoires through which people listen to music. Many of the methods sociologists of culture favor also impose a formal multidimensionality. Multivariate statistical tools such as principal components analysis, correspondence analysis, factor analysis, latent class analysis, canonical correlational analysis, and multidimensional scaling are commonly used to reduce a collection of "taste measures" into a lower-dimensional sub-space (Mohr 1998). Advances in the computational data sciences have lead to the spectacular growth of multivariate analysis through deep-learning encoders (Kozlowski et al. 2019).

Third, it is consonant with the senses of taste in other domains. Consider how taste is conceptualized within studies of gustatory taste (the root sense of taste). Here, taste refers to the conscious perception of food compounds that bind to specific receptors in the tongue and the palate (Lindemann 1996; Gaillard & Cinnamon 2019). Contemporary scholarship on gustatory taste assumes a set of basic taste sensations. While there is broad agreement on a set of five basic tastes, gustatory taste is also commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon (i.e. the "taste tetrahedron") where each basic taste component can be thought of as a taste dimension (Henning 1916; McBurney & Gent 1979; Bachmanov & Beauchamp 2007).

But most of all, we should adopt such a pluralist approach because it is both intuitive and generative on for the ways we theorize about taste and related phenomenon. In the section to come, we argue that we intuit taste as a multidimensional phenomenon. In addition, we show how thinking taste as thick subjectivity can be theoretically generative by using it to articulate the analytical form of complex tastes, a family of tastes that are both mundane yet under-appreciated by current scholarship.

The case of simple and complex tastes

To show how taste is intuited as a thick subjectivity, we present a case study of five varieties of taste. Each of these tastes can be considered an instance of what we refer to as "complex tastes." Complex tastes as such are so because they contain antinomies in the different modalities to taste. These five tastes, when flattened to a thin, one-dimensional conception of taste, can appear similar to each other. However, on a multidimensional representation, they become markedly distinct from one another. And the latter, we argue, is much closer to our intuition about what these tastes actually ares. We use a case study approach like this following Blumer's advice that ambiguous social scientific concepts that are resistant to strict formalization are best refined through "expositions which yields a meaningful picture, abetted by apt illustrations which enable one to grasp the reference in terms of one's own experience" (1954: 8).

Consider the following quintet of tastes (Figure 7). Johnny and his band of friends and family are teenagers in school. We're interested in understanding their tastes for Dr. Disrespect ("the Doc"), a popular video-game streamer on Twitch and YouTube who is known for his elaborate, bombastic self-presentation. All five teenagers can be described as having a "taste" for Dr. Disrespect. Yet we intuit obvious differences among our teenagers' tastes. Just as Ryle's quarter of winking boys wink in different ways, our teenagers have distinct tastes for Dr. Disrespect. These differences between their tastes become salient when we think of taste as a thick form of subjectivity comprised of distinct modalities of action.

Simple tastes

To begin, let's take a look at Johnny's taste for Dr. Disrespect. Johnny *enjoys*, *consumes* and *thinks highly* of the Doc. Suppose someone were to ask us about Johnny taste, and we responded with either of the three responses:

Oh, Johnny loves Dr. Disrespect!

Oh, Johnny watches Dr. Disrespect all the time!

Oh, Johnny thinks Dr. Disrespect's just the best!

Figure 7: A quintet of tastes

Person	Description	Preference	Consumption	Evaluation of Competence	Type of taste
Johnny	Johnny enjoys watching Dr. Disrespect. He watches his Call of Duty streams everyday after school. He thinks the Doc is a first-rate entertainer.	✅	✅	✅	Simple taste
Jesse	Jesse is one of Johnny's best friends. Jesse watches Dr. Disrespect as much as Johnny does. He describes the doc as "cringe" to others even if he enjoys it anyway.	✅	✅	❌	Guilty pleasure
Kaci	Kaci is Johnny's younger sister. She grew up watching the Doc with Johnny, and enjoyed him greatly. But she's stopped. Although she still finds the Doc entertaining, she finds his persona to be a bad influence, and tries to persuade Johnny to stop too.	✅	❌	❌	Justified abstention
Nico	Nico is Johnny's younger brother. He looks up to Johnny. Unlike Kaci, Nico happily shares and parrots Johnny's takes on the Doc. He sits by and accompanies Johnny when the Doc is streaming, but of late his attention is focused on the *Genshin* session on his iPhone and hardly ever on the stream.	✅	❌	✅	Taste pose
Mo	Mo is a classmate and rival of Johnny's. He doesn't like the Doc's content, and finds it low-brow. Nonetheless, he watches it regularly to make fun of Johnny for it.	❌	✅	❌	Ironic consumption

Each of the responses seem to suffice. A taste like Johnny's can be described as simple. *Simple tastes* are tastes where the multiple modalities of taste are harmonized and matched to one another. One charac-

teristic of simple tastes is that they are easily reducible to singular modes of action. Because of this, they lend themselves to thin conceptualizations of taste. When we reduce simple tastes to singular modes of action, we do not significantly mischaracterize them; rather, they can be predictably surmised. However, not all tastes are simple as such, and we would be remiss to treat them so.

Complex tastes

This brings us to the conceptual counterpart to simple tastes, complex tastes. *Complex tastes* are tastes that contain important characteristic antinomies among its constituent taste modalities. Unlike simple tastes, complex tastes cannot be described by recourse to a single mode of action; indeed, the omission of the antinomy between its taste modalities denies a complex taste the nature of its being. As an example, consider one example of a complex taste, the guilty pleasure. Guilty pleasures can only described by a joint consideration of three modalities of action: a person i who has a guilty pleasure taste for cultural object j has to enjoy j, participate in the consumption thereof, while holding a negative appraisal of j. If we were to exclude i's evaluation from consideration, it would no longer resemble a guilty pleasure and we would not be understanding their taste correctly. It is for this reason that complex tastes warrant special attention from empirical researchers. They represent cases where it can be particularly problematic to flatten taste into a single modality of action.

Our concept of a complex cultural taste is influenced by complex tastes within studies of gustatory taste. It is generally known that gustatory taste can be represented as a multidimensional phenomenological space. From this point of view, a complex gustatory taste is one that cannot be simply described by singular basic taste components. Gustatory tastes are complex for different reasons. Some are complex because they involve mixtures of different basic taste components (McBurney & Gent 1979; Erickson & Convey 1980). Compounds such as calcium chloride and urea are complex because they are "bitter-salty" and "bitter-sour" respectively, and not simply "purely bitter" as compounds like caffein and quinine are (Drewnowski 2001). Some gustatory tastes are considered complex because of their temporal profile. Compounds like saccharins and catheins have taste profiles that change over time: saccharin are sweet with a bitter aftertaste, while catheins are bitter with a sweet aftertaste. Some gustatory tastes are

described as complex because they are multimodal. These tastes simulate several sensory systems simultaneously, such that it's hard to decide if they are a taste, a smell, a tactile sensation, or a conjunction of them all). Take the taste of peppermint mint, which is characterized by 1-menthol. 1-menthol leads to the joint stimulation of tactile (cold), olfactory (minty) and gustatory (sweet and bitter) sensations (Nagata et al. 2005). The obverse, where non-gustatory perceptions stimulate taste, can also happen. There are preliminary investigations into "thermal taste" where the heating or cooling in small areas of the tongue *per se* produce the perception of saltiness or sweetness respectively (Cruz & Green 2000). This is independent of the well-known effects of temperature on taste transduction (e.g. McBurney et al. 1973).

For an example from gustatory taste that is closer to cultural taste, consider the case of wine-tasting. Wine-tasting is not just about a snapshot of the palatial simulations a person may derive from a glass of wine. It involves not just gustatory taste but also sight and smell. Consider how a wine connoisseur might approach a Riesling:

> [Wine connoisseurs] do not experience a homogeneous Riesling-taste; instead, they immediately notice its scent of petroleum. Once it is in their mouths, they notice the high levels of acidity present in all good Riesling, and they recognize its sweet fruity aroma, and in some cases the presence of mineral extracts in the flavor. The fact that wine tasting involves the use of some specific physical techniques, including gurgling and making sure that the wine covers the whole of the tongue, as well as the deployment of discriminatory abilities, indicates that wine tasting involves activities; it is not a mere taking of stimuli. (Gray & Tanesini 2010: 725)

Wine-tasting requires a succession of kinetic movements that allow for a processual unfurling of its complex taste: "One must be able to deploy the wine tasting technique, and one must also have expectations or understanding of how sensory stimulations change with movements of the tongue within the mouth. One needs to know how to be in a position to experience the sourness and sweetness of an item." (Gray & Tanesini 2010: 727).

Four types of complex tastes

Let's return to the remaining quartet of tastes from Figure 7 The tastes of Johnny's kin and kith are examples of complex tastes. Each of the four represents a distinct variety of complex taste. We will consider each of them at length in the section to come.

Let's return first to Jesse's taste. We had earlier labeled Johnny's taste for Dr. Disrespect as an instance of a simple taste. This does not apply as much to Jesse. There is some important sense in which we, as observers, are misunderstanding Jesse's taste if we reduce it to a single modality of action. Do any of the following statements suffice singly as a summary of Jesse's taste?

> *Jesse loves Dr. Disrespect. Jesse watches Dr. Disrespect all the time Jesse finds Dr. Disrespect cringe (not very good).*

We argue not. To describe Jesse's taste accurately, you'd have to note all three modalities of taste jointly. For example, we may say that Jesse loves and watches Dr. Disrespect all the time *but* doesn't respect his work as good. That is to say there is an antinomy that is fundamental to Jessie's taste.

Jesse's taste is an instance of a complex taste of a particular sort. We have different referent for such tastes, but perhaps the most common label for them is the **guilty pleasure** Guilty pleasures involve the *pleasurable consumption* of cultural content a person considers to be *bad* for one reason or another. They are "the sprightly but inane movies, or half-baked television program no sophisticated person would admit to watching, as well as other aesthetic uncoolnesses" as Lorrie Moore (2018: 282) calls them. Guilty pleasures occur because a person evaluates culture as "bad" for one reason for another, even though they enjoy and consume said culture (Lancellotti & Thomas 2018). There are a number of reasons why individuals might produce such negative evaluations. Some guilty pleasures are perceived as such because they defy hegemonic aesthetic standards. Romance fiction is one example. Although romance fiction plays an important compensatory role in the life of readers as a form of escapism, "fulfilling basic psychological needs for women that are induced by culture but are unmet in day to day existence," many readers treated it as a guilty pleasure (Radway 1984). Even the readers who did not personally evaluate romance fiction

negative acknowledged the gaze from the media, their spouses, and children: because romance fiction was perceived by hegemonic standards to be frivolous, low-brow and pornographic, readers felt guilt for spending time and money on it. Other guilty pleasures are perceived as such because they are associated with the transgression of moral norms. Consider the confession from the manqué protagonist Ram in Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club*,

> There is something about that club. Just walking along the drive from the gate to the clubhouse, seeing the perfectly-kept lawns on either side, the specially-designed street lamps hovering above you, the white stones lining the road, the car-park, and then the croquet law — *croquet*! a place where middle-aged people placed croquet [...] A beautiful open Mercedes drove past me and someone waved. I waved back. [...] The trouble with me is that I like that. I like to put my hand in my pocket with a bit of cuff showing; a suspicion of waistcoats under my coat, and a strip of handkerchief in my breast pocket. I like it. I am *aware* that I like it. (Ghali 2014[1964], pp. 126-127)

Ram spends his life dancing between the twilight of privilege and socialist political agitation. Ram can't help his champagne socialist preferences and practices; neither can he escape reflexive condemnations of them. In the same vein, some Starbucks consumers describe their daily Frappuccino as a guilty pleasure because they dread the association between Starbucks and the "corporatization" of everyday life:

> For a long time I wouldn't go to Starbucks because in my circle of friends it's not socially acceptable to go to Starbucks because it is just a big corporate and that it destroys all the local coffee shops. (Respondent from Thompson & Arsel 2004)

Other cultural products are evaluated as bad because of their undesirable associations to different status groups. Some Star Trek fans label their Star Trek engagement as a guilty pleasure because they resent the stigmatized associations with other Star Trek fans. Many thus keep their predilection quiet from others:

> I have to admit to keeping pretty quiet about my devotion to the show for many years simply because people do tend to view a Trek fan as weird or crazy. Only my family and my closest

> friends were aware of how much I enjoyed the show or that I bought all the books and, later, other items. (Respondent from Kozinets 2001)

Such fans often make self-deprecating references to their Star Trek predilection ("I must admit to being addicted to Star Trek") and feel ashamed of their tastes ("The [perception of Trekkies] as 'compulsively attached' to a television show, or as 'near-addicts' has affected my involvement in Star Trek, from a general embarrassment of my Star Trek toys to a reluctance to be pegged as a Trekkie") (Kozinets 2001).

Now, let's consider Kaci's taste. As with Jesse's, Kaci's taste contains an antinomy in tastes. In this instance, Kaci*finds Dr. Disrespect enjoyable*. However, she has come to *think poorly* of the Doc, and has chosen to *stop watching his streams*. We call Kaci's taste an instance of **justified abstention**. Justified abstention are characterized by an antinomy between a positive orientation in preference and negative orientations in consumption and evaluation. We note here that a negative appraisal need not be the "cause" or motivation behind the decision to forgo consumption; a justified abstention merely describes their coincidence.

Justified abstentions are commonplace in cultural fields. There are two cases in particular where we may expect individuals to hold such tastes. One, justified abstentions are involved when individuals practice abstentions from behavioral addictions, the "chronic, progressive compulsion to consume a particular substance or engage in a particular activity" (Garriott & Raikhel 2015). While the compulsive non-medical self-administrative of drugs are the paradigmatic example of addiction (Weinberg 2002), other manners of behavior can likewise be perceived as a form of behavioral addiction (Singer 2012). Cultural consumption has often been conceptualized as a kind of habitual behavior. Many cultural economists, for example, argue that habitual consumption in culture can be usefully modeled as a kind of "beneficial addiction" (e.g. McCain 1979; Becker & Murphy 1988). Where cultural consumption is more malignant, however, it is designated as a behavioral addiction (Billieux et al. 2015). Problematic cultural consumption classified by the DSM-5 as behavioral addictions include shopping, binge-eating, gambling, excessive internet-use, excessive social media use, and excessive gaming (Petry & O'Brien 2013; Billieux et al. 2015; Robbins & Clark 2015).

While justified abstentions involve the rejection of consumption, they do not involve the negation of desire. As recovering addicts have noted, a person's desire for the object of their addiction "isn't a constant pull that diminishes over time; it ebbs and flows corresponding with the powerful emotions that lead to such harmful escapism in the first place" (respondent from Spencer et al. 2014). The brain gradually adapts to the chronic exposure to addictive behaviors, producing durable changes in neuropsychological structures, most notably in the exchange of key neurotransmitter such as serotonin and dopamine. The obdurateness of such desires explains why addicts relapse (Weinberg 2002).

Two, justified abstentions are also involved when a person makes strategic decisions to reshape their habitus. Members from marginalized communities may strategically abstain from preferred cultural consumption habits when they find themselves in social contexts that are hostile to their proclivities. In such situations, many individuals go against their native affective preferences and make willful decisions to resist consumption. Consider this example from *Invisible Man*:

> Then far down at the corner I saw an old man warming his hands against the sides of an odd-looking wagon, from which a stovepipe reeled off a thin spiral of smoke that drifted the odor of baking yams slowly to me, bringing a stab of swift nostalgia. I stopped as though struck by a shot, deeply inhaling, remembering, my mind surging back [...] I took a bite, finding it as sweet and hot as any I'd ever had, and was overcome with such a surge of homesickness that I turned away to keep my control [...] What a group of people we were, I thought. Why, you could cause us the greatest humiliation simply by confronting us with something we liked. Not all of us, but so many. Simply by walking up and shaking a set of chitterlings or a well-boiled hog maw at them during the clear light of day! (Ellison 2010[1952]: 367)

Here, the eponymous narrator describes the experience of relapsing from a justified abstention. He had given up sweet yam, a beloved childhood treat, in order to distance himself from the Black South. Justified abstentions of similar motivations can also be found among the upwardly mobile. For example, a socially aspirational person in the mid-century United States who came from a middle-class background would likely have to eschew the mass cultural forms they grew up enjoying due to the strict high-low

culture class homologies that defined the cultural hierarchy at the time (Bourdieu 1984; Ohmann 1996; Lahire 2008).

Next, we turn to Nico's taste. Nico's taste likewise contains a unique antinomy. In this instance, Nico *enjoys and thinks highly* of the Doc; however, he has *abstained from consumption* of the Doc's media content. This is an examples of a **taste pose**. Taste pose is a variety of complex taste where a person likes and appraises a particular cultural article highly, while neglecting to participate in consumption of the very same. The mismatch we find here is between a positive orientation in preference and evaluations, and the negative orientation in consumption. We make one qualification here. It is necessary to assume that the unrealized consumption in a taste pose is not driven by resource constraints or the lack of opportunity. Taste poses occur where there is opportunity and power to consume, but the subject makes a volitional choice as to otherwise. If a person who has a taste for skiing is unable to express realize his taste because he doesn't quite have the time or money to make it out to Whistler for the season, that does not seem very much like a complex taste. A taste that goes unfulfilled because of resource constraints does not quite seem complex. In the case of Nico, he has the opportunity to watch the Doc — he chooses not to.

Taste poses are best exemplified by the phenomenon of the "unread bestseller." A book can sell well, and still go unread. As a *Guardian* columnist puts it, "One of the drawbacks of being a bestselling author is that no one reads you properly. Sure they read you, but do they really read you?" (Rebellato 2010). Many best-selling books, such as Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* and Thomas Pilketty's *Capital* have been known to sell well yet go unfinished (Dearden 2014). In the case of *Capital*, many readers gave up particularly quickly, often stopping not more than 30 pages into the book (Ellenberg 2014). Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose* was another work that gained a repute as an unread bestseller:

> Says Howard Kaminsky, president of Warner Books, which bought the [Name of the Rose]'s paperback rights for $550,000: "Every year there is one great unread best seller. A lot of people who will buy the book will never read it." It serves, he has said, as a "passport" to intellectual respectability. "It doesn't hurt to be seen carrying a copy at the Museum of Modern

> Art. It hints you've got something more in your mind than getting picked up." (Howard Kaminsky in Still 1983).

We can imagine that many of these readers may nonetheless claim to like the work, some even genuinely so. They might also corroborate and repeat the critical judgement of the work as good. But the unrealized consumption leaves the taste as a facile representation of a simple taste.

Finally, let's consider Mo's taste. Unique among them, Mo *dislikes* while also *thinking rather poorly of* Dr. Disrespect. Yet despite such twinned dissentiments, Mo *stays a steadfast consumer* of the Doc's stream content. If we were to define Mo's taste by preference alone, we may conclude that Mo simply does not have a taste (alternatively, has a "distaste") for Dr. Disrespect. Yet this inference sits uneasily with the fact that Mo consumes the Doc's content on a regular basis. If we were to measure taste by consumption alone, as many sociologists and market research scholars too, we would register Mo as having a taste for the Dr. Disrespect. Neither of these reductive treatments of taste work because they elide the crucial antinomy that is crucial to understanding Mo's taste: he consumes a particular article of culture even as he simultaneously dislikes and disapproves of it.

We refer to complex tastes with such an antinomy in taste modalities as **ironic consumption**. Ironic consumption is the volitional consumption of culture a person neither considers good nor pleasurable. Individuals engaging in ironic consumption *know* that they dislike and disapprove of a particular article of culture, but they continue nonetheless in their consumption of said article. In a study of a consumers engaging in ironic consumption of *The O'Reilly Factor*, Gray notes that

> [For all these posters' criticisms, many keep going back for more. When one poster can declare that "the show IS O'Reilly, because, face it, there is no show. Just this frustrated White man . . . who thinks he knows all and grandstands and moralizes all of his points," there would seem to be no reason to keep watching. Some viewers, however, appear to engage actively in their antifandom, watching O'Reilly precisely to raise their blood pressure or, as the predominantly intellectual-rational tone of their posts suggests, as some- what of an

> intellectual-rational challenge. (Gray 2005: 854)

One particular kind of ironic consumption that has entered the zeitgeist over the past decade has been the practice of "hate-watching." Hate-watching is a colloquial expression for the practice of "watching a show or movie you suspect you will emphatically dislike, for the purpose of being able to talk about how much you disliked it, either during the program (on social media) or afterward" (Ambrosino 2014). Hate-watching is distinct from other complex taste counterparts, such as guilty pleasures. As an Urban Dictionary entry puts it,

> Hatewatching is distinct from enjoying a guilty pleasure, wherein you like something despite its obvious badness. A hatewatched show is one the viewer genuinely despises but cannot stop watching [...] Whatever the reason, the hatewatcher can't look away from the train-wreck. (beatnikherbie 2013)

Hate-watching has become a common variety of taste. The ironic consumers of *The O'Reilly Factor* are one instance of hate-watchers. As are the South Asian diaspora who hate-watch *Indian Matchmaking* for its promulgation of hegemonic casteist and classist values (Guha 2022), or middle-class Americans who hate-watch reality shows like *The Bachelor* and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (Letak 2022).

Ironic consumption can be motivated by a variety of reasons. Some ironic consumption can be explained by the fact that we are not simply hedonistic creatures that seek pleasure or positive affects from our cultural consumption. We can crave aversive experiences as well, whether it be fear, disgust, terror, or the experience of failure (Andrade & Cohen 2007; Juul 2013; Cohen et al. 2021). Ironic consumption can also be motivated by the feelings of collective effervescence that individuals may derive from engaging in communities of anti-fandom. Persons engaged in ironic consumption may take pleasure from their shared vocal expressions of discontent with a community of like-minded "haters" (Guha 2022). Participation in ironic consumption is a way of creating social ties as well. Social connections can develop not just from shared likings but also shared dislikings.

How complex tastes matter

We bring up this quintet of tastes because they show us how we intuit taste as a form of thick subjectivity. Each of these tastes represent an instance where a person could be thinly described as "having a taste" for a cultural object, yet we intuit significant differences among all of them. There are important and appreciable differences between Johnny's simple tastes, Jesse's guilty pleasure, Kaci's justified abstention, Nico's taste pose and Mo's ironic consumption. Thinking of taste as thick subjectivity lets us articulate the analytical form of these tastes. Each of them are constituted by configuration among the different modalities of taste; for the complex tastes, a particular antinomy among the modalities of taste. The identification of these complex tastes also carries important implications for how we theorize about the dynamics around reception and consumption in culture. Here, we want to consider three in particular.

First, the identification of complex tastes may reveal new ways in which the taste-class homologies in the current moment. Complex tastes are the product of symbolic power. Power may not necessarily disbar consumption of culture outright, but it may persist nonetheless through "feeling rules" and evaluation schemas that reward certain genre conventions and not others. Much of the contemporary research on taste have focused on the ways in which serves power and privilege (e.g. Bourdieu 1984; Warde 2007a, 2008b). The strict symbolic boundaries around culture have been transformed. The simple high-low cultural hierarchies that had characterized much of early-to-mid 20th century Anglo-European society (Bourdieu 1984; Levine 1988) have been transformed into one of a more elusive character (Warde 2007a, Lizardo & Skiles 2012). While cultural omnivorousness is now the new normal, it's also true that taste remains a potent tool for distinction. One of the ways we may be able to reveal this is through an analysis of complex taste. Two persons who are similarly omnivorousness in the consumption modality may not be equally so in others. Consider our early example of from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where the eponymous black protagonist has had to abstain from a childhood treat for much of his adult life. A non-black person who grew up in a different social context from the protagonist would in a thin sense share the same taste; but there is obviously something intuitively different about the two. If we miss the yearning for an justified abstention, we are neglecting as the power of a cultural hierarchy to

deny pleasure.

Second, complex tastes are sites through which we can understand contradictions between private/public expressions of cultural tastes. Complex tastes such as guilty pleasures and ironic consumption are sites where the division between public and private modes of cultural consumption are particularly salient. Private modes of consuming culture have proliferated in the 20th century. A battery of factors from cultural taboos to social desirability produce important disjunctures between public and private modes of cultural consumption (Stephens-Davidowitz 2017). The thoughtful reconciliation of the differences between these two modes of consumption represents one of the most important changes in cultural reception that the sociology of culture has had to contend with. As Lahire writes,

> [Televisions], radios, hi-fi systems, video recorders, DVD players and, more recently, computers and the internet, have allowed a number of cultural products to enter the private sphere. But, what happens to cultural norms once we enter into the intimacy of the home and how are they refracted within this "private" domestic space? Can they sustain themselves within the context of a solitary consumption, in which the individual no longer fears the exterior (disapproving) look and (negative) cultural judgement? (Lahire 2008: 176)

These changes have only accelerated since his writing. Cultural consumption has become ever more portable and private; what is more, they can be voluntarily broadcast to an audience of an individual's choice, should a person choose to do so. Lahire (2008) speculates that these changes will allow individuals to submit to their ego, favor "the most hedonistic dispositions"; individuals will feel liberated from the gaze of the other. Many new tastes have been made possible by the expansion of private modes of consumption are now possible because individuals are no longer susceptible to second-order judgements from others. To understand them, we must understand the antimonies inherent to them as complex tastes.

Third, complex tastes can help us to understand how endogenous changes in culture occur. The capacity for endogenous change is an aspect of culture that has fascinated scholars (Lieberson 2000;

Kaufman 2004), in part because it seems to contravene structuralist conception of culture that "reduce cultural choices to passive reproduction of structural necessities" (Gartman 1991). Yet, it can be unclear what individual level mechanisms contribute to such endogenous changes in culture on the aggregate. We suggest that complex sites may be among the most promising of places to study such endogenous changes. Drawing on balance theory (Cartwright & Harary 1956) and theories of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), we hypothesize that complex tastes may be less stable than simple tastes due to their inherent antimonies. Complex tastes may prompt a person to engage in agentic practices that manipulate or structure a person's first-order tastes, whether it be conscious realignment of a person's affective reactions with those of esteemed others (Godart & Mears 2009) or institutional training that's tries to reshape a person's artistic intuitions (Fang 2020).

Conclusion

More than half a century ago, Herbert Blumer (1954) wrote an incisive diagnosis of a fundamental problem stalking sociological theory, warning of the "distressingly vague" concepts that were becoming prolific in the field. The reason for the pervasive ambiguity, Blumer argued, was that most social scientific concepts were sensitizing concepts that only gives the practitioner a general sense of reference and allowed only rough identification of their empirical instances. Yet, he was ultimately sanguine over the problem of semantic ambiguity:

> Does it mean that our field is to remain forever in its present state of vagueness and to forego the possibilities of improving its concepts, its propositions, its theory and its knowledge? This is not implied. Sensitizing concepts can be tested, improved and refined. Their validity can be assayed through careful study of empirical instances which they are presumed to cover. Relevant features of such instances, which one finds not to be covered adequately by what the concept asserts and implies, become the means of revising the concept. (Blumer 1954: 8)

Taste is one of these sensitizing concepts. The first and humblest ambition of this paper had been to contribute "an extra edge of consciousness" to the polysemy around an important yet ambiguous sociological concept (Williams 2015[1976]: XXXV). In this essay, we're tried to chart the disparate senses of taste by considering how empirical researchers have sought to measure taste over the past decades. Among these studies, we find that there are three paradigmatic approaches to the measurement of taste, each of which assumes taste to be a distinct modality of action. The *preference paradigm* takes taste to be a kind of preference, that is a person's affective response towards a cultural object or activity. The *consumption paradigm* takes taste to be consumption, that is a person's realized participation, engagement, or consumption of culture. The *competence paradigm* takes taste to be a kind of evaluative competence, most often revealed through a person's evaluation of an article of culture.

We then assume the challenge of disambiguating these three senses of taste. After considering and eschewing some alternative approaches to disambiguation, we settle on the idea that taste is best con-

ceptualized as *a person's thick subjectivity in a cultural field*. This subjectivity is expressed through multiple modalities of action, the most salient of which are a person's cultural preferences, cultural consumption, and evaluative competence. We argue that such a multidimensional conception of taste is compatible with our intuition of what taste is, and that this becomes particularly obvious when we consider tastes that are "complex." We show this by using our approach to articulate the analytical form of complex tastes, a class of tastes that are both mundane yet under-appreciated by sociologists of culture. Complex tastes such as the guilty pleasure and ironic consumption are so because they contain antinomies in the different modalities to taste. They are also sites through which we can understand (a) contradictions between public and private consumption in tastes, (b) the exercise of power on tastes, and (c) the stability of tastes over time.

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Essay 2:

The costliest signals of authenticity? How death inflates artistic reputations in hip-hop.

Abstract

In this study, we examine how the death of an artist affects artistic reputations. Drawing on a novel balanced panel data of audience evaluations from a major online review aggregator, we show how the death of an artist durably inflates the artistic reputations in hip-hop. Audience evaluations of an artist's work improves in the short-term after an artist's death, and these improved evaluations persist in the medium- and long-term after an artist's death. We find that such "death effects" on artistic reputations are mediated by three distinct mechanisms. First, these death-induced inflations in evaluations are mediated by sympathetic censoring and eulogizing effects: the death of an artist leads to the suppression of censure and exaggeration of praise respectively. Second, death-induced inflations are the result of audience shift. The death of an artist leads to changes in the size and composition of the evaluative audience for an artist's work, in-so-doing changing the distribution of audience evaluations. Third, death-induced inflations occur because an artist's death can function as a costly signal of authenticity, a variety of symbolic capital local to the field of hip-hop. We close by considering the implications of our findings for our understanding of posthumous reputation-making, the semiotic dimensions of death, and the implicit rules of the game in cultural fields.

Key words: *artistic reputation*, *death*, *synthetic control*

Introduction

> It's funny how wasn't nobody interested 'til the night I almost killed myself in Lexus. – Kanye West, *Last Call*

> I shall not wholly die: some part of me will cheat the goddess of death ... my reputation shall keep green and growing. – Horace, *Ode* 3.30

In most of life, death connotes an ending. This is less obviously so in cultural fields. While death generally implies the cessation of cultural production, cultural consumption and reception continues. As Horace puts it, an artist's work transcends after their passing – they are an artist's legacy. To an audience, the death of an artist is often experienced instead as an eventful interlude that transforms the way they interpret, understand, and evaluate the artist's work. What happens to the reception of art after an artist's passing? What is more, does the context around a death matter?

In this study, we examine how the death of an artist affects artistic reputations. Drawing on a novel digital trace data of audience evaluations from a major online music community, we show how the death of an artist durably inflates the aesthetic reputations of music albums in hip-hop. Audience evaluations of an artist's work improves in the short-term after an artist's death, and these improved evaluations persist in the medium- and long-term after an artist's death. We find that such "death effects" on aesthetic reputations are mediated by three distinct mechanisms. First, these death-induced inflations in evaluations are mediated by sympathetic censoring and eulogizing effects: the death of an artist leads to the suppression of censure and exaggeration of praise respectively. Second, death-induced inflations are the result of audience shift. The death of an artist leads to changes in the size and composition of the evaluative audience for an artist's work, in-so-doing changing the distribution of audience evaluations. Third, death-induced inflations occur because an artist's death can function as a costly signal of authenticity, a variety of symbolic capital local to the field of hip-hop.

This paper makes three main contributions. First, it contributes to our understanding of posthumous reputation-making in culture. The making or unmaking of posthumous reputations in

the arts remains under-scrutinized in the sociology of culture. We complement influential past studies, such as Lang & Lang's (1988) study of etchers, by considering how a particular kind of artistic reputation, audience evaluation of an artist's work, changes in the years after their passing. To do so, we draw on novel digital trace data from a major music community, *RateYourMusic*.We use this to construct a balanced panel of audience evaluation data over the span of two decades that allows us to assess changes in the artistic reputation of artwork in the years before and after an artist's death. In addition to this, we also employ a novel estimation strategy that uses synthetic controls to construct a plausible counterfactual for every deceased artist. Synthetic control estimations matches every deceased artist to a weighted sample of non-deceased counterparts based on their pre-death attributes (in particular, we match albums based on their pre-death artistic reputation). This allows us to construct more plausible counterfactuals than in previous studies of posthumous artistic reputations.

Second, it contributes to our understanding of the semiotic dimensions of death. Scholarship that examines the impact of death have proliferated since Johnson et al.'s (1985) influential work examining the impact of an executive's death on stock returns. Early scholarship on such "death effects" have tended to make the strong simplifying assumption that death can be treated as an unique supply-side disruption that irreversibly ends production of a particular good, service, or activity (Ekelund et al. 2000). While such assumptions have been both necessary and productive in many fields and instances, they are also untenable in others. They seem to be particularly hard to justify in cultural fields. Because of the symbolic meanings that are inherent to anything "cultural," it can be difficult to reduce cultural objects, products, or activities to commodities no different from any other objects of production and consumption (Griswold 1987). Much of the contemporary scholarship has sought to weaken these assumptions. For instance, Azoulay et al. (2019a, 2019b) and Oettl's (2012) work have demonstrated that stable unit under treatment assumptions are often implausible in studies of death effects given the possibility of spillover events. We complement such a move away from strong simplifying treatments of death by focusing on the symbolic meanings of death. We ask what deaths might mean to an evaluative audience, and how such attendant meanings might transform their interpretation, engagement, and judgement of work by a deceased artist.

Three, it contributes to our understanding of the implicit rules of the game in cultural fields. Scholars in the sociology of culture have long argued that cultural production and reception must be understood in concert as social fields (Becker 1983; Childress 2012; Phillips 2013). The presence of death-induced inflation of artistic reputation thus has important implications for cultural producers. They can be viewed as one particularly poignant manifestation of the costly qualities and attributes that cultural fields demand of artists. Cultural fields may valorize qualities or attributes, such as "authenticity," that require artists to put themselves in physical or psychological jeopardy. Audience desire and reward costly acts of commitment from their artists. This may create a dangerous set of incentives for cultural producers.

Literature Review

Death is a critical event in the making and unmaking of an artist's reputation (Lang & Lang 1988; Price 2020). The true measure of greatness in art is often perceived to be the posthumous recognition an artist receives from the public (Lang & Lang 1988; Scarre 2001). Such posthumous esteem is perceived to be a reassurance of an artist's antemortem excellence. Only a select few artists ever ascend to the immortality Horace spoke of. Vincent Van Gogh is often held up as the archetypical artist whose reputation was made posthumously. In life, Van Gogh was one of many – a talented artist who worked in obscurity and occasioned in critical praise. It was only in the decades after his death that Van Gogh started to become recognized as a singular sine qua non genius. The creative inspiration, universality, and prolixity of Van Gogh's work would go on to attract and hold the attention of ardent popularizers. Van Gogh's reputation among the public would then be remade through the work of these popularizer (Heinich 1996). A more recent example of such posthumous deification is Hank Williams. While Williams had been a star in life, his exalted status as the personification of country music came later: Hank Williams as the cowboy who sang about hillbillies was deliberately constructed to be the authentic iconic representation of country music by music executives in Nashville (Peterson 1997). Most others are not as lucky. They lose their spot under the spotlight and step back to anonymity. The question of why some reputations survive and prosper while others do not remains unresolved. In an influential study of etchers, Lang & Lang (1988) find that the survival of artistic reputations does not just rest on the strength of an artist's objective accomplishments in life. They argue that the durability of artistic reputation rests on both lifetime initiatives from the artists – such as the quantity of their artistic output, and holding an accessible and identifiable oeuvre – as well as the presence of persons or groups with a stake in the preservation and promotion of the deceased. In this paper, we examine the contributions of a third source of artistic reputation, audience evaluations of an artist's work.

In this essay, we examine how death transforms artistic reputations within the specific case of hip-hop. Hip-hop is a genre of music that first emerged in the 1960s in the block parties of South Bronx as a syncretic fusion of American, West African, and Jamaican music (Jeffries 2011; Persaud 2011;

Ewoodzie 2017).[1] Artists such as DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster are frequently cited as the progenitors of the genre (e.g. Ewoodzie 2017). As a genre of music, hip-hop is best distinguished by its emphasis on danceable "beats" (produced by the DJ) and "flow", the rhythmic delivery of vocals to these beats (the MC's rapping) (Rose 1994; Williams 2015).[2] We choose hip-hop as our case for two main reasons. First, we choose hip-hop because of its prominence in American culture. Hip-hop is at the center of one of the biggest contradictions to American cultural life: the same disadvantaged youth who are systematically disadvantaged by middle-class American mainstream culture provide the cues for what's cool and fashionable within the very same (Rodriquez 2006; Patterson & Fosse 2015; Lee 2016). Although it emerged out of deindustrialization and the rusting urban core (Rose 1994), hip-hop is a highly popular genre of music consumed by a diverse group of listeners, where it maintains a strong cultural association to the black community, in particular to Black "street culture" and the iconic ghetto (Rose 1994; Lena 2006; Harrison 2008; Lee 2016; Stuart 2020).[3] Second, it is a genre of music where artists commonly suffer from early deaths. While popular musicians on average have lower expected life expectancy compared to the population at large, this is particularly so in the hip-hop genre (Bellis et al 2007, 2012).[4] Hip-hop is a genre haunted by dramatic deaths, chief among them the untimely passings of the genres two biggest stars, Christopher Wallace (Biggie Smalls) and Tupac Shakur who were both shot to death within six months of each other. Hip-hop's unfortunately association to early death persists today, to the extent that members of the hip-hop community have called for interventions and self-reflection to address the

[1]Hip-hop is often considered to be more than a genre of music, but rather an entire subculture in its own right that comprises emceeing (rapping), deejaying, breakdancing, and graffiti (e.g. Persaud 2011; Ewoodzie 2017; Magana 2020). In this essay, however, we restrict our considerations to hip-hop as genre of music.

[2]Rose (1994) defines hip-hop as "a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music."

[3]Non-black consumption, particular white consumption, of hip-hop has frequently been problematized by journalists and academics alike. As Jeffries (2011) writes, it is "commonly assumed that many white male hip-hop fans consume and derive pleasure from racist representations of black masculinity in order to access a desirable, distinctive, and trendy masculine self-concept without regard for the poisonous racial and ethnic politics that enable such consumption." Some scholars caution against reductive cultural appropriation framings however. Kitwana (2006) argues for instance that many of the white teenagers who engage with hip-hop culture are guided by a growing sense of alienation from mainstream American life. Coming at the end of the grunge era, disaffected white kids in the 1990s who were in search of counterculture started listening to hip-hop. Rose (1994) similarly thinks that the cultural syncretism that occurs in hip-hop cannot be simply be reduced to accounts of dilution and theft.

[4]Much of the shortened life expectancy of popular musicians can be attributed to violent death (accident, suicide, homicide) and liver disease (Kenny & Asher 2016).

so-called 'crisis' (e.g. Too $hort & E-40 2022; Vera & McLaughlin 2022). XXXTentacion, Nipsey Hussle, Pop Smoke, and Takeoff (of Migos) are but four of the most famous hip-hop artists to have suffered early deaths in recent memory. While unintentional injury and substance abuse were among the leading causes of death in rock music and jazz, homicide was the lead cause of death among hip-hop artists. According to one study of popular musicians (Lawson 2015), 55 percent of hip-hop artists who passed away from 1987 to 2014 were the victims of homicide.

How does death affect artistic reputations?

Our study belongs to a small but lively literature on "death effects" in artistic and cultural fields.[5] The majority of such studies focus on the effect of an artist's death on the sales of their work. They theorize the death effect as a supply-side shock that causes a clustered rise in prices of the deceased artists' work. Similar to durable goods monopolists under the Coase conjecture, artists can be viewed as suppliers who cannot exert market power during their lifetime due to their inability to credibly commit to not inflating production through the creation of more artwork (Coase 1972). As a result, prices of their artwork settle below monopoly price. From the market's perspective, death can be viewed as a sudden and credible commitment to cease any further production. The market adjusts to this new information and prices rise as a result. Testing such theories using a panel data of Latin American artists' work, Ekelund et al. (2000) find that prices of artwork rise substantially just after an artist's death, before falling back to previous levels. Maddison & Pederson (2008), in a follow-up study, similarly finds evidence for this death effect. They also find that conditional life expectancy affects price, and that interest in artists' work generally decreases after their deaths. Itaya & Ursprung (2016) arrive at a similar conclusion through the modeling of a Markovian Stackelberg equilibrium. The death effect has also been observed in the market for sports

[5]Studies of the so-called "death effect" originate from economics, and can be traced back to Johnson et al.'s (1985) study of executive death on stock market returns. They find that the sudden death of executive was associated with positive stock market returns when the executive is a corporate founder, which the researchers attribute to the differences in contracting between founder-managers and professional managers. On the other hand, the sudden death of an executive was associated with negative stock market returns when the executives are higher in the decision-making hierarchy, which the researchers speculate reflect the market's pricing of the loss of firm-specific human capital. Similar death effects have been found in other organizational contexts. Other notable studies of death effects include Azoulay et al. (2019a, 2019b) work on the death effect among scientists in the life sciences, and the death of a star scientist also changes the dynamics of production within a scientific subfield. publications and grants by scientists who didn't publish with the star surge (Azoulay et al. 2019b), Aizenman & Kletzer's (2011) as well as Frey & Gullo (2020) work on the "citation death tax" among economists.

memorabilia (Matheson & Baade 2004) and sales of albums (Brandes et al. 2016).

Such "supply-shock" theories of the death effects in culture have two major limitations. First, they assume that the cultural articles in question are archetypical private good, where consumption or purchase of culture by one person diminishes the opportunities of another to consume or purchase it (e.g. Samuelson 1954). This assumption does not always hold in studies of culture. Many fields of culture involve the consumption of impure private goods (Cornes & Sandler 1986).[6] The consumption of music albums is a case in point. Because music albums are trivially reproducible through digital sales and digital streaming (in addition to the cheaply reproducible analog counterparts), they should be treated as a non-rivalrous private good: one individual's listening of a music album does not reduce the availability of the music album for consumption by others. The supply of non-rivalrous goods does not experience the same shocks private goods do: once a music album has been produced and released, the death of its creator does not hinder its reproduction and distribution through analog or digital mediums.

Second, these theories tend to assume prices and consumption are the primary explananda of interest. While consumption and purchasing behavior are no doubt of significant interest, they are not the only modalities of action that matter to sociologists. Most notably, they do not apply well to artistic reputation, an audience's recognition and esteem for an artist (Ma 2023). In this essay, we focus our attention how death affects artistic reputation by considering changes in an audience's evaluation of an artist's work. Artistic reputation is an example of the multivalent sensitizing concepts that are common in the sociology of culture (Blumer 1954). There are multiple senses of artistic reputation that are important, from artistic recognition, the esteem in which others in the art world regard an artist, to artistic renown, an artist's renown beyond the art world (Lang & Lang 1988). Audience evaluations are an important contributor to artistic reputation because they represent an audience's judgements of taste, their deliberative evaluations of the quality of a cultural article. The quality of cultural objects or experiences are ambiguous. It is only through acts of taste – taste being "the compass that directs our perceptive ap-

[6] Alternatively, we may consider music today to be a spite good, a private good that is nonrivalrous but for which users may be readily excluded (Bowles 2003).

paratus on the high seas of sensation" (Vercelloni 2016) – that are able to produce discerning evaluations of the relative goodness or badness of a cultural article. Such judgements of taste collectively contribute to an artist's artistic reputation writ large. How might death affect artistic reputations? At present, we don't have many empirical studies that set out to answer this. In the sections to come, we propose three mechanisms through which death can affect artistic reputation, and we will spend the remainder of the paper evaluating the plausibility of these mechanisms.

Because of these limitations, it is natural to wonder if artistic reputations are subject to the same death effects as have been accounted elsewhere. In the first part of the analysis, we ask how the death of a musician affects the artistic reputation of their antemortem work. More specifically, we hypothesize that such death effects take the form of a death-induced inflation to audience evaluations. To find out if this is so, we test the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 1A**: The death of a musician affects the artistic reputation of their antemortem work, most likely taking the form of a death-induced inflation to audience evaluations of their work.

Further, we test for the persistence of such death effects. While death effects on the price of artwork has been shown to ameliorate quickly over time, it remains to be seen if the same holds in the case of artistic reputation. Accordingly, we test the following hypotheses:

> **Hypothesis 1B**: Death effects on artistic reputation are expected to wane over time, such that they become weaker in the medium-term and negligible in the long-term after an artist's death.

Mechanisms behind death effects on judgements on taste

In the second part of the analysis, we examine the mechanisms that are responsible for producing such death effects in artistic reputation. We test for the plausibility of three mechanisms in particular: (i) sympathetic censoring and eulogizing, (ii) audience shift, and (iii) the costly signaling of authenticity.

First, any death-induced inflation to artistic reputation may be decomposed to what we refer to as *sympathetic censoring* and *sympathetic eulogizing*. Audience evaluations of a deceased artist's work may be affected by feeling rules that constrain or encourage different types of evaluations (Hochschild 1979). There are social rules of propriety that we all feel obliged to follow in the event of a person's passing. The same applies, although to a markedly lessened extent, to the deaths of those who are less proximate to us, such as that of artists that we listened to (Fowlkes 1990). Although we might not necessary go through the stages of bereavement, coping, mourning and grief that tends to follow a person's passing (Jakoby 2012), we may, as a collective, still constrained by the symbolic impositions of such a loss. We may feel obliged to be adopt sympathetic orientations when producing evaluations associated with a recently deceased artist; we may feel obliged to speak differently or produce diffracted evaluations of their oeuvre. Such feeling rules may oblige us to either suppress our negative evaluations of the deceased (and their associates) or exaggerate their positive evaluations of the same.

Sympathetic censoring refers to an audience's tendency to censor or suppress negative evaluations of a cultural article in the aftermath of an artist's passing. Within Anglo-American societies, this collective tendency is perhaps best expressed by the aphorism *mortuis nihil nisi bonum* to never speak ill of the dead. As result of this feeling rule, we may be more inclined to "go lightly" on artists or work that we otherwise deride. A person who would otherwise give a putative bad album a 1.0-star review may hold back due to such sympathetic censoring. If polite censoring were to be the main mechanism driving death effects in judgements of taste, we may expect the death effect to be primarily driven by a decrease in the proportion of bad ratings given to an album.

> **Hypothesis 2A**: The death effect on artistic reputation is caused by sympathetic censoring, which can be observed through a decrease in the proportion of bad ratings given to an album after an artist's death.

Sympathetic censoring is complemented by a contending effect in *sympathetic eulogizing*. Sympathetic eulogizing refers to an audience's tendency to exaggerate its praise for a cultural article in the aftermath of an artist's passing. The tendency of an audience, in particular the deceased's contemporaries, to eulogize

on the deceased's behalf has often been attributed to the feted reputations of artists who die early:

> It can be much better to die young than to live out one's lifespan because it removes or lessens generational competition. Orwell died in 1950 at the age of 46 and was immediately eulogized by the leading intellectuals of the Anglo-American literary community– V.S. Pritchett, Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe. If he had lived even until 1955 or 1960, it would have been impossible for him to maintain his stature on all fronts. The importance of one's contemporaries for establishing reputation has to do with one's "moment of emergence." (Rodden 2006)

As result of this feeling rule, we may be more inclined to over-praise work that we hitherto approve of. For example, a person who would otherwise give an average-to-good album a 3.5-star review may instead feel inclined to give a 4.5 star review on account of an artist's recent passing. Unlike sympathetic censoring, the sympathetic eulogizing can be inferred through increases to the proportion of good ratings given to an album. As such, we test the following hypothesis.

> **Hypothesis 2B**: The death effect on artistic reputation is caused by sympathetic eulogizing, which can be observed through an increase in the proportion of good ratings given to an album after an artist's death.

Finally, we consider the relative importance of sympathetic censoring and the eulogizing effect. We believe that the moral rule of sympathetic censoring is much stronger than the tendency to eulogize, and that we can evaluate this by comparing the relative contributions of each to the overall death effect on judgements of taste. Sympathetic censoring is likely to be contribute more to the death effects observed if changes in mean ratings decompose in such a way that the changes to bad ratings outweigh the changes to proportion of good ratings. As such, we test for the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 2C**: The magnitude of decreases in the proportion of bad ratings given to an album after an artist's death is higher than among the proportion of positive ratings given to an album in the same period.

Second, the death effect may be attributable through *audience shift*. Audience shift refers to the changes in size and composition of an evaluative audience following an artist's death that in turn affects the distribution of evaluations an album receives. The death of an artist leads to renewed public and media interest in an artist, expanding the audiences who are interested in consuming the deceased artist's work. Such an expansion to the audience can have negative consequences as well. As Kovács & Sharkey (2014) point out, the evaluations that are recorded on websites like *RYM* or *Goodreads* are produced from a two-step procedure. A would-be reviewer must first identify a particular album out of a possibility of many others as worthy of consumption and consideration, and only after do they perform their judgements of taste. Audience shift refers to the changes in the composition of the evaluative audience that result from such an audience shift. Audience shift can change the distribution of judgements received. These newer reviewers may be less familiar with the conventions of hip-hop and evaluate the album according to a different standard of taste; older reviewers might experience a "snob effect" and downgrade their assessments, since some of the enjoyment they used to derive from exclusivity will have been decreased (Kovács & Sharkey 2014). Since direct measures of the evaluative audience are elusive in our case, we use a quasi-instrumental variables approach by looking at how death affects audience reception measures that are expected to covary with any audience shift.[7] One, audience shift, ceteris paribus, must lead to an expansion in audience engagement with the cultural article. In the case of our hip-hop albums, audience shift can be expected to increase the count of ratings an album. As such, we test the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 3A**: The death effect on artistic reputation is driven by audience shift, which we may be able to observe through an increase in the total count of ratings an album receives.

Two, audience shift can also be expected to change the underlying distribution of judgements of taste. This may be observed through changes to the higher moments of the distributions of ratings, such as its dispersion and standard deviation. As such, we test the following hypothesis:

[7] We are unable to measure audience attributes through our data collection scheme.

Hypothesis 3B: The death effect on artistic reputation is driven by audience shift, which we may be able to observe through an increase to the dispersion of ratings an album receives.

Third, the death effect on artistic reputation can be attributable to the costly signaling of authenticity, an important local symbolic capital within the field of hip-hop. Music genres like hip-hop can be understood as semi-autonomous fields.[8] As such, hip-hop is "partially autonomous from the necessities of the larger social macrocosm that encompasses it" and "endowed with its own laws of functioning" (Bourdieu 1991: 375). This is to say hip-hop has a capacity to define for itself what it finds valuable.[9] One class of symbolic capital that is local to the genre of hip-hop is that of authenticity (Jeffries 2011; Harkness 2014; Stuart 2020). Artists who can credibly signal their authenticity are often rewarded with commercial and critical success, both within hip-hop and without (Cheyne & Binder 2010; Stuart 2020).

Authenticity carries a particular set of meanings in hip-hop.[10] Within hip-hop, authenticity is communicated through the performance of what Tricia Rose (1994) calls "ghetto blackness," a stylized interpretation of black male street culture (Harrison 2008; Patterson & Fosse 2015; Reitsamer & Prokop 2018).[11] The closer an artist gets to the "hustler" archetype from gangsta rap, the more proximate they are to the iconic ghetto, the more authentic a person is conceived to be (Cheyne & Binder 2010; Harkness

[8]Defining what a field is can be a elaborate endeavor in itself (Martin 2003). In this essay, we follow a Bourdieusian line of thinking that conceives of fields as "structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of their occupants (which are partly determined by them)" (Bourdieu 1993: 72).

[9]Indeed, as Bourdieu points out, a field is defined by this relative autonomy to define for itself what it finds valuable. If a field does not hold the capacity to do this, it ceases to be a distinct field or subfield altogether (Steinmetz 2017). The autonomy of every genre to determine its own local cultural capital provides the pre-conditions for creativity; it is the source of its resistance to the symbolic violence exerts by the superstructural systems of hierarchization. (Benson 1999).

[10]To be sure, we don't claim that hip-hop is the only field that values authenticity. Authenticity is valorized in a wide variety of contexts (Peterson 2005; Zukin 2008), from the literary arts (Hungerford 2016) to indie music (van Poecke 2018), comedy (Reilly 2018), gourmet food (Johnston & Baumann 2007; Schifeling & Demetry 2020), artisanal spirits (Gaytan 2019) and craft beer (Frake 2016). However, hip-hop does have a very particular understanding of what authenticity connotes.

[11]But as Tricia Rose points out, such a notion of "authentic" black street culture is highly stylized: If black ghetto street life were really being represented, we'd hear far more rhymes about homelessness and the terrible intergenerational effects of drug addiction. There would be much more urban contemporary radio play of songs about fear and loss, and real talk about incarceration. Prison is not a rite of passage; it is a devastating and terrorizing place to be. And the loss of potentially life-changing opportunities that define life after prison are rarely exposed in mainstream hip hop lyrics, despite the deep impact that incarceration has on the lives of young black men especially. Where are the conversations about the terrorizing acts of violence against men that are commonplace in prison life?" (Rose 2008)

2013). In Harkness' study of Chicago's underground hip-hop scene, he finds that aspiring artists who could credibly demonstrate their membership in street gangs enjoyed vaunted position in the local music scene; gang membership was viewed as a desirable status trait, "a demarcation of authenticity in a youth culture where 'keeping it real' is imperative" (Harkness 2013: 153). Such equation of of black street culture to authenticity is not particular to Harkness' subjects – elite tastemakers, such as those at the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* likewise think that hip-hop "must be produced in local places" and that "'the ghetto' is a site from which rap full of personal meaning emerges" (Cheyne & Binder 2010). [12]

This leads us to how early death may function as a costly signal of an artist's authenticity. Because authenticity is so sought-after, hip-hop artists often engage in elaborate efforts of exaggeration, deception, or fabrication to be perceived as authentic. Audiences, savvy to such work, demand credible signals from hip-hop artists because they are willing to accept artists' claims to authenticity. Death may serve as one such signal, albeit the costliest of them all. Most hip-hop rappers are not as proximate to black street culture as they claim.[13] To be perceived so, some hip-hop artists employ deliberate strategies of "autodestructive homages" to exaggerate their extant claims of authenticity. They don the self-presentation of black super-predators in the hope of going viral and "blowing up", often with deleterious consequences for their own mortality (Jeffries 2011; Stuart 2020):

> If there is a dominant message running through virtually every drill song, video, and related content, it's an appeal to superior authenticity: I really do these violent deeds. I really use these guns. I really sell these drugs. My rivals, however, do none of this. (Stuart 2020)

As a consequence, many of the hip-hop artists who are perceived as most authentically street are actually

[12]Cheyne & Binder (2010) find that elite evaluation of hip-hop is deeply died to the iconic ghetto in particular: "'The ghetto' is the predominant place typification imagined in critics' writing, and this context of production is perceived to be home to the racialized 'underclass' [...] Critics use a variety of terms to mark rap's racial-urban origins—the streets, inner-city, etc.—and employ suggestive ethnographic description to signal these locations. The Wu-Tang Clan rappers, for example, 'are bound to Park Hill, a Staten Island neighborhood where the red brick housing project towers over weather-beaten storefronts, and a mural names the neighborhood's young dead.'"

[13]According to one analysis from Patterson & Fosse (2015), less than a third of the hip-hop artists who produced the fifty bestselling rap songs were of 'genuinely street culture' background (examples of these include 50 Cent, Puffy Daddy and DMX). Mant were from low-middle-class backgrounds (Outkast, Mc Hammer, Dr. Dre), or from the working poor (JayZ, Lil Wayne, Ja Rule) or from comfortably middle-class backgrounds (Will Smith, Ludacris, Kanye West).

not like that (Stuart 2020). Some hip-hop artists resort to deception or outright fabrication in order to signal authenticity. One of the most notorious cases of fabricated authenticity in hip-hop came from the rapper Vanilla Ice:

> According to Village Voice columnist Rob Tannenbaum, Robert Van Winkle (aka Vanilla Ice) told Stephen Holden of the New York Times that "he 'grew up in the ghetto,' comes from a broken home, hung out mainly with blacks while attending the same Miami high school as Luther Campbell of 2 Live Crew, and was nearly killed in a gang fight." Yet, in a copyrighted, front page story in the Dallas Morning News, Ken P. Perkins charges, among other things, that Mr. Van Winkle is instead a middle-class kid from Dallas, Texas. (Rose 1994)

Audiences are likewise conscious of the ways hip-hop artists may choose to exaggerate or fabricate their claims of authenticity (e.g. Cheyne & Binder 2010). Because of can be very important for artist's to find *credible* ways of signaling their authenticity. Generally speaking, the more costly a signal is, the more credible it is (e.g. Bereczkei et al. 2010). Early death is able to serve as a costly signal of a hip-hop artist's authenticity because it reflects their active involvement in social situations that jeopardize their well-being and mortality (e.g. Harkness 2014). An artist who passes away early from homicide or substance abuse did not 'merely' rap about gangs, guns, or drugs in their verses – they lived it. To be clear, we are not implying that artists strategically pass away early to confer their own work authenticity; we are saying that artist's early death have the incidental effect on communicating the authenticity of their hip-hop persona and work. Should early death be able to serve such a function, we would then expect the death effect experienced by artist's who suffered early deaths to be greater in magnitude than non-early deaths. Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 4A**: The death effect on artistic reputation is greater in magnitude in the case of early deaths.

Hip-hop is not a monolith. Hip-hop is constitutive of many subgenres, even if some (like

gangsta rap) may be more prominent than others.[14] Many sub-genres of hip-hop, have become distinct so to become a subfield of their own, with their own forms of symbolic capital, doxa, illusio, habitus, and its own competition over subfield-specific stakes (Steinmetz 2017). Hip-hop sub-genres can be broadly divided into two broad categories: (a) a "street" category of subgenres that exalt the aforementioned black male street culture, and '(b) a "decent" category of subgenres that do not.[15] The "street" category of sub-genres comprise the subgenres of hip-hop that are most closely associated with black male street culture and the iconic ghetto (Anderson 2012). Examples of such subgenres include gangsta rap, trap, crunk and drill music (Harkness 2014; Lee 2015; Stuart 2020). Examples of sub-genres in the "decent" category of subgneres include "backpacker" rap, nerdcore, Japanese hip-hop, Calvinist rap, Jazz rap, cloud rap, and instrument hip-hop (Williams 2010, 2015). We expect that albums from subgenres in the "street"category of subgenres are expected to benefit more from the costly signaling of early death. We posit the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 4B**: Conditional on the death being early, the death effect on artistic reputation is greater in magnitude among artists in the "street" category of hip-hop subgenres.

[14]Scholars have noted that there be a problem when sub-genres of hip-hop, most notably gangsta rap, get conflated with the broader genre: hip-hop then becomes reduced to simplistic gangsta icons, whether it be violence, criminality, sexual deviance or misogyny (Rose 2008; Anderson 2012).

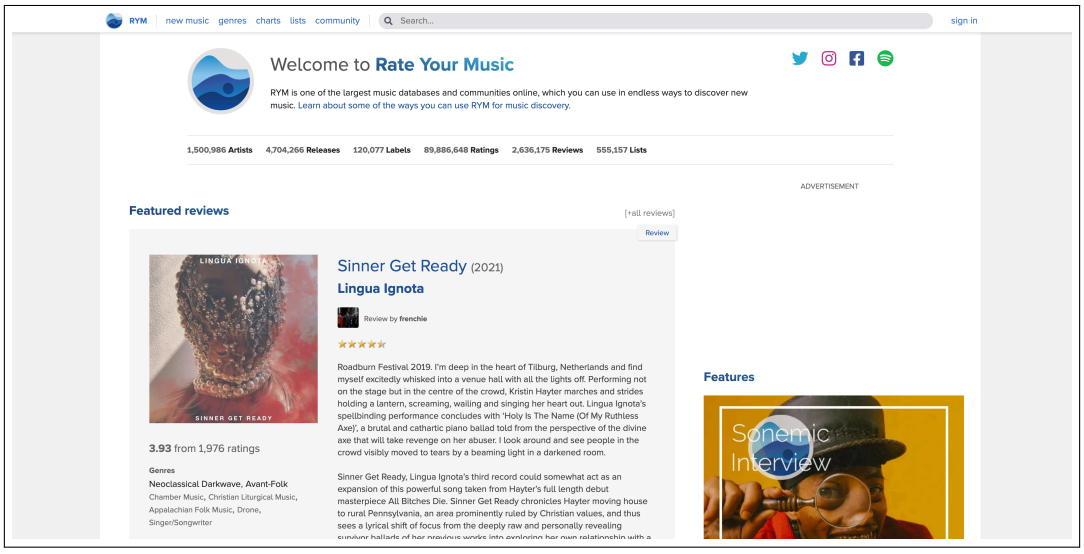
[15]In his study of the Chicago underground rap scene, Harkness performs a similar bifurcation, classifying his respondents into two broad categories comprising the "gangsta" (best represented by 50 Cent) and the "backpacker" (best represented by Kanye West).

Data

Data collection

This study draws on a novel longitudinal data set of music albums from 2002 to 2020. The data set is constructed from two major sources. One, we draw on digital trace data of user evaluations from a major music web community, Rate Your Music (RYM). *RYM* refers to itself as "a community-built music and film database where you can rate, review, catalog, and discover new music and films, as well as participate in contributing to the database itself" (RYM 2021).[16] A screen-capture of *RYM*'s home-page, dated to 8/11/21, can be found in Figure 8.

Figure 8: *Rate Your Music*'s (*RYM*) home page



All data on the website is community-driven, that is submitted by users of the website, and moderated by a team of volunteers (RYM 2021). *RYM* was first launched in 2002. It underwent a major revamp (a "*RYM* 2.0" re-launch) that added significant community features including a message board) in 2008.[17] According to *RYM*'s site administrator in 2002, 50% of *RYM* web-traffic comes from the US, the UK

[16] *RYM* also collects and documents artist and recording metadata through a community-moderated system: "All information in our database is entered, edited, and maintained by our community of users and volunteer moderators. Sources of information can be anything from record sleeves to magazines/books to other sites on the internet." (Rate Your Music 2021).

[17] The site administrator writes: "[*RYM* 1.0] offered ratings, collections, user profiles, reviews, lists, and the ability to add albums and artists to the database. Other features were gradually added over time (cover art, forums, messaging, etc). [*RYM* 2.0] was a completely new version of the site, with almost all features rewritten and many added." (RYM 2012)

and Canada. Western Europe, Russia, Poland, Brazil, and Australia also make up appreciable portions of their web-traffic.[18] Visitors to the website who create a free *RYM* account are able to leave behind ratings and reviews of a website. These ratings span the range of 0.5 stars (lowest) to 5.0 stars (highest), in intervals of 0.5. A record of every rating given to an album is publicly accessible and retrieved using a web-script (Figure 9). We augment the *RYM* digital trace data with album-level covariate data from Spotify. Sonic features from Spotify have been used in many studies of cultural reception and production (e.g. Askin & Mauskapf 2017; Wang & Horvat 2019). We validate the accuracy of data collected by comparing subsamples against two other major music websites, discogs.org and allmusic.com.

Population

Our sampling frame comprises all hip-hop music albums released from 1/1/2002 to 12/31/2020.[19] From this, we begin to identify all ante-mortem albums that were released artists who had passed away sometime during this period of observation. More specifically, we identify all valid albums that fulfill the following inclusion criteria:

1. The album must be released by a solo artist.

2. The album must be released antemortem (while an artist is alive) during our observation period (1/1/2002 to 12/31/2020).

3. The deceased artist's death must occur within the observation period.

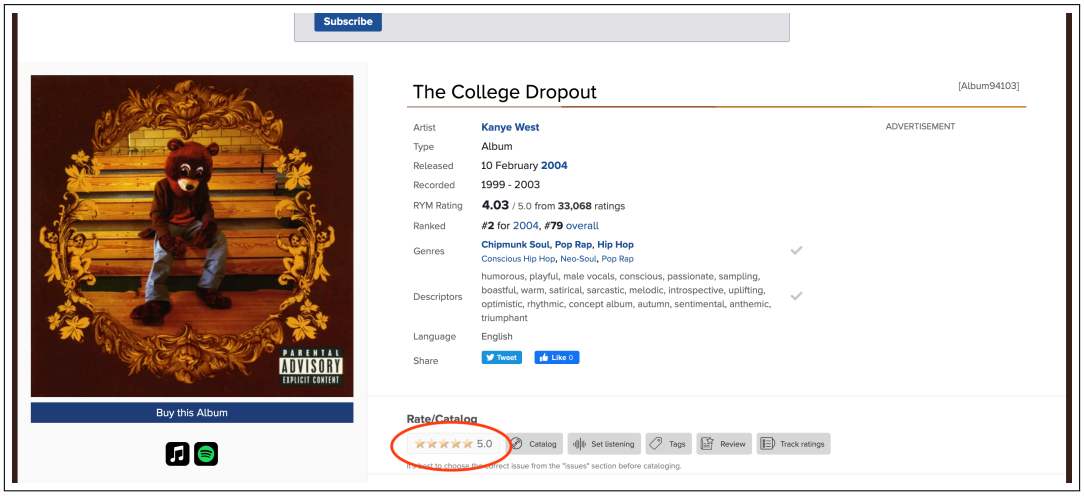
4. There must be sufficient pre-death observation periods (>=6 months of ratings.

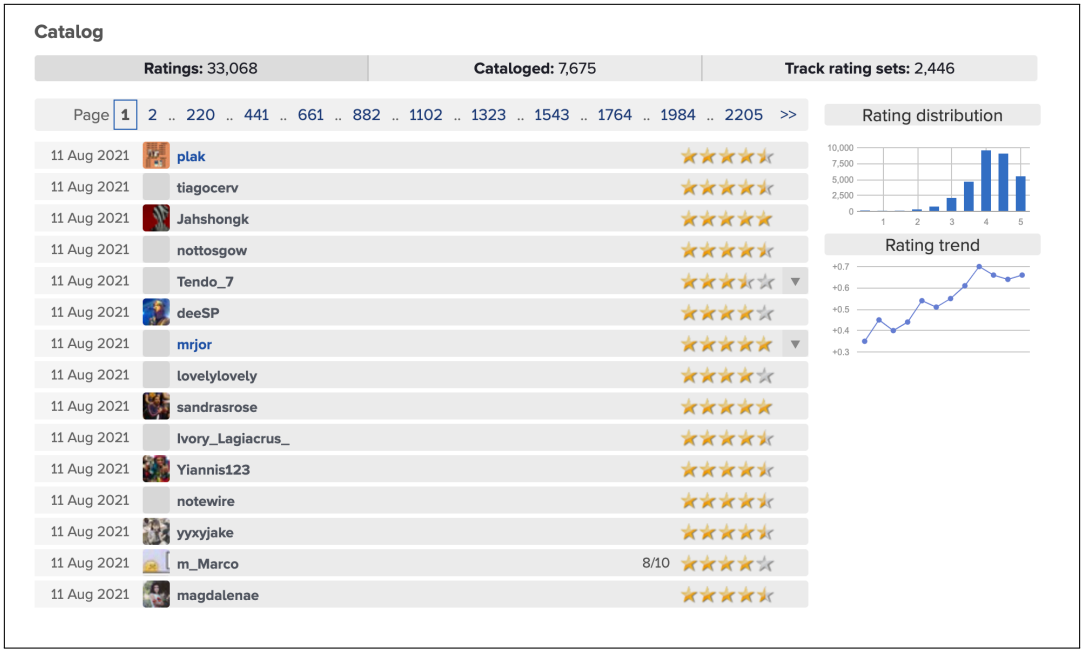
5. There must be sufficient post-death observation periods (>=6) months of ratings.

[18]When asked about the demographics of the site's users, *RYM* administrator wrote the following in 2012: "There's no central place for stats, but you can ask here if you like. Alexa and similar sites are pretty worthless in terms of accurately estimating traffic. The US, UK, and Canada combined make up around 50% of *RYM*'s traffic. We also receive a significant amount of traffic from Western Europe (particularly the Nordic countries and the Netherlands), Poland, Russia, Mexico, Brazil, and Australia."

[19]Genre categorization is a community-led and verified by *RYM* volunteer moderators, who are typically senior members of the community. *RYM* categorization of album genres is consistent with those of other major music websites, such as allmusic.com and discogs.com.

Figure 9: How users leave ratings on *RYM*





6. There must not be months with missing data (e.g. months where the album receives no ratings). synthetic control requires balanced panel data).

Table 1 contains a list of all 11 albums that fulfill the inclusion criteria.

To better understand the inclusion criteria, it may be helpful to consider some albums that were excluded from the study. Albums that were released by a hip-hop group, such as *Culture* by Migos, would be excluded since they do not fulfill criterion #1. Albums such as *Shoot for the Stars, Aim for*

Table 1: Music albums from deceased musicians in hip hop

Artist	Album	Subgenre(s)
Nujabes	Metaphorical Music	Jazz Rap, Instrumental Hip-hop
Nujabes	Modal Soul	Jazz Rap, Instrumental Hip-hop
XXXTentacion	17	Trap, Emo Rap
Lil Peep	Come Over When You're Sober, Pt. 1	Emo Rap, Trap
Mac Miller	Blue Slide Park	Pop Rap, Cloud Rap
Mac Miller	Watching Movies With the Sound Off	Abstract Hip Hop, Cloud Rap
Mac Miller	GO:OD AM	Pop Rap, Abstract Hip-hop
Mac Miller	The Divine Feminine	Neo-soul, Jazz Rap
Juice WRLD	Goodbye & Good Riddance	Emo Rap, Pop Rap, Trap
Juice WRLD	Death Race for Love	Emo Rap, Pop Rap, Trap
Nipsey Hussle	Victory Lap	Gangsta Rap, Trap

Note:
Sub-genre categorization is a community-led and verified by *RYM* volunteer moderators, who are typically senior members of the community. *RYM* categorization of album subgenres is consistent with those of other major music websites and services, such as Spotify, Last.fm, allmusic.com and discogs.com.

the Moon by Pop Smoke were excluded on the grounds of criterion #2 since they were posthumously released. Albums such as *Me Against the World* by Tupac Shakur or *Welcome to O'Block* by King Von were excluded on the grounds of criterion #3 since the artist's deaths occurred outside of the observation period. Albums such as *?* by XXXTentacion and *The Genie of the Lamp* by Mac Dre were excluded on the grounds of criterion #4 since the artists passed away shortly after the albums were released, such that they aren't sufficient pre-death observation periods. Albums such as *Born Like this* by MF Doom were excluded on the grounds of criterion #5, since the artists passed away so late in the observation period that there were insufficient post-death periods in the data. Albums such as *Resurgam* by Alias were excluded on the grounds of criterion #6 since there was missing rating data around the important windows of analysis (pre- and post-death months).

Measures

The study features seven key measures as well as a suite of covariates. First, we measure the artistic reputation of a hip-hop album through the audience evaluations left behind by *RYM* members.[20] *RYM*

[20]Guests are able to sign up for free memberships to *RYM*. Membership requirements are meant to deter bots and other site interference.

members are able to assign "ratings" to all albums cataloged on the site. These ratings span the range of 0.5 stars (lowest) to 5.0 stars (highest), in intervals of 0.5. We measure the artistic reputation in any given month t, $Y_{\mu it}$, of any album i by the mean of all ratings in the month. We do so for up to 18 months before and after an artist's death.[21] Second, to measure and test for sympathetic censoring, we measure the count of all ratings and standard deviation of the ratings for the album over the same period of time. Third, to measure and test for audience shift, we measure the proportion of bad ratings and good ratings received in a month. We define the former as the proportion of ratings received in a month bad rating that are 1.5 or lower ($Y_{\mu it} \leq 1.5$), while a good rating is one that is 4.0 or higher ($Y_{\mu it} \geq 4.0$). Fourth, to measure and test for the costly signaling of local symbolic capital, we perform two classifications. We classify artist's deaths into two categories, early deaths and non-early deaths. Within our sample, an artist is considered to have passed away early if they passed away before the age of thirty. We classify the hip-hop albums into two broad subgenre categories. We assign an album to the "street" subgenre category if it belongs to any of the following subgenres of hip-hop (a), gangsta rap, (b) trap, or (c) drill. Otherwise, it is considered assigned to the "decent" subgenre category.

In addition to the above, we also control for the following covariates: (a) the skew of monthly ratings, (b) the kurtosis of monthly ratings, (c) age of the artist at album release, (d) recording history prior to album release, (e) initial reception of album (no. of ratings in first 3 months), (f) initial reception of album (average rating in first 3 months), (g) no. of subgenres an album belongs to, (h-n) sonic features of the album including track duration, danceability, energy, instrumentalness, loudness, speechiness, and valence.

[21] This is subject to data constraints. In some cases, pre-death observation periods may be fewer than 18 because the artist passed away less than 18 months after an album's release. In some cases, post-death observation periods are limited because the artist passed away close to the end of our overall observation period, which closed at 12/31/2020.

Estimation Strategy

How can we best estimate the death effect on artistic reputation? One way is to take a leaf out of the potential outcomes literature and think of the death of an artist as a kind of (morbid) treatment effect. We take a *treated unit* in our case to refer to any antemortem music album whose creator passed away in the years after its release. An *untreated unit* refers to any music album whose creator did not die. The death effect ($\tau_{\mu i1}$) at time t can then be thought of as the difference in Y between the observed mean monthly rating of album i ($Y_{\mu it}$) and its counterpart in a counterfactual universe where the artist did not die ($Y'_{\mu it}$), i.e.

$$\tau_{\mu i1} = Y_{\mu i1} - Y'_{\mu i1}.$$

For each of these 'treated' albums, we construct an estimate of the counterfactual, $\hat{Y}'_{\mu i1}$, using a synthetic control procedure. The short of it is that we take a pool of peer albums, weight them using similarity to the treated albums, and use the weighted estimates from these albums to construct the counterfactual. We then take the difference between the observed value and the synthetic control estimate to produce an estimate of the estimands of interest. Each synthetic control is constructed with weights chosen such that the resulting synthetic album is one that best reproduces the pre-treatment monthly ratings and important covariates of the treated album.

The synthetic control procedure was first introduced by Abadie and colleagues as a method for estimating the effect of a treatment, in the presence of a single treated unit and a number of control units, with pre-treatment outcomes observed for all units (Abadie & Gardeazabal 2003; Abadie et al. 2010). The method constructs a set of weights such that covariates and pre-treatment outcomes of the treated unit are approximately matched by a weighted average of control units. The weights are restricted to be nonnegative and sum to one, which allows the procedure to obtain the weights even when the number of lagged outcomes is modest relative to the number of control units, a setting that is not uncommon in applications. Synthetic control so-to-speak is then a linear combination of these weighted control

units. Synthetic control estimation is most often used in economic and public policy, where it has been described as "arguably the most important innovation in the policy evaluation literature in the last 15 year" (Athey & Imbens 2017). Synthetic control has been used to estimate the effect of residential segregation (Brazil 2016), increases to minimum wage policies in California (Card 1992) and New York City (Sabia et al. 2012), impact of California's Tobacco control program (Abadie et al. 2010), German reunification (Abadie et al. 2014) among others.

Synthetic control is ideal for a quantitative case study like ours where there is a low number of treated units and where the treated units, being cultural products, are of such sui generis character that it is difficult for any one single untreated unit to provide a good comparison for each music album we're studying. The reliability of synthetic control estimates depends on four main criteria. First, there must be a large number of pre-intervention periods observed, such that matching on pre-intervention outcomes can help to control for unobserved factors and for the heterogeneity of the effect of both observed and unobserved factors on an outcome of interest (Abadie et al. 2010). We satisfy this criteria by measuring 18 months of monthly ratings in the lead-up to the death of an artist. Second, the pool of donor albums from whom the synthetic control is constructed must be judiciously restricted to units that are similar to the treated unit. We satisfy this criteria by limiting the donor pool of each treated album to only hip-hop albums that were published contemporaneously to each. Third, treatments must not reoccur. We satisfy this requirement since the 'treatment' we're interested in ('death') can only occur once for the set of mortal beings. Fourth, the donor units from whom the synthetic control are constructed should not be affected by the treatment. There is a trivial sense in which this is true, since the main effects of death of artist are exclusively centered on the deceased artist's works. There is a need, however, to assume that there are no spill-over effects on the ratings of remaining artists.

We prefer synthetic control to difference-in-difference estimation because it relies on a different set of statistical assumptions. For difference-in-difference estimation to be unbiased, there must be no time-variant album-specific unobservable attributes among the albums in our sample. Such "parallel trends" assumptions are famously difficult to justify, and the same is truth for our case. We prefer

synthetic control to regression-based methods for three main reasons. For one, the method controls for unobservable factors that have an effect on the common time trend of samples in the treatment and control groups. For two, synthetic control relies on interpolation from a convex hull of control group units. This means that it is impossible for synthetic control to produce results that extrapolate beyond the support of the data, which can occur in extreme situations with regression (Cunningham 2021). For three, synthetic control produces weights that make explicit what each untreated unit is contributing to the counterfactual, where regression does this blindly. This makes the analysis for transparent. Finally, we prefer synthetic control to other matching methods such as propensity score matching because of its desirable statistical properties. Among matching methods, synthetic control achieves the highest possible covariate balance, fully exploits all known features of the covariate distribution, and allows the weights to vary smoothly across control units (Hainmueller 2009). Many matching methods such as propensity score matching are also poorly suited to cases like ours with a low number of treated units.

We begin the synthetic control procedure by constructing a donor pool of comparison albums. Following these heuristics from Abadie et al. (2014), we do the following. [22] An album is considered as valid for consideration in the donor pool if it was not produced by any artist who died Then, we filter for albums that (1) share at least one sub-genre classification as the treated unit, (2) were rated a similar number of times, (3) were released by artists of a similar age, (4) and released within 1 year of the treated unit. In the event that there are more than 50 valid albums are in the donor pool, we take a random sample of 50 albums from the set of all possible comparison albums.

Let X_1 be a $k \times 1$ vector contains the values of the pre-intervention characteristics of the treated unit that we aim to match as closely as possible. Let X_0 be the $k \times 51$ matrix collecting the values of the same variables for the units in the donor pool. We first find the synthetic control weights

[22] Abadie et al. 2014 recommend that (1) units affected by the event or intervention of interest or by events of a similar nature should be excluded from the donor pool, (2) units that may have suffered large idiosyncratic shocks to the outcome of interest during the study period should also be excluded if such shocks would have not affected the treated unit in the absence of the treatments (3) restrict the donor pool to units with characteristics similar to the treated unit to avoid interpolation biases, (4) restrict the size of the donor pool and consider only units similar to the treated unit is to avoid overfitting. Overfitting arises when the characteristics of the unit affected by the intervention or event of interest are artificially matched by combining idiosyncratic variations in a large sample of unaffected units.

for each donor unit. These synthetic control weights can be represented by a 50×1 vector of weights $W = (w_1, \ldots, w_{50})'$. The synthetic control procedure seeks to minimize the difference between the pre-intervention characteristics of the treated unit and the synthetic control by $X_1 - X_0 W^*$ (Abadie 2010). For $m = 1, \ldots, k$, let X_{1m} be the value of the mth variable for the treated unit and let X_{0m} be a 1×50 vector containing the values of the mth variable for the units in the donor pool. W^* is the value of W that minimizes

$$\sum_{m=1}^{k} v_m (X_{1m} - X_{0m} W)^2.$$

v_m is a weight that reflects the relative importance that we assign to the m-th variable when we measure the discrepancy between X_1 and $X_0 W$. It then follows that the death effect on the artistic reputation ($\tau_{\mu it}$) of album i at time t can be estimated by

$$\hat{\tau}_{\mu it} = Y_{\mu it} - \hat{Y}'_{\mu it}.$$

We produce estimates of $\hat{\tau}_{\mu it}$ in the short-term (1 month), medium-term (6 months), and long-term (18 months) after the death of an artist. Given that there is only one treated unit, a simple t-test where we compare means before and after treatment is not applicable. We can make statistical inferences about our estimates by performing in-time placebo tests where we assign each album in the control donor pool to fictitious treatment (Abadie et al. 2014). A pseudo p-value can be constructed by estimating in-space placebo effects for each unit in the sample and then calculating the fraction of such effects greater than or equal to the effect estimated for the treated unit. Where necessary – such as when we produce average treatment effects or treatment effects across a particular artist's oeuvre – we pool estimates by simply taking the mean of the coefficient estimates across the pooled cases (Dube & Zipperer 2014). We construct test statistics for these pooled estimates by taking the mean of the percentile ranks of the individual events). The distribution of such a mean percentile tank can be calculated using the Irwin-Hall distribution since

percentile ranks are uniformly distributed on the unit interval. We use the mean pooled percentile tank statistic to test for the sharp null hypothesis that the death effect is zero across the pooled estimates.

Results

Death inflates artistic reputations

Table 2: Mean rating from audience evaluations of albums pre- and post-death

		Mean rating		
Artist	Album	Pre-	Post-	Delta
Nujabes	Modal Soul	3.83	3.87	0.04
Nujabes	Metaphorical Music	3.80	3.78	-0.02
XXXTentacion	17	1.69	1.94	0.26
Lil Peep	Come Over When You're Sober, Pt. 1	2.42	2.76	0.34
Mac Miller	Watching Movies With the Sound Off	3.28	3.51	0.23
Mac Miller	GO:OD AM	3.25	3.43	0.18
Mac Miller	The Divine Feminine	2.75	3.09	0.33
Mac Miller	Blue Slide Park	1.99	2.39	0.40
Juice WRLD	Goodbye & Good Riddance	2.63	3.06	0.43
Juice WRLD	Death Race for Love	2.26	2.62	0.36
Nipsey Hussle	Victory Lap	3.14	3.24	0.10

We find that death tends to inflate artistic reputations. We show this by first presenting a simple comparison of audience evaluations before and after an artist's death. We then follow this with estimations from our synthetic control procedure.

Table 2 shows the audience evaluations of artist's albums in the year before and after an artist's death. We observe indications of heterogeneity in the size of death effects on artistic reputation. Some albums seem to evince clear death effects. For example, Mac Miller's *Blue Slide Park* (+0.43), Juice WRLD's *Goodbye & Good Riddance* (+0.40), and XXXTentacion's *17* (+0.26) seem to experience an inflation to the album's mean monthly rating in the year after the artist's death. Others, such as Nujabes' *Modal Soul* (+0.04) or *Metaphorical Music* (-0.02) do not appear to evince much change. An examination of the time-series of mean monthly ratings for each of these albums produces similar observations. Figure 3 shows how the mean monthly ratings of XXXTentacion's *17* and Nujabes' *Modal Soul* change over time. In the former, we can observe an upward trajectory in album ratings after XXXTentacion's death; in the latter, we find that mean monthly ratings hold steady even after Nujabes' passing.

Figure 10: Time-series of XXXTentacion's *17* and Nujabes' *Modal Soul*

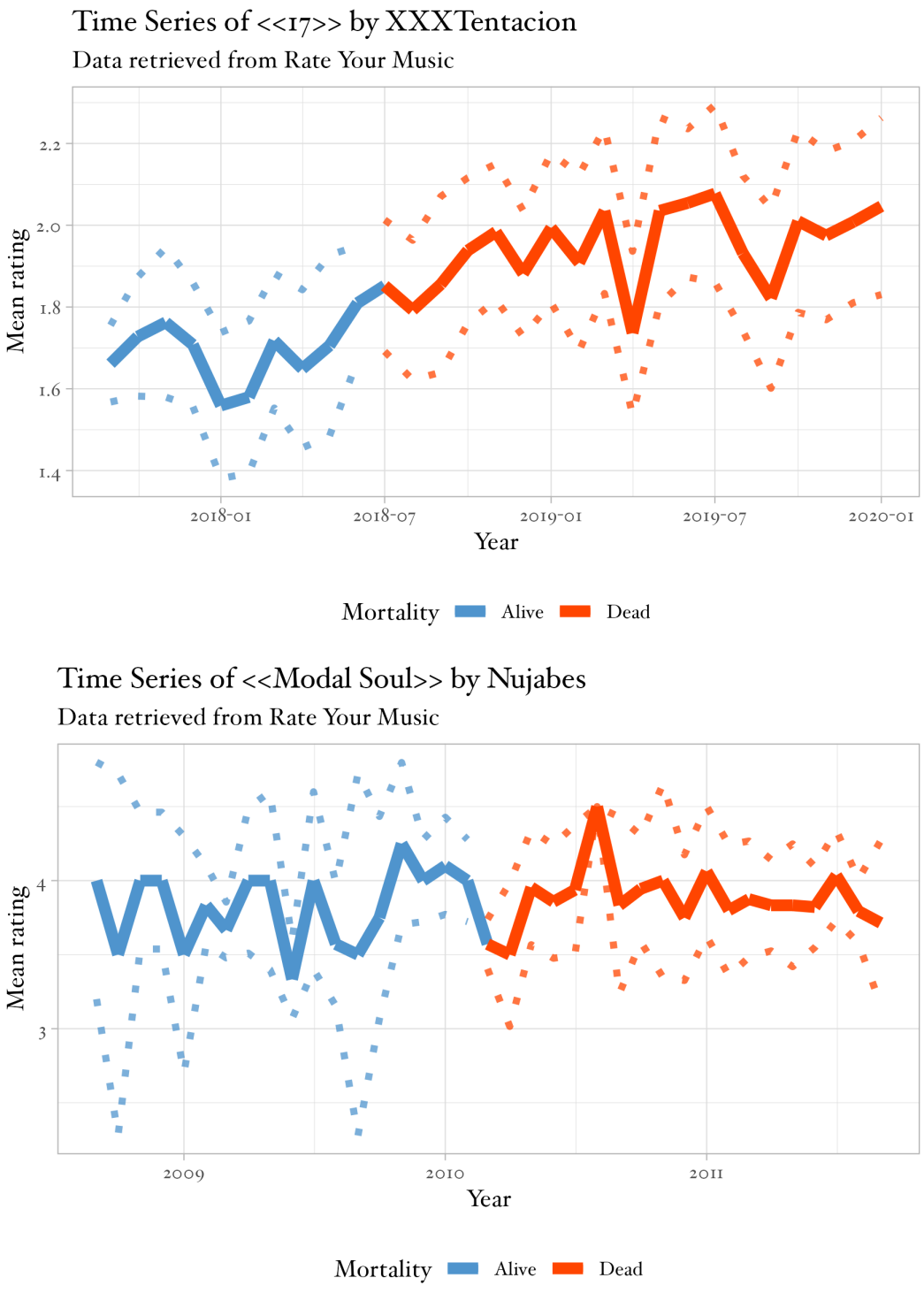


Figure 3 shows how the mean monthly ratings of XXXTentacion's *17* and Nujabes' *Modal Soul* change over time. In the former, we can observe an upward trajectory in album ratings after XXXTentacion's

death. In the latter, we find that mean monthly ratings hold steady even after Nujabe's passing. What is more, we seem to observe that the death-induced changes in artistic reputation may persist over time – at least, it would appear so in the case of *17*. Are these changes in artistic reputation post-death statistically significant? Do they persist over time? To answer these questions, we turn to the synthetic control estimation strategy outlined above.

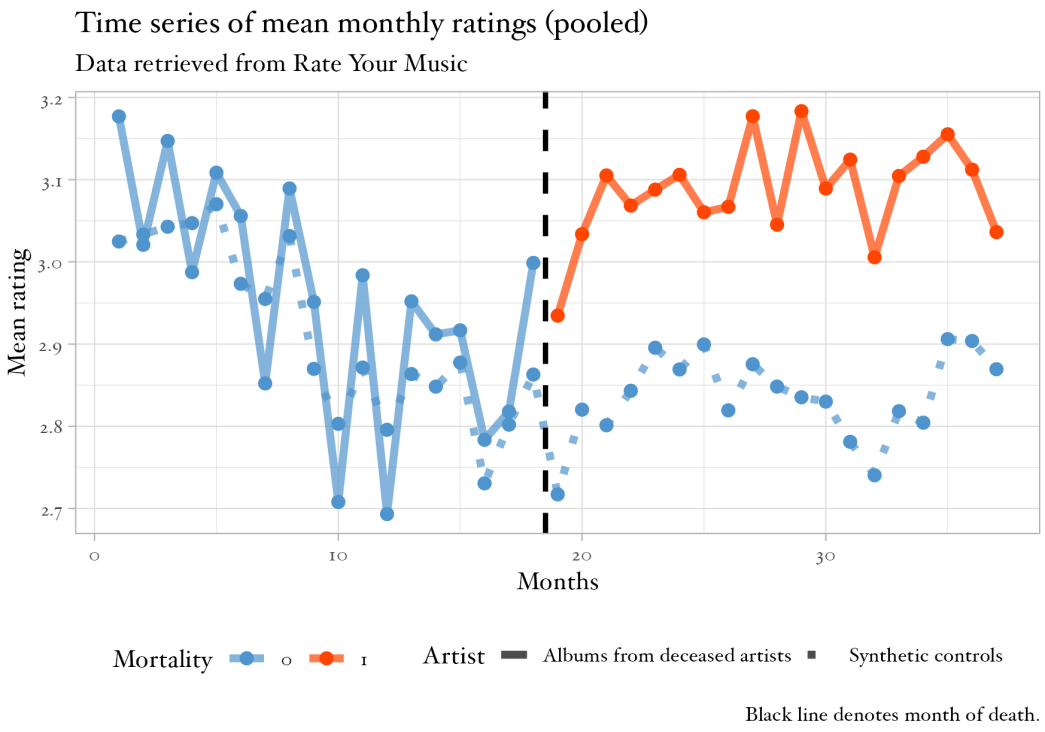
Table 3: Synthetic control estimates of average death effects (pooled)

Time post-death	Est.	P
Short-term (1 month)	0.26**	0.05
Medium-term (6 months)	0.21***	<0.01
Long-term (18 months)	0.16***	<0.01

Figure 10 and Table 3 show the estimates of the average death effect on artistic reputation across all the albums in our sample. We find that death causes an observable inflation in artistic reputation after an artist's death. We find **hypothesis 1A** to be true. On average, an artist's death results in the inflation of their album's ratings by 0.26 points ($p < 0.05$) in the short-term after an artist's death. We also find support for **hypothesis 1B**. Although these death-induced inflations to artistic reputation ameliorate in magnitude over time, they remain statistically significant and differentiable from the synthetic control counterparts. Death-induced inflations of artistic reputation persist in the medium- and long-term after the artist's death. An artist's death results in the inflation of their album's ratings by 0.21 points ($p < 0.01$) in the medium-term after the artist's death. This death-induced inflation continues to persist in the long-term after an artist's death, although it would, on average, have decreased in magnitude to about 0.16 points ($p < 0.01$).

It is important to note that these death-induced changes to artistic reputation are heterogeneous both between and within artists. Table 4 shows the estimated death effect for each album. First, there is heterogeneity between artists. Neither of Nujabes' albums experience any death-induced inflation to monthly ratings; in fact, *Metaphorical Music* experiences a relative decrease in rating of +0.4 points ($p < 0.05$) in the long-term after the death of Nujabes when compared to its synthetic control counterpart. Nipsey Hussle's album similarly stands out from the rest of the albums. Although *Victory Lap* experiences an

Figure 11: Average death effects over time



increase in rating (+0.28, $p < 0.01$) in the short-term after Nipsey's death, this trend quickly ameliorates and indeed reverses by the medium-term (-0.6, $p < 0.01$). Second, there can also be important heterogeneity within an artist's oeuvre. The case of Mac Miller is instructive. Two of Mac Miller's albums, *The Divine Feminine* and *Blue Slide Park*, experienced death-induced inflations to monthly ratings while the remaining two, *Watching Movies With the Sound Off* and *GO:OD AM*, were unresponsive.

Table 4: Synthetic control estimates of the death effect on mean ratings (album-level)

	Short-term		Medium-term		Long-term	
Album	Est.	P	Est.	P	Est.	P
Nujabes						
Modal Soul	-0.14	0.82	0.23	0.23	0.59	0.59
Metaphorical Music	-0.03	0.79	0.11	0.11	-0.4*	0.05
XXXTentacion						
17	0.21*	0.07	0.36*	0.06	0.45***	0.01
Lil Peep						
Come Over When You're Sober, Pt. 1	0.51*	0.10	0.51	0.51	0.38	0.38
Mac Miller						
Watching Movies With the Sound Off	0.33	0.21	0.26	0.26	0.21	0.21
GO:OD AM	0	1.00	0.53	0.53	0.95	0.95
The Divine Feminine	0.2	0.20	0.2**	0.02	0.37**	0.02
Blue Slide Park	0.69*	0.10	0.25*	0.10	0.21*	0.10
Juice WRLD						
Goodbye & Good Riddance	0.02	0.77	0.38**	0.01	NA	NA
Death Race for Love	0.6***	0.01	0.24***	0.01	NA	NA
Nipsey Hussle						
Victory Lap	0.28**	0.01	-0.6**	0.01	NA	NA

Note:
Table figures in "Est." columns are pooled estimates from comparisons against synthetic controls. P-values are pseudo p-values derived from placebo permutation tests. *p < 0.10; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.

Mechanisms behind the death effect

Next, we investigate the mechanisms that might be producing the death effects on artistic reputation we have hitherto assumed. To do so, we consider three dimensions of variation that may help us to explain the mechanisms behind the death effects we've found. To evaluate the plausibility of sympathetic censoring and eulogizing as mechanisms behind the death effect, we decompose changes ratings into three constitutive buckets, and ask if negative ("bad") ratings or positive ("good") ratings are particularly affected by deaths. To evaluate the plausibility of audience shift, we consider death's effects on other important moments of the distribution. To evaluate the plausibility of death as a costly signal of authenticity, we explore the variation in the death effect among subgenres and among different types of deaths.

Evaluating sympathetic censoring and eulogizing

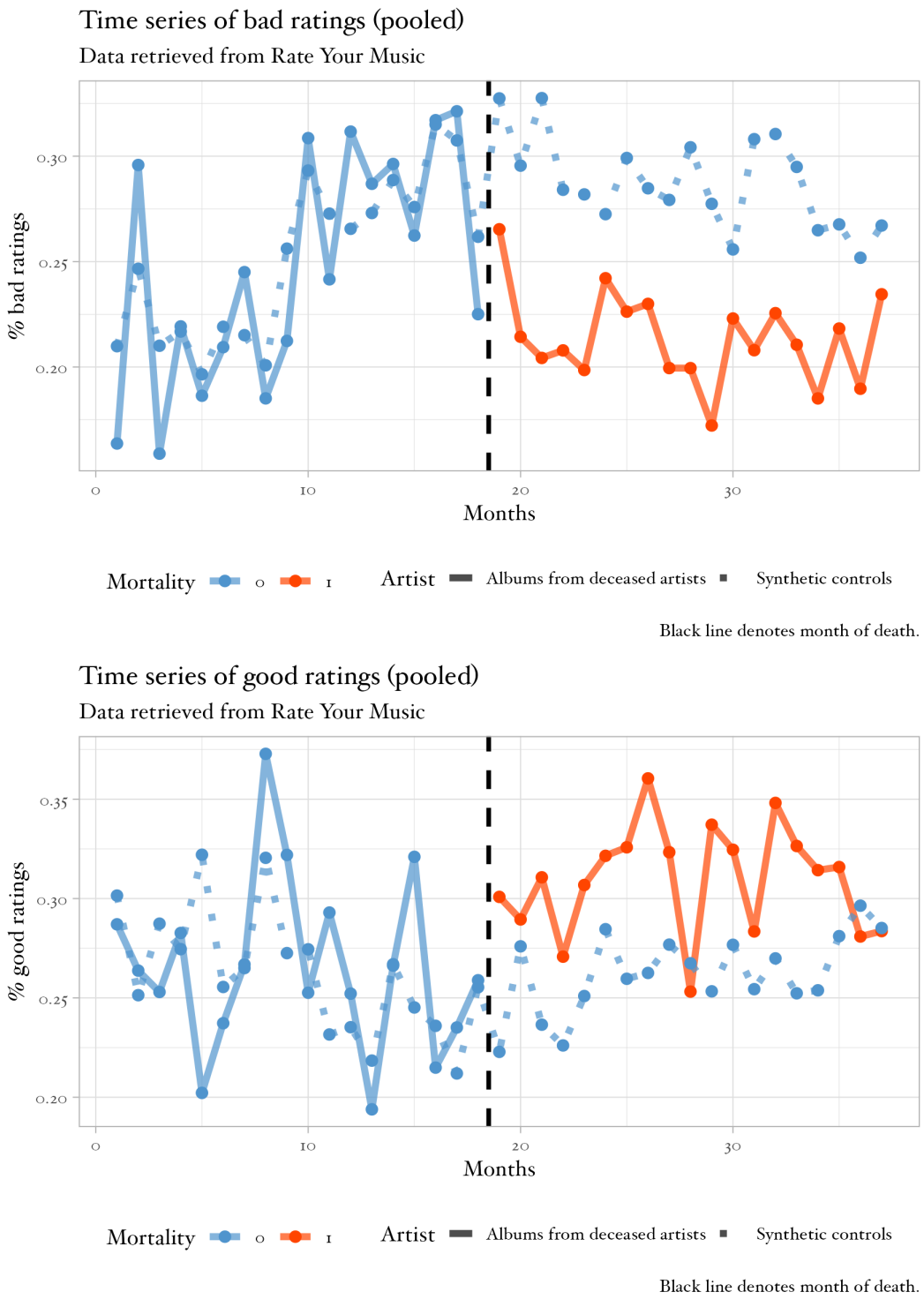
First, we examine the plausibility of sympathetic censoring and eulogizing as mechanisms driving the death effect. **Hypothesis 2A** argues that the death effect is caused by sympathetic censoring, which should be observed through a decrease in the proportion of bad ratings album receives after the death of an artist. Figure 12 and Table 5 shows estimates of how, on average, the proportion of bad ratings and good ratings received changed after an artist's death.

Table 5: Changes in proportions of good and bad ratings

Time post-death	Est.	P
Bad ratings		
Short-term	-0.09	0.15
Medium-term	-0.08***	0.01
Long-term	-0.03	0.26
Good ratings		
Short-term	0.02	0.13
Medium-term	0.06	0.39
Long-term	0.01*	0.09

We begin by testing **hypothesis 2A**. We find that there is a measurable average sympathetic censoring effect across the albums in our sample, even if the strength of the effect varies over time. On average, there is a 8.0 percent decrease ($p < 0.01$) in the proportion of bad ratings received in the medium-

Figure 12: Changes in proportion of good and ratings after an artist's death



term after an artist passes away. Such sympathetic censoring effects are not consistent over time. Most notably, there is an absence of such sympathetic censoring effects – on aggregate – in the short-term after

the death of an artist, where one might expect such effects to be strongest. Sympathetic censoring may be part of the story behind death-induced inflation of artistic reputation, but not the whole story.

Second, we test **hypothesis 2B**. We argued earlier that the death effect may be caused by sympathetic eulogizing, which should be observed through an increase in the proportion of good ratings album receives after the death of an artist. As with before, we find a measurable average sympathetic eulogizing effect across the albums in our sample, even if they appear milder than the case of sympathetic censoring. We find that, on average, there is a 1.0 percent increase ($p = 0.09$) in the proportion of good ratings in the long-term after the death of an artist. As with before, we find that sympathetic eulogizing effects are not consistent over time. There is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis in both the short- and medium-term after an artist's death.

Finally, we test **hypothesis 2C**. We had argued earlier that sympathetic censoring may contribute more to the death effect on artistic reputation than do sympathetic eulogizing, and that we can observe this by comparing the relative magnitudes of the coefficient estimates obtained. We do find evidence supporting hypothesis 2C. As we see on Figure 5, the magnitude of the differences in bad ratings received between our sample albums and their synthetic control counterparts appears to be consistently greater than the differences in good ratings received. When we look at specific time intervals in the short-, medium-, and long-term (Table 5), we find that magnitudes of coefficient estimates are generally greater with respect to changes in bad ratings compared to changes in good ratings. When it came to the medium-term, there was a large 8.0 percent decrease in proportions of bad ratings received ($p = 0.01$), while there was no statistically significant effect observed among proportions of good ratings. While there was a statistically significant difference in proportions of good ratings but not bad ratings in the long-term, the magnitude of the change is rather small in comparison: a mere 1 percent difference in this case ($p = 0.09$). Still, it's important to note that while sympathetic censoring effects are stronger than sympathetic eulogizing effects, their joint contributions complement on another. This becomes particularly obvious when we look at death effects in the short-term. While there was insufficient evidence to reject the null for either in the short-term, the estimated 9 percent decrease in proportion of bad ratings received ($p =$

0.15) and the estimated 2 percent increase in proportion of good ratings received together produce a statistically significant death effect – the 0.26 increase in mean monthly ratings we had observed in Table 3.

Next, we examine the plausibility of audience shift as a mechanism that's responsible for the observed death effect on artistic reputation. Overall, we find provisional evidence supporting this.

Table 6: Changes in rating count and standard deviation of ratings after an artist's death

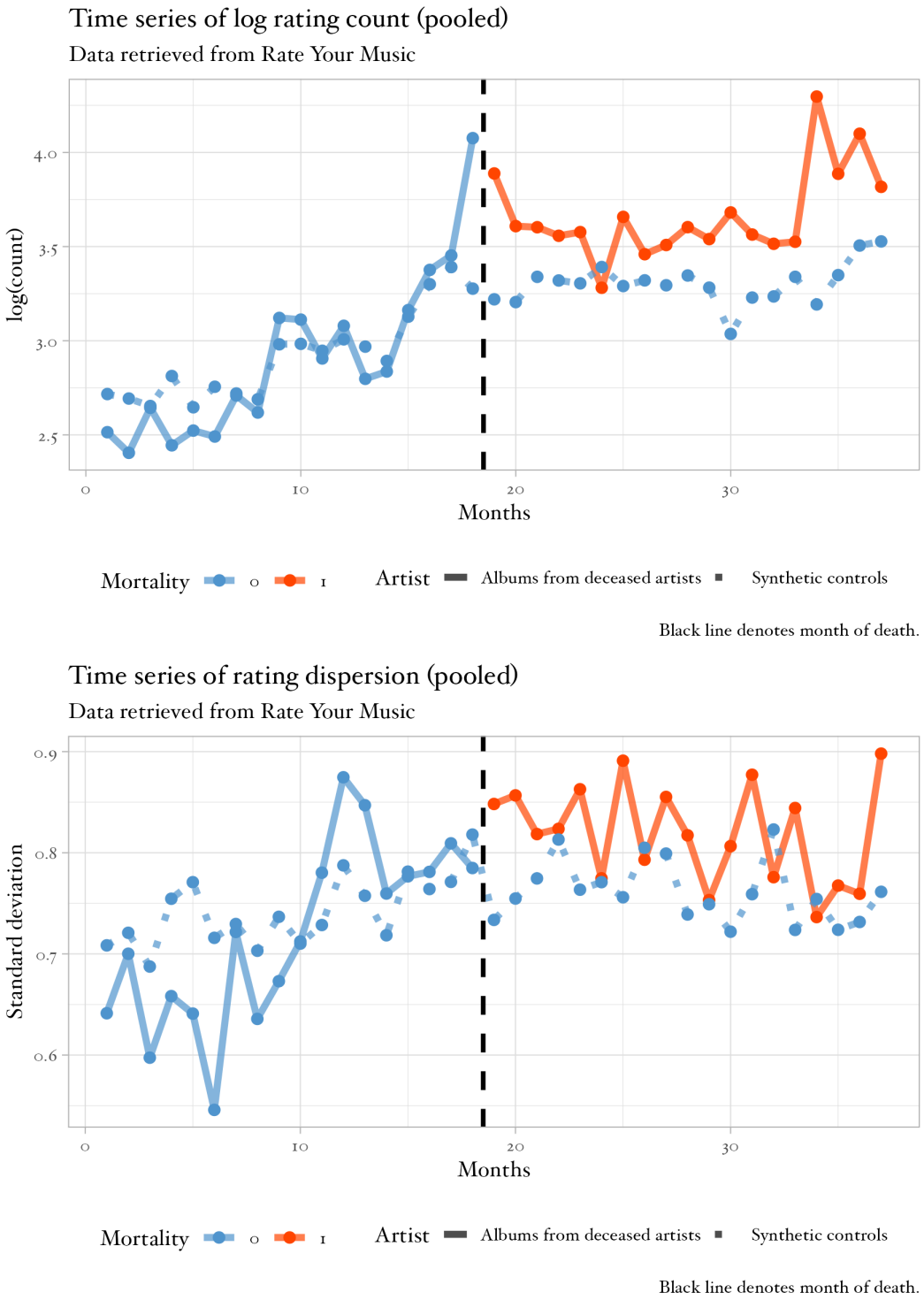
Time post-death	Est.	P
Rating count (logged)		
Short-term	0.39***	<0.01
Medium-term	0.36***	<0.01
Long-term	0.29	0.47
Standard deviation of ratings		
Short-term	0.11	0.15
Medium-term	0.15	0.32
Long-term	0.14	0.41

Table 6 and Figure 13 show how rating counts and the dispersion of audience evaluations change after an artist's death. We find mixed evidence for this. First, we evaluate **hypothesis 3A**. We had argued earlier that post-death audience shifts would be consistent with an increase in the total count of ratings an album receives. This does appear to be so. We find that death induced increases the amount of ratings an album receives. We estimate that, on average, an album gets rated 47.7 percent ($p < 0.01$) more times in the short-term after an artist's death, and 43.3 percent more times in the medium-term after an artist's death. These death-induced changes to rating counts would have diminished to statistical insignificance after 18 months.

Second, we evaluate the plausibility of hypothesis 3B. We had argued earlier conditional on audience shift occurring after the death of an artist, we should expect that the death of an artist would likewise cause a change in the dispersion of ratings an artist receives. We find that the death of an artist produces no statistically significant differences in the standard deviation of ratings their album receives. This is true in the short, medium term, and long-term after the artist's passing. On the face of it, one may be inclined to dismiss this as a simple case of null results, but there is more to it than this. Recall that we had found earlier that albums do receive more ratings in the short- and medium term after an artist's death. Should the underlying distribution stay the same, then we should expect the sample standard deviation we measure to *decrease*. Therefore, we should not simply dismiss the null results we find here –

they remain consistent with what we might expect under a situation of audience shift.

Figure 13: Changes in rating count and standard deviation of ratings after an artist's death



Finally, we ascertain if the death effect can be explained as a case involving the costly signaling of local symbolic capital.

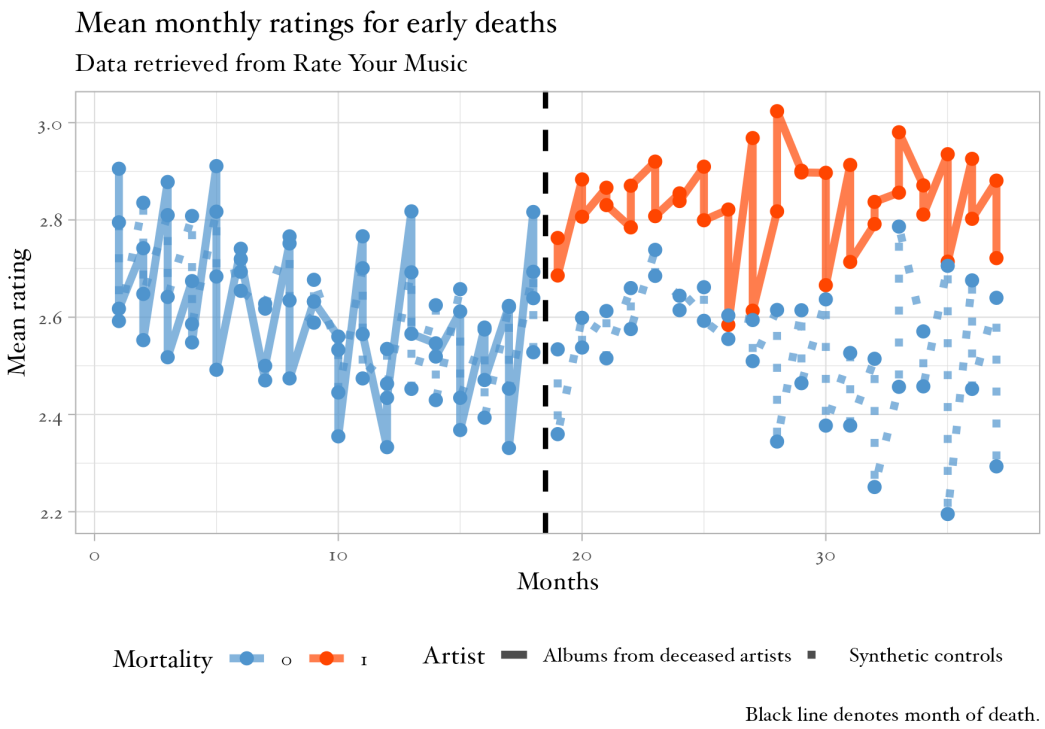
First, we ask if death effects are greater when the deaths involved are early deaths. To do so, we test **hypothesis 4A**. We had argued earlier that death effects on artistic reputation should be greater in magnitude in the case of early deaths because they are more likely to confer local symbolic capital. We find some provisional evidence supporting this. Table 7 and Figure 14 shows how the earliness of an artist's death affects the death effects observed. Among artists who suffered early deaths, we find that their albums received a 0.25 increase (p = 0.01) in mean monthly ratings in the medium-term after their passing. Conversely, among artists who did not die early deaths, we find that their albums' mean monthly ratings experienced a modest decrease of 0.03 points (p = 0.06) in the medium-term after their deaths. This provides some support of the hypothesis that states that early deaths are likely to produce greater death-induced inflations of artistic reputation than non-early deaths.

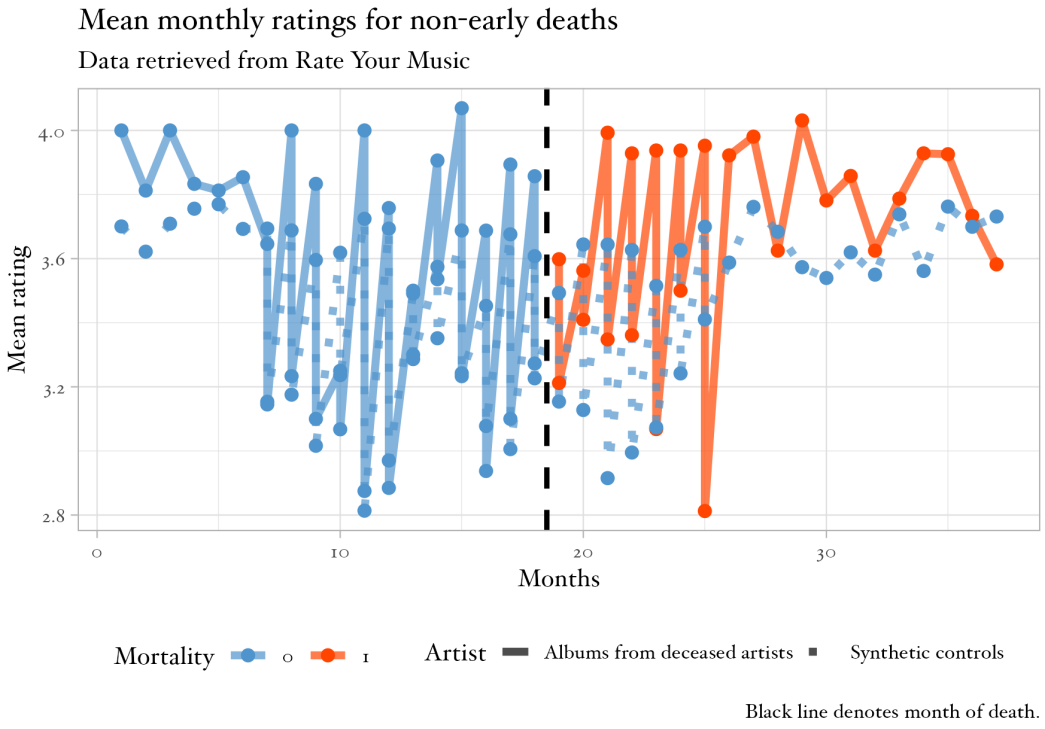
Table 7: Death effects by early death

Type of death	Time post-death	Est.	P
Early	Short-term	0.32	0.27
Early	Medium-term	0.25***	0.01
Early	Long-term	0.27	0.46
Non-early	Short-term	0.04	0.75
Non-early	Medium-term	-0.03*	0.06
Non-early	Long-term	-0.15	0.74

Second, we ask if early deaths are more impactful within different sub-genres of hip-hop. To answer this, we test **hypothesis 4B**. We had argued earlier that, conditional on its creator dying early, the death effect an album experiences is greater in magnitude if it belongs to "street" category of hip-hop subgenres than if it belongs to "decent" category of hip-hop subgenres. Once again, we find mixed evidence supporting hypothesis 4B. Table 8 and Figure 15 show how death effects from early deaths vary across the "street" and "decent" subgenre categories. Our findings for death-effects in the long-term corroborate our hypothesis. We find that early deaths cause a larger death effect among albums in "street" subgenres in the long-term. Among albums in the "street" subgenres, early deaths produce a significant

Figure 14: Average death effects by earliness of death

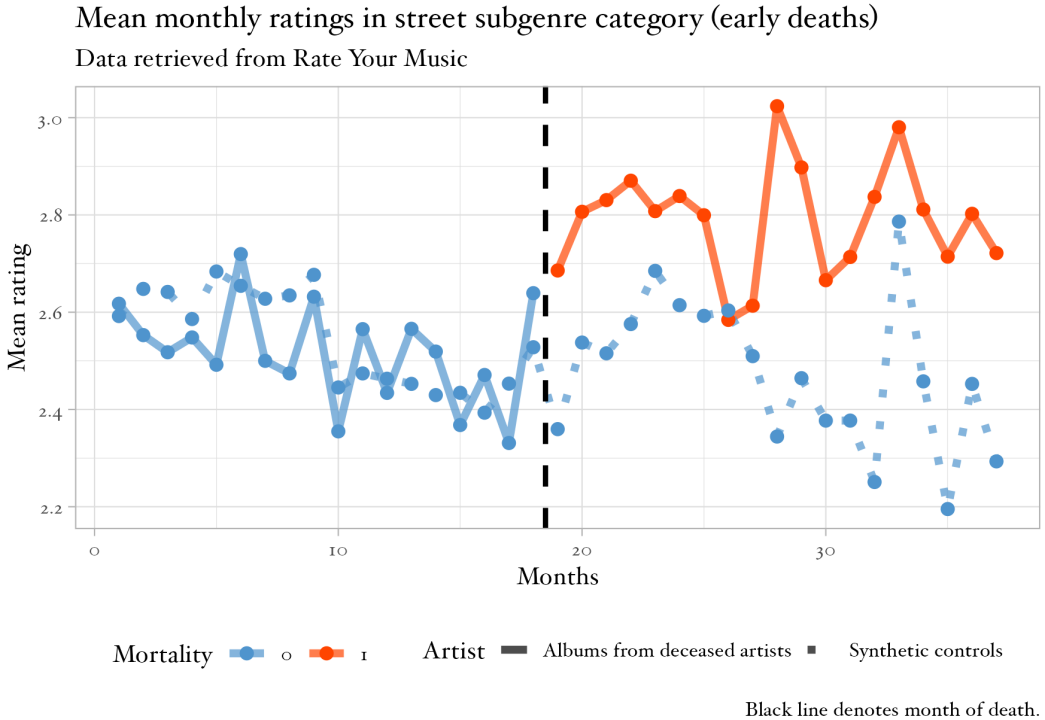




death-induced inflation of 0.43 points (p = 0.08) in the long-term after the death of an artist; among the albums in "decent" subgenres, early deaths produce a smaller death-induced inflation of 0.24 points (p =

0.07) in the long-term after the death of the artist. However, this is not the case for the short- and medium-term. We find that there is insufficient statistical power to discern any death effects in either "street" or "decent" subgenres in the short term. In the medium-term, we only find a statistically significant death effect among albums in the "decent" subgenres. For albums in "decent" subgenres, early deaths produce a death-induced inflation of 0.25 points ($p = 0.03$) in the medium-term after the death of the artist. We are unable to reject the null for the same period when looking at albums in "street" subgenres.

Figure 15: Average death effects by subgenre category (only early deaths)



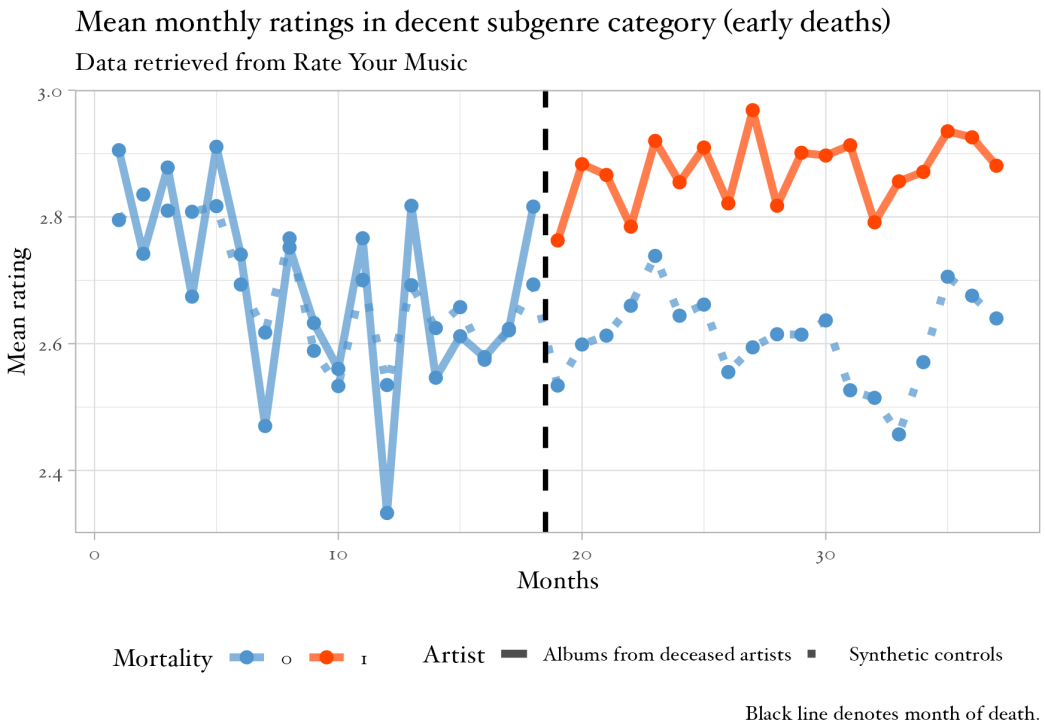


Table 8: Death effects by sub-genre category (only early deaths)

Subgenre cat.	Time post-death	Est.	P
"Decent"	Short-term	0.28	0.18
"Decent"	Medium-term	0.25**	0.03
"Decent"	Long-term	0.24*	0.07
"Street"	Short-term	0.38	0.73
"Street"	Medium-term	0.26	0.34
"Street"	Long-term	0.43*	0.08

Discussion

Death inflates artistic reputations

First, death leads to a significant and enduring inflation to artistic reputation. As with the previous studies that examined death effects on the purchase and consumption of culture (e.g. Ekelund et al. 2000; Maddison & Pederson 2008), we find that death causes an exogenous shock to the evaluations of cultural items. Some, including many emic to the *RYM* community, may find the such death-induced inflation to ratings to be surprising. Many *RYM* users consider themselves music anoraks with more discerning tastes than the average music listener. When we went through the reviews left behind users, we found many that emphasized the "objectivity" of their judgements of taste. They explicitly referenced their unwillingness to let an artist passing influence their reception of the artist's work, no matter how unfortunate or untimely:

> Mr. Peep had a life ahead of himself. What a terrible shame. It is hypocritical to just spout "his death shoudn't [sic] affect the rating" when this website knows first-hand the impact of context in music (very recently with legend David Bowie's passing). I took all of this into account when giving this a bad score. I really, really, really did not enjoy *Come Over When You're Sober, Pt. 1*. (*RYM* user in a review of Lil Peep's work)

> [Lil Peep's *Come Over When You're Sober, Pt. 1*] solidifies the fact that any music becomes more commercially successful and critically elevated when the artist dies, regardless of its intrinsic quality. This is quite simply some of the worst music I've ever heard. (*RYM* user

in a review of Lil Peep's work)

> I'm going to start off this review by saying that I am not one of those people who will blindly glorify artists because they are no longer alive. If they made music that I liked, I would enjoy the music that they made when they were here [...] but what I'm not going to do is say that an artist made good music just because they died. (*RYM* user in a review of Juice WRLD's work)

Some users go as far as to claim that deaths might cause the obverse effect and attract more negative reviews on a site like *RYM*:

> i can absolutely see why the music gets hate, it's very teenage angst, and i wouldn't expect many to be into that. personally, i can't relate to everything in it, but i appreciate it nonetheless [...] i think the way it's become cool to "dunk" on x online in certain circles, especially after he died, is fucking weird. (*RYM* user in a review of XXXTentacion's work)

Contrary to such insisting, however, we find that the death of an artist *does* result in the inflation of the artistic reputation of their antemortem work on *RYM*.

Mechanism I

Second, we try to understand the mechanisms that are responsible to producing such death effects. Earlier, we had argued that there were three mechanisms that could plausibly contribute to any observed death effect: (1) sympathetic censoring and eulogizing, where death causes an audience to suppress their censure or exaggerate their praise of a deceased artist's work, thereby inducing a death effect; (2) audience shift, where an artist's death changes the audience who are consuming and evaluating their work, thereby inducing a death effect; and (3) the costly signaling of authenticity, where the death of an artist confers local symbolic capital, in this case authenticity, to their previous work, thereby inducing a death effect.

On the first, we find strong evidence supporting the efficacy of sympathetic censoring and sympathetic eulogizing. Sympathetic censoring refers to an audience's tendency to censor or suppress

negative evaluation of a cultural article in the aftermath of an artist's passing. On examining user reviews, we find that many *RYM* users themselves are cognizant of such effects from themselves or others:

> That being said however, there is one aspect of his life that I have failed to mention until this point. Jahseh passed away at a young age, effectively ending his career and the chance at any artistic growth not calculated in a toxic and distasteful manner by his record label. The potential of evolution and potential redemption (to those who are willing to accept it) was completely tarnished at that point. As a result of this, when I listen to 17 I feel a great deal of sadness, not because of what he intended to discuss here, but because of everything surrounding this project. (*RYM* user on a review of XXXTentacion's work)

> its fine but not great. i wouldnt recomend it if you like music. only gave it a 5 because you dont want to disrespect the dead (*RYM* user on a review of Lil Peep's work)

As we have shown, these tendencies are not idiosyncratic to the users above, but consistent across the RYM community. On average, we observe an 8 percent decrease in the proportion of bad ratings received in the medium term after an artist's death. In addition, we find that these sympathetic censoring effects are complemented by a sympathetic eulogizing effect. Sympathetic eulogizing refers to an audience's tendency to exaggerate its praise for a cultural article in the aftermath of an artist's passing. Some of the artists included in our sample, such as Nujabes, have become feted figures within hip-hop. Although we are not suggesting that their untimely deaths were responsible for their present status in cultural memory, we do not think it implausible that it contributed in some small way:

> When *17* dropped, I reviled it. I despised the album for underdeveloped songs, poor performances, and dogshit lyrics, an opinion clearly shared by the average RYM user. Upon revisiting the album, however, my views have softened a bit. Do I like this album now? Certainly not. Do I think it's at least somewhat redeemable? [...] Something I wasn't willing to concede when this album came out but I am willing to concede now - at its core, *17*'s blend of emo and hip hop was pretty unique when it entered the mainstream. The subgenre has

> certainly proliferated nowadays, but back in 2017, very few artists were on this wave. So I have to give it props for that, at least. (RYM user on a review of XXXTentacion's work)

> Nujabes has become a significant figure, much more so than we could ever have imagined at the time of his death [...] He's become the kind of figure you're expected to already know about if you're entering discussions about music online. (RYM user on a review of Nujabes' work)

> Oftentimes, when the term "gone too soon" is thrown around, it's used to describe artists with a bevy of respected and acclaimed albums who've already established an iconic legacy to fall back on. With all due respect, one of the very few artists who was legitimately gone too soon was Jun Seba AKA DJ Nujabes. (*RYM* user on a review of Nujabes' work)

We find evidence of modest sympathetic eulogizing effects. On average, an album produced by a deceased hip-hop artist experiences a increase of 1 percent in proportion of good ratings received in the long-term. While these sympathetic eulogizing effects are milder than sympathetic censoring effects, they cannot be wholly dismissed – their joint contributions are responsible for death effects in the short-, medium-, and long-term that we find.

Mechanism II

On the second, we find provisional evidence supporting audience shift as a mechanism behind death effects in artistic reputation. Audience shift refers to the changes in size and composition of an evaluative audience following an artist's death that in turn affects the distribution of evaluations an album receives. The death of an artist attracts reviewers to albums that they might not otherwise have checked out or heard of. When reading extended reviews, it wasn't uncommon to come across reviewers who'd lament on the fact that they had not heard of the artist prior to their passing:

> Another entry on the list "Brilliant Musicians Who Died Before I Ever Even Heard Of Them." (*RYM* user on a review of Nujabes' work)

Sometimes, the death of an artist serves as an impetus to check out a work that a user would have otherwise missed. Albums sometimes gained admirers this way:

> I'll admit the album didn't catch my ears until I watched his incredible NPR Music *Tiny Desk Concert* the evening the news of his death arrived. I noticed how striking the melodies are, how his singing seems to finally click and the soulful take on hip hop he's been working on for years seems to finally come together. When I revisited the album itself the intricacy of his production slowly opened up for me and was what really hooked me. Incredibly lush and detailed but also with just the right amount of hard-hitting, it's the pinnacle of his sound. Major talent like Dev Hynes, DJ Dahi, Thundercat and Flylo contribute, but it's clear that it is fully Mac's vision. (*RYM* user on a review of Mac Miller's work)

Conversely, some users would also make mention of the (in-their-view) Johnny-come-lately reviewers that are attracted by the recent passing of an artist:

> So, I figured I'd step in and drop a review before this album gets bolded by all the people discovering Nipsey Hussle following his death. (*RYM* user on a review of Nipsey Hussle's work)

We find that, on average, the death of an artist does leads to an increase in total number of ratings an album receives in the short-term by about 47.7 percent, and in the medium-term by about 43.3 percent. While we do not find any death-induced changes to the dispersion of ratings received, this null result does not necessarily defy our theory of audience shift. As we mentioned in our results section, we should expect the sample standard deviation to decrease when the count of ratings is increase. The fact that it doesn't implies that the distribution from which ratings are effectively drawn has changed – this comports with audience shift as a mechanism driving the death effects on artistic reputation.

Mechanism III

Finally, we find provisional evidence supporting the fact that the early death of an artist acts as a costly signal of local symbolic capital. We had argued earlier that the death effect on the artistic reputation. can be partially explained by the fact that certain types of deaths, such as early deaths, function as a costly signal of the artist's "authenticity" bona fides. When reading through user reviews, it was common to find reviews expressing the sentiment that the early death of an artist changed the meaningfulness of their antemortem work. One *RYM* user put this across particularly beautifully in a review of Mac Miller's albums:

> The death of Mac Miller of an overdose will cast a retroactive light over every impression that this project creates, and it should– Swimming is a mournful record, made more so by his passing [...] Nothing in here reads as a suicide note, but the attitude that lead to his self-destruction is apparent in its hazy dissociation. (*RYM* user on a review of Mac Miller's work)

Many times, the death of an artist led to a dramatic change in a user's evaluation of their work. Many user reviews made explicit references to the artist's death, and their subsequent about-turns in judgements:

> [XXXTentacion's] album truly connects to me now knowing that X is died, knowing that his message can truly be heard is whats beautiful about this album. I know this album was hated on so much during its initial release, as the lyrics are cliche and sometimes even cringy. But truly knowing what X what [sic] true, the terrible things he did and how misunderstood he was makes this album a true masterpiece. (*RYM* user on a review of XXXTentacion's work)

> When I first heard Lil Peep, I, like many, assumed he was one of a litany of rappers using depression as a fashion statement. It was trendy, it sold, and I figured Lil Peep, with his incredibly poppy and simplistic lyrics revolving around these subjects, was milking it for all it's worth. It certainly had a more authentic spin on the 'emo' sound than his contemporaries,

> but that didn't really sell it for me. Upon Lil Peep's passing, myself and many other skeptics and cynics realized Peep was a kid who was going through a lot that was trying to make a lighthearted take on some pretty heavy stuff weighing on his mind. (*RYM* user on a review of Lil Peep's work)
>
> I've been playing this several times a day lately, I totally 180d man I love this now. I originally thought it sounded forced but his passing caused me to take a second look into him and I even talked to a local photographer who knew him and it made me rethink the songs and where they came from. [...] And the crazy thing I'm still processing is that the songs are about drug use and dying young and then he died young from drug use, like the shit was scripted. It's crazy to see this kind of thing happen in front of you. In high school I would read about it in rock magazines as this romanticized thing and then to see it happen is just tragic and a shame. (*RYM* user on a review of Lil Peep's work)

To see if early death has such costly signaling effects, we see if death effects on artistic reputation. are greater in the case of early deaths (compared to non-early deaths). We find that this does appear to be so. When artists suffered early deaths, their albums experienced a 0.25 rating increase in the medium-term; conversely, when they did not, they actually experienced a minor 0.03 decrease in rating in the medium-term. What is more, we find that the costly signaling effects from early deaths are differentiated across subgenres of hip-hop. Artists in "street" subgenres of hip-hop are more likely form the costly signaling of early death in the long-run. While costly signaling effects are greater among albums in "decent" hip-hop subgenres in the short- and medium-term, this trend crucially reverses over time. In the long-term, it is albums from "street" subgenres of hip-hop that experience the greater death-induced inflations in artistic reputation.

Conclusion

In a recent video essay, Anthony Fantano of *The Needle Drop*, described as "the only music critic who Matters if you're Under 25" by the New York Times (Coscarelli 2020), revisited *Swimming*, an album from the late Mac Miller that was released just two months before his passing. [23] When *Swimming* was first released in 2018, Fantano had panned the album as "about as fun as rush-hour traffic." Five years later, Fantano noted that his feelings on the album had changed:

> This is a redux review, a re-review. [*Swimming*] is a record whose context changed greatly in a very short span of time. Just a month after the album's release, Mac Miller passed away in what was said to be an accidental drug overdose. Suddenly the record's themes of inner demons, depression and substance abuse came into a fuller and much more intense view. *Swimming* became not just another record in a young artist's growing catalog but Mac Miller's final statement. At the time I didn't really care for it. [...] With time passing, it's easier to go into this album now with different expectations and a different mindset, and appreciate this album not just for emotions Mac put into it [...] In retrospect there is definitely credit I should be giving to these tracks. (theneedledrop 2023)

As we have shown in the paper thus far, Fantano's change of heart with respect to *Swimming* is far from an anomaly. The death of an artist produces a profound and enduring change in their artistic reputation. We can observe this through the changes in the audience evaluation of their antemortem work. The death of an artist, on average, results in the durable inflation of the artistic reputation of their work. Such death-induced inflation of artistic reputations can be attributable to three mechanisms. First, audiences have a tendency to perform sympathetic censoring and eulogizing after an artist's death. We observe both the suppression of censure as well as the exaggeration of praise after an artist's passing. Second, the death of an artist produces an audience shift, changing the size and composition of the evaluative audience. Such changes in the audience change the distribution of evaluations received. Thirdly, the death of an artist can function as a costly signal of authenticity. Authenticity is a variety of symbolic capital that is highly

[23] *Swimming* was excluded from our analysis because it was released just a month before the Mac Miller's death.

valued in the field of hip-hop. We find that early deaths are more likely to confer authenticity, and that such early deaths within "street" genres of hip-hop are more likely to result in durable changes in artistic reputations.

Our work has three important implications for our understanding of posthumous reputation-making, the semiotic dimensions of death, and the reciprocal relations between cultural production and reception. First, we find that the death of an artist causes an immediate and enduring changes in their artistic reputation. Reputations respond different to the death of an artist as do other important outcomes. Previous studies have found that deaths cause real but fleeting changes in consumption behavior around a deceased artist's work. For example, Ekelund et al. (2000), Matheson & Baade (2004), and Maddison & Pederson (2008) all find that the death of an artist produces a clustered rise in the value of an artist's artwork immediately after their death, but such death-induced changes are temporary effects that ameliorate in the long-term. Contrary to these studies, we find that the death effects on artistic reputation are persistent and long-standing. In this respect, our findings echo Azoulay et al.'s (2019a) and Chan et al. (2019) findings that deaths can often stimulate long-last changes to the reputation trajectories of a deceased artist's work.

Second, we find that the symbolic meanings associated with the death of an artist contribute in important ways to the death-induced inflation to artistic reputation that we found. There are at least two ways the symbolic meanings of death matter. One, there are cultural norms that dictate what constitutes polite or appropriate behavior after an artist's passing. These norms functions as constraints around evaluative behavior. The death of an artist results in an audience's tendency to suppress criticism or censure directed towards the artist's work; conversely, it also encourages an audience to exaggerate its evaluation of such work's merit. Two, deaths also directly communicate meaningful information to an audience. We find that in the case of hip-hop, death, in particular early deaths, function as a costly signal of an artist's "authenticity", a variety of symbolic capital that is highly sought-after and which has a interpretation that is local to hip-hop. Because claims of authenticity are frequently fabricated by artists, audiences in hip-hop are on the look out for credible signs of an artist's authenticity. The credibility of a

signal rests often on its costliness. Early deaths, being as they are the costliest claims of all, can function as a poignant signal of an artist's authenticity to an evaluative audience. We find evidence supporting this. Early deaths produce greater death-induced changes in artistic reputation. They are also more persistent within subgenres of hip-hop that most valorize such local symbolic capital.

This leads to our study's final implication with respect to the rules of the game implicit to cultural fields. The reciprocal relations between cultural reception and cultural production are well-known. What then might the presence of such death-induced inflation on artistic reputations mean for cultural producers? On one hand, you could see such death effects as benevolent at best and benign at worst for cultural producers. Should a young talented artist pass away before their time, it surely cannot be a bad thing that we, as an audience, take their early passing into account in a gracious way. In a time of grief, one might think that we can and should relax our standard in the face of tragedy; inflate our judgements, and so on. On the other hand – and this is our claim – such death-induced inflation on artistic reputation reveal some of implicit rules in cultural fields. We could view such death effects as one particularly poignant manifestation of the costly qualities and attributes that cultural fields demand of artists: audience desire and reward costly acts of commitment from their artists. To make art that others consider great, an artist must put themselves in physical if not mental jeopardy. To make great hip-hop music, an artist ought to live "authentically" and dangerously. These seem like pernicious incentives to aspiring cultural producers. We want to make clear that we do not think that artists strategically die for the sake of artistic reputation. However, it is quite plausible that artists, when in pursuit of artistic reputation, may engage in activities that put themselves in mortal jeopardy. The "autodestructive homages" that hip-hop artists engage in to credibly demonstrate their authenticity are often dangerous, exposing artists to heightened risks of mortality (Harkness 2014; Stuart 2020). Such artists mean to tread nimbly on a knife's edge. But the edge is thin, and people slip. And when they do, we confer them inflated evaluations. Should we?

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Essay 3:

Denunciations and Scandals in a Cultural Market

Abstract

Public attempts to call-out, denounce, or "cancel" individuals and organizations for alleged moral transgressions have become routine occurrences in contemporary cultural industries. For want of a better term, this "cancel culture" has become and remains a flashpoint in the public sphere. In this study, we understand such actions as instances of public denunciations. These public denunciations frequently, but not always, cascade into scandals that disrupt their local fields in eventful ways. As of yet, there is little empirical research that provides a broad descriptive account of such denunciations, how such denunciations develop into scandal, or of how key actors and even the field itself are affected and transformed by these scandals. In this study, we examine denunciations and scandal within a particular cultural market, that of Anglophone young adult (YA) fiction 2015-2019. To do so, we construct a novel denunciation-scandal event data set that links three disparate types of data: (1) unstructured text and social media metrics from Twitter, (2) newspaper archival data from mass circulation newspapers, and (3) book sales data. After estimating a Poisson fixed effect model, we find that the the negativity of Twitter discourse around a writer is positively associated with media attention to alleged transgressions committed by the same writer. We find evidence of an *anonymity discount*: the negativity of Twitter discourse around a writer from verified sources are positively associated with higher media attention. We also find evidence for an *agitprop effect*: the political orientation of a newspaper moderates the relationship between Twitter discourse and media attention. Finally, we find that the direct effects of scandal are heterogenous by the types of transgressions involved. Comparing cumulative abnormal returns across relevant cross-sections, we find negative direct effects of scandal to be exclusive to cases involving field-specific norm transgressions (e.g. the alleged inclusion of "age-inappropriate" content).

Key words: *denunciations*, *scandal*, *event history analysis*, *cumulative abnormal returns*

Introduction

Public attempts to call-out, denounce, or "cancel" individuals and organizations for alleged moral transgressions have become routine occurrences in contemporary cultural industries. In this study, we understand such actions as instances of public denunciations in public discourse. Public denunciations frequently, but not always, cascade into scandals where the norm transgressions in question are publicized by the mass media. In this study, we examine public discourse that is known to contain public denunciations, Twitter discourse among the young adult fiction community. We conduct a two-part analysis that begins with an analysis of how such denunciatory public discourse contributes to the publicization of norm transgression, before considering how such publicizations directly affect the livelihoods of the writers implicated within them.

In the first part of the analysis, we use a deep learning classifier to measure the discourse valence and discourse entropy associated with the public discourse of writers who are implicated in scandals. We then use a Poisson fixed effects model to estimate their relationship to subsequent media coverage of alleged norm transgressions. We find the following. (1) The negativity of Twitter discourse around a writer is positively associated with media attention to alleged transgressions committed by the same writer. (2) We find evidence for an *anonymity discount*. Anonymity moderates the relationship between Twitter discourse and media attention. The negativity of Twitter discourse around a writer from verified sources are positively associated with higher media attention. The discourse entropy around a writer from pseudonymous sources are positively associated with higher media attention. (3) We find evidence for an *agitprop effect*. The political leanings of a newspaper moderates the relationship between Twitter discourse and media attention. Only for center-leaning and conservative-leaning newspapers do we find negativity of Twitter discourse around a writer to be positively associated with media attention. What is more, this association is stronger in magnitude for conservative-leaning newspaper then for center-leaning ones. In the second part of the analysis, we ask if and how a scandal affects the young adult fiction writers implicated in them. Drawing on the literature on event analysis from economic sociology, we measure and test for the cumulative abnormal returns in book sales for each of the works whose authors are implicated in

widely-publicized allegations of norm transgressions. (4) We find that, on average, young adult fiction writers who are implicated in scandals do not experience statistically significant changes in book sales. (5) This is largely attributable to heterogeneity in the direct effects of scandals across transgression types. Within our sample, the negative direct effects of scandal are exclusive to scandals involving field-specific norm transgressions, and not field-agnostic norm transgressions.

This study draws upon theoretical insights from the sociology of morality and methodological innovations from the computational social sciences to examine a social phenomenon of significant public and scholarly interest — "cancel culture." Public attempts to call-out, denounce, or "cancel" individuals and organizations for alleged moral transgressions have become routine occurrences in contemporary cultural industries. While "cancel culture" is an ill-defined concept, the public denunciations and scandals that are associated with it are not. Indeed, they are both longstanding subjects of study among sociologists of morality and culture. Sociology has a rich tradition of studying moral phenomena stretching most notably back to Durkheim (Hitlin & Vaisey 2013), yet this theoretical tradition has rarely been put in conversation with the computational turn in the social sciences (Lazer et al. 2020). We try to put these big ideas up against big data to good effect by building upon the concepts of the public denunciation and the mediated scandal (Thompson 2000; Adut 2008; Bergemann 2019). Using methodological innovations from the computational social sciences and digital trace big data, we intend to establish a broad descriptive picture of what public denunciations and mediated scandals look like in a cultural field frequently associated with "cancel culture," that of Anglophone young adult fiction. As we do so, we also intend to extend our understanding of how scandals emerge, a long-standing line of inquiry in the sociology of morality (e.g. Bergesen 1977; Ben-Yehuda 1980; Adut 2005). We do so by specifying how specific mechanisms, such as the anonymity, embeddedness, trust, and political polarization, mediate the development of public denunciations into scandal.

This study contributes to the economic and organizational sociology literature on how scandals and organizations by examining the direct effects of scandal. There is an enormous body of literature in the organizational and economic sociology literature that speaks broadly to how actors in competitive

markets are affected by scandal. While this literature lately has focused on the spillover effects of scandal (e.g. Devers et al. 2008; Jonsson et al. 2009; Piazza & Perretti 2015; Barlow et al. 2018; Naumovska & Zajac 2021), there remains much that we do not know about the direct effects of scandals. As Azoulay et al. noted (2017), few empirical studies document the consequences of losses from scandals. This can be a problematic elision because scandals are heterogenous. As Fine puts it, "[Some scandals] have large repercussions, while others are passing fancies; some change their focus and their implications as they develop; and some involve heated disputes as to what the scandal is, even leading the scandal proponent to be attacked" (Fine 2019). It follows that scandals are similarly heterogeneous in the breadth and depth of the reputational risks they pose; their direct effects may not be as homogenous as theories of organizational stigma assume.

Finally, this study contributes to the sociology of culture through the creation of a novel longitudinal event-data set that measures both cultural production and cultural reception over time. Contemporary scholarship in the sociology of culture tend to stress the codependence of production and consumption side processes in the creation of cultural objects (e.g. DiMaggio 1987; Kaufman 2004). Recent studies (e.g. Childress 2019) have done a great deal in extending our understanding of how reception and production relate to each other, but they have tended to be singular case studies. In future projects, we plan to use the same data set to examine how status loss affects actors and organizations in cultural fields. Much of the literature on status within cultural fields has focused on processes of consecration: how honor is awarded, reputations are made, and status and worth legitimated and so on. Scandals, through processes of stigmatization, tend to afflict status loss on the subject of a scandal, and thus gives us some purchase into how reputations are unmade in cultural fields.

Literature review

Public attempts are calling out, denouncing, or "canceling" individuals and organizations for alleged norm transgressions have become routine occurrences in contemporary cultural industries. For want of a better term, this "cancel culture" has become and remains a flashpoint in the public sphere. Such public denunciations have otherwise been described and conceptualized as cancel culture (Clark 2020), call-out culture (Matei 2019), outrage culture (Crockett 2017), online shaming (Ronson 2015), online aggression (Rost et al. 2016), digital vigilantism (Trottier 2020), and digitized moral entrepreneurism (Ingraham & Reeves 2016). In this study, we understand such actions as instances of public denunciations in public discourse. A public denunciation occurs when an individual, the accuser, makes an accusation of an alleged transgression by another individual, the accused, to a concerned public. Public denunciations frequently, but not always, cascade into scandals that disrupt their local fields in eventful ways.

To better understand these, we study public discourse in the young adult fiction Twitter community. We choose young adult fiction as our site of study because it is a field with a robust online community that has acquired a reputation for recurrent spates of denunciations and scandals. Young adult fiction, or "adolescent fiction," is a genre of fiction written specifically for adolescents in their early teenaged years, aged 11 to 15. Works commonly classified as YA fiction include such works like *Anne of Green Gables*, the *Harry Potter* series, and *The Fault in Our Stars* (Trites 2014). The readership of YA fiction includes both adolescent and adult readers (Belbin 2011). The YA fiction readership is majority female; Anglophone YA fiction writers are majority white and female (Rawson 2011; Bold 2018). High profile online campaigns that publicize and shame individuals for perceived moral transgressions have become so routine within the field that YA fiction has commonly been featured as the poster child of "cancel culture" (Senior 2019; Waldman 2019; Bouvier 2020). Many of such public denunciations occur on Twitter, a social networking platform that is highly popular among members of the YA fiction writers. The online milieu of YA fiction writers has been described as one that "regularly identifies and denounces books for being problematic" (Rosenfield 2017), whose "determination to pinpoint and eradicate books deemed problematic is relentless" (Okuniewska 2017), and where "ideologues have far more power than

moderates. They have more followers; their tweets get more traction; they set the terms of their neighborhood's culture and tone" (Senior 2019). In anonymous interviews with journalists, industry insiders have been described as highly wary of these public denunciations (Benedictus 2019).

How public denunciations become scandals

It's not clear how and when contemporary public denunciations contribute to and become scandals. Much of the previous scholarship on denunciations has focused on their practice within the context of authoritarian states (Gellately 2001), such as that of Nazi Germany (Bergemann 2017), Bolshevik Russia (Fitzpatrick 1996), the French Revolution (Lucas 1996), the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Yang 2021), the Spanish Inquisition and Romanov Russia (Bergemann 2017). We know less about contemporary public denunciations. Public denunciations differ from their "classical" counterparts in at least two major ways. First, contemporary public denunciations are not addressed towards formal institutional authorities but rather towards a public of peers (e.g. Hindman 2008; Rambukkana 2015). Second, contemporary public denunciations are supported by novel technological platforms. Denunciations are practices whose character are refracted by the medium through which they are addressed (Garfinkel 1956). The novel media platforms through which public denunciations are expressed change how disapproval is expressed, how denunciatory claims are spread, and expressions of credibility (Thompson 2000).

The scandal is not a clearly defined category. In both academic and popular usage, "scandal" is used to refer to grossly disreputable actions, events or circumstances that often offend moral sentiments or the sense of decency (Thompson 2000), but explicit definitions of what a scandal is, what makes a particular case "scandalous" are often elided.[24] This poses a knotty measurement problem for positivist studies of scandal: how do we count what we cannot precisely identify? Recent theorists of scandals have come to understand scandals simply as a publicized moral transgression. This stresses two particular char-

[24] Examples of studies that study scandal without offering explicit definitions of scandal include Knittel & Stango's (2014) study of how the "Tiger Woods scandal" affects the stock market returns of the golfer's commercial partners, Hope et al.'s (2021) study of "tunneling scandals" in China (tunneling refers to a variety of corporate malfeasance where agents expropriate assets of listed companies through inter-corporate loans), Hansen & Movahedi's (2010) essay on the under socialization of popular analyses of "Wall Street scandals," Goldstein & Eaton's (2021) study of for-profit higher education that more or less takes scandals to be "bad news" about a company, Lom's (2016) study of the Olympic judging scandal in figure skating, Woo's (2019) study of the Ray Rice scandal).

acteristics of scandals. One, scandals involve the conduct, or accusation thereof, a moral transgression. Such moral transgressions typically involve the violation of a norm or moral prescription perceived to be highly important to a community, who are the norm audience (Adut 2005). The moral salience of such transgressions owe to the emic interpretations from the community, thus making scandals necessarily local and parochial phenomena — every scandal must be analyzed with a specific norm audience in mind. Two, these moral transgressions much be widely publicized throughout the norm audience. Exactly what publicity entails can be uncertain. Adut, for example, claims that publicity is achieved "only when members of a public are exposed simultaneously to the information." Elites have historically tended to be the sources of publicization, in party because they are judged as more credible (Adut 2005). In this study, we consider a particular type of scandal, the *mediated scandal*. Mediated scandals are scandals that are constituted by mediated forms of communication (Thompson 2000). Because a mediated scandal is said to have occurred when a subject attracts a significant amount of media coverage for an alleged norm transgression (e.g. Andrews & Caren 2010; Benediktsson 2010), we rely on media attention to alleged norm transgression as our measure of scandal.

The sheer quantity of data means that, for now, it is an intractable proposition to examine Twitter discourse through expert coding.[25] Instead, we will rely on sentiment analysis techniques. Sentiment analysis refers to a class of computational techniques that perform automatic identification of attitudes and emotions that are expressed in short informal texts. Sentiment analysis is commonly, used in related analysis, such as hate-speech detection (Badjatiya et al. 2017; Schmidt & Wiegand 2019), partisan bias (Robertson et al. 2018). We perform sentiment analysis on Twitter public discourse using a deep-learning language model that has been fine tuned on Twitter data (Liu et al. 2019). Sentiment analysis is commonly, used in related analysis, such as hate-speech detection (Badjatiya et al. 2017; Schmidt & Wiegand 2019), partisan bias (Robertson et al. 2018). We use the sentiment label assignments from the

[25]However, we did engage in some limited qualitative coding of Twitter data to better understand the data set. In this exercise, we took a non-random sample S of writers. S comprises of 20 writers who are known to be implicated in scandals, as well as a random sample from 20 of remaining writers. We take a random sample of 2500 tweets from these writers. We use an inductive approach to develop labels, guided by our theoretical conception that public denunciations involve the public implication of a person in a norm transgression. We code for denunciation-related exchanges. Three major analytical categories emerged: they are the (1) denunciatory exchanges, (2) contra-denunciatory exchanges, and (3) distal-denunciatory exchanges.

model to produce measures of discourse valence and discourse entropy.

To begin, we ask two questions. First, we ask if changes in the negativity of the discourse valence surrounding a YA writer are associated with changes in the media attention to norm transgressions they are alleged to have committed.

> **Hypothesis 1A**: The more negative the discourse valence surrounding a YA writer, the more likely they are to be subject to media attention of norm transgressions.

Next, we ask if changes in discourse entropy are associated with changes in the media attention to norm transgressions. We expect the outbreak of a scandal to be associated with a coalescing of public opinion around the norm transgression committed. Changes in discourse entropy may be negatively associated with media attention to alleged transgressions, since a consensus around denunciations may make the denunciations more legitimate and credible, and thus worthier of media coverage. On the other hand, the converse may also be true: dissensus in the public sphere, as in the case of partisan outrage, may attract media interest in and of itself.

> **Hypothesis 1B**: Discourse entropy surrounding a YA writer is negatively associated with changes in media attention to the norm transgressions.

The anonymity discount

Next, we consider how the anonymity of the sources of public discourse moderates these sets of associations. We ask if public discourse coming from anonymous sources are received differently by the mass media than ones from known actors; we refer to such discrepancies as the *anonymity discount*. Anonymity is generally thought to encourage the making of denunciations. Anonymity reduces the personal cost of denunciation for the accuser, protecting them from retaliation. In his study of denunciations, Bergemann (2019) finds that the institutional guarantee of anonymity and protection from retaliation is one of the most effective means through which institutional authorities encourage voluntary denunciations. Yet, while anonymity decreases the expected personal cost of a denunciation for an accuser, it also affects

the perceived legitimacy of the denunciation. A public denunciation must be perceived as legitimate and endorsed by third parties, whether peers or the news media, in the social environment for it to be effective (Jordan et al. 2016). The credibility of a denunciation is commonly thought to be negatively affected by anonymity. Anonymous denunciations are often considered cheap signals since the possibility of retaliation makes it less likely for an actor to make false or opportunistic public denunciations (Turner 1969). It is for this reason that the accusers behind denunciations sometimes voluntarily waive anonymity to lend their claims verisimilitude. In her study of denunciations in Bolshevik Russia, Fitzpatrick (1996) finds that many accusers volunteered their identities to the authorities to distinguish their claims from *anonimki* that were not taken seriously. Hindman (2008) makes similar observations in his study of political scandals on the internet. While the internet allows any internet user to cast denunciations, denunciations from anonymous web sources are only rarely efficacious. The distribution of attention on the internet is highly unequal and long-tailed, such that scandals are generally spread by known entities.

> **Hypothesis 2A**: Anonymity moderates the efficacy of a public denunciation. Discourse valence from verified and pseudonymous actors have different associations with media attention to norm transgression.

> **Hypothesis 2B**: Discourse entropy from verified and pseudonymous actors have different associations with media attention to norm transgression.

The agitprop effect

> "There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself." — Pat Buchanan (1992)

Finally, we look at the agitprop effect. The agitprop effect refers to the tendency among media outlets to selectively cover and report public denunciations in alignment with the outlet's political orientation. In studies of denunciation, it is commonly assumed that legitimacy is a desirable trait that facilitates the success of a denunciation. That is to say, the more credible and legitimate a public denunciation is, the

more likely it is for a mass circulation newspaper to consider it newsworthy and re-broadcast a public denunciation to its reader base. Yet, there is good reason to question this straightforward correspondence. Reports of scandals do not always scale monotonically with increases in actual misconduct (Dziuda & Howell 2021). Media outlets are motivated organizational actors with prior ideological commitments (Thompson 2000). They tend to selectively report stories in service of political interests. The partisan leaning of newspapers affects how much they cover political scandals (Puglisi & Snyder 2011). In his study of media coverage of corporate scandals, Benediktsson (2010) finds that the political leanings of newspapers are reflected in both what scandals a newspaper covers, and how they cover them. Notably, politically liberal newspapers are more likely to cover corporate malfeasance scandals than conservative newspapers.

We argue that a similar agitprop effect may be at work in scandal coverage in young adult fiction. In their model of political scandals, Dziuda & Howell (2021) argue that highly polarized social environments can lead to dishonesty in scandal production. Where there is a high degree of polarization, political parties are more likely to suppress or censor information if the misconduct is coming from a politician aligned with their faction. They also accordingly become more likely to falsely accuse opposition politicians of misconduct. A media outlet having higher standards of legitimacy for public denunciations that are aligned with their political orientation, while having lower standards of legitimacy for public denunciations that run counter to their political orientation. Further, it is likely that the agitprop effect favors the latter rather than the former because false claims have a tendency to spread faster than true claims on the internet (Vosoughi et al. 2018). This tendency is particularly obvious in the media, with the emergence of the "outrage" genre of political opinion media (Berry & Sobieraj 2014).

The "culture war" between key political factions in the United States and United Kingdom has become a cultural phenomenon of significant interest among both popular and scholarly audiences (e.g. DiMaggio et al. 1996; Mouw & Sobel 2001; Crockett 2017; Lazer et al. 2020; Broćić & Miles 2021). Broadly speaking, the cultural war refers to a realignment within the American public, such that the most salient political divide is between two polarized groups with competing moral orientations, one holding a progressivist moral vision and the other a traditionalist moral vision, each of which seeks to impose its

cultural and moral ethos over the other (Hunter 1991). Whether or not there is a cultural war playing out in the American mass public remains an unsettled dispute in the political sciences. Many have rejected the cultural war hypothesis and argued that the American public remains largely moderate; the cultural war embraced by journalists and politics is exaggeration at best and fiction at worst (e.g. Florina et al. 2008). Recent scholarship does suggest that there is growing ideological polarization in the public that was unobserved in the decades before (e.g. Goren & Chapp 2017; Baldassarri & Park 2020). However, there is broad agreement that there is a cultural war being played out among the political elites, most particularly in the mass media (Hunter et al. 2006; Florina et al. 2008). This cultural war among the political elite is fought on many fronts, some of the most notable being school prayer, gun control, climate change, abortion, and LGBT rights (Gore & Chapp 2017). Young adult fiction could be another front of these "cultural wars." Education is a common issue in the cultural war — the imbroglio over critical race theory in schools being a recent example of this. Each of the two factions in the cultural war have a different vision of what normatively good children's and young adult fiction look like, and consequently have different conceptions of what a norm transgression of propriety would look like — indeed we find in our data that the "banning" of allegedly inappropriate children's literature and young adult fiction from schools constitutes a major class of mediated scandals.

In this paper, we make inferences about the agitprop effect by evaluating how political orientations of mass circulations moderate their reception of public denunciations. We test two hypotheses in particular:

> **Hypothesis 3A**: Progressive-leaning, centrist-leaning, and conservative-leaning newspapers' coverage of alleged norm transgression are differently associated with changes in *discourse valence*.

> **Hypothesis 3B**: Progressive-leaning, centrist-leaning, and conservative-leaning newspapers' coverage of alleged norm transgressions are differently associated with changes in *discourse entropy*.

How scandals affect book sales

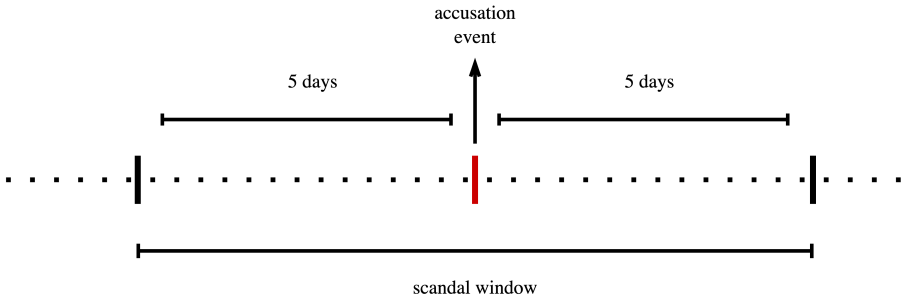
Within studies of cultural, organizational and economic sociology, scandals tend to be treated as an event that poses negative reputational risks for individuals or organizations embroiled in them (Fine 2019). Because of their negative effects on status, reputation and legitimacy, scandals are generally assumed to be inversely related to the routine performances of an agent or organization (Jonsson 2009). This is most clearly articulated by theories of organizational stigma, which argue that scandals begin a labeling and attribution process that leads to the categorical negative evaluation of a scandalized objects and others that are associated with it (Devers et al. 2021). When applied to our context of young adult fiction writers, we may thus expect that any writer who is involved in a mediated scandal should suffer losses in some kind in the cultural market, most saliently in book sales. Yet, there are some reasons to question this straightforward correspondence.

Although much of the recent economic sociology research on scandals have focused on the spillover effects of scandals (e.g. Adut 2005; Jonsson et al. 2009; Paruchuri & Misangyi 2015; McDonnell et al. 2021; Naumovska & Laie 2021), there is still much that we do not know about the direct effects of scandals. As Azoulay et al. noted (2017), few empirical studies document the consequences of losses from scandals. In a recent study of the direct effects of the Tiger Woods scandal, Knittel & Stango (2014) find that the market value of Tiger Woods' sponsors fell substantively after the outbreak of the scandal – but as the authors note, the evidence on the direct effects of scandals is, on the whole, mixed. This can be a problematic elision because scandals are heterogenous. As Fine puts it, "[Some scandals] have large repercussions, while others are passing fancies; some change their focus and their implications as they develop; and some involve heated disputes as to what the scandal is, even leading the scandal proponent to be attacked" (Fine 2019). It follows that scandals are similarly heterogeneous in the breadth and depth of the reputational risks they pose. We posit that there may be significant heterogeneity in the direct effects of scandals among the young adult fiction writers in our samples, so much so that certain writers may even come to benefit materially from their embroilment in a mediated scandal.

To begin then, we ask if and how a scandal affects young adult fiction writers. Drawing on the

literature on the event analysis from economic sociology (e.g. Cowan 1993; McWilliams & Siegel 1997), we measure the cumulative abnormal returns in books sales around the time of a scandal. Cumulative abnormal returns are commonly estimated in event studies within economic sociology, where scholars have used it to examine the effects of scandal and misconduct (Paruchuri & Misangyi 2015; Baker et al. 2019; Naumovska & Laie 2021), corporate name changes (Bosch & Hirschey 1989; Cooper et al. 2001; Wu 2009), and institutional changes in organizations (Eklund & Kapoor 2019; Gatignon et al. 2023) among others. The intuition behind estimation of cumulative abnormal returns is that, assuming an efficient market and the absence of confounding effects, any abnormal market movements that are associated with an unanticipated event can be said to be caused by the event. More specifically, we create a mediated scandal window around the mass publicization of every alleged norm transgression by a YA writer. To do so, we identify an initial accusation event (in our case, the initial mass publicization of an alleged norm transgression) and measure the cumulative abnormal returns over a 10-day scandal event window surrounding the initial accusation event around a scandal (Figure 16):

Figure 16: Construction of a mediated scandal window



We then test the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 4A** Scandals result in cumulative abnormal returns during the mediated scandal window (mass media publicization of an alleged norm transgression).

Next, we examine the heterogeneity in direct effects across scandals. We explore how two sources of heterogeneity, (1) heterogeneity in the kinds of norm transgressions behind scandals and (2) heterogeneity in the genre categorization of the scandalized subjects are associated with changes in the

direct effects of scandals.

Scandals can involve the transgression of a diverse variety of norms. For example, political scandals can be broadly categorized into broadly categorized into three main types involve sexual, financial, or power-related transgressions (Thompson 2000; Herkman 2018). Because these norms hold different import within a field, we may expect there to be heterogeneity in the extent to which a scandalized subject is penalized for their transgressions. Norm transgressions allegedly committed by YA writers in our sample can be broadly sorted into two categories, field-agnostic norm transgressions and field-specific norm transgressions. *Field-agnostic norm transgressions* refer to norm transgressions allegedly committed by young adult fiction writers that would be perceived as such in the social world at large; the norms that are being transgressed are not local to the field of young adult fiction. Field-agnostic transgressions include instances of fraud, sexual misconduct, and hate speech. In total, there were 5 young adult writers who implicated in field-agnostic transgressions in media coverage. Joe S. was accused of making a string of fraudulent claims, among which include a dubious claim to Native American Heritage. S's novel was dropped from the shortlist for PEN Center USA's young adult award as a result of these allegations.

> Numerous controversies have sprouted up around him, including one about a teaching appointment, a literary prize that was rescinded, questions about the authenticity of quotes praising [S.] and accusations that he misrepresented himself as Alaska Native. (from the LA Times, 2017)

> After [S's] nomination was announced, several writers including [M.J.] criticised the decision. [M.J.], who knew Smelcer from the [University] MFA creative writing course, accused him of being a "living con job" in a public Facebook post. "This is the motherfucking fuckery we keep talking about. Why does this always happen? Why do these people keep making the same stupid mistakes?" wrote [M.J.] [M.J.] called "this entire fiasco ... a terrible stain on the reputation and integrity" of the prize. (From the Guardian, 2017)

In another instance of misrepresentation, Jason G. was implicated in a case of "accidental" plagiarism,

where he sold products and profited from the writings of another writer.

> [G.] had become associated with a particular misattributed quotation, and had started selling merchandize featuring said quotation. The line, misattributed to [G.], Paper Towns, was thought to originate from a lesser-known writer, Melody Truong, who had penned the line at the age of 13 on her now-defunct Tumblr page. Truong had been a devotee of [G.]' work and frequently posted quotes of his that she'd make accompanying illustration for. [G.] owned up to the mistake, and committed to sharing royalties with Truong (Dewey 2015).

James A. and Jim D. were accused of sexual misconduct. James A., the author of a popular young adult novel that became a Netflix series, faced allegations of sexual harassment. The allegations received nationwide media coverage. A. denied the accusations and launched defamation lawsuits against accusers:

> [James A.], author of the best-selling novel [A's novel], that became a Netflix series, is seeing an authors' group over allegations that he harassed women. [A's] defamation lawsuit, filed Friday in Los Angeles, contends that his family, creed and reputation were damaged by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and its executive director, Lin Oliver. Oliver told the Associated Press last year that the group had investigated and found [A.] violated its code of conduct. [A.] says both claims are false. (From the St. Joseph News).

Jim D. is another young adult writer whose popular young-adult series is currently being adapted into a film trilogy. He was similarly accused of sexually harassment:

> Utah author [Jim D.], whose young-adult series [D's work] has been adapted into a film trilogy, was dropped by his agent Tuesday after [D.] was accused of sexual harassment. Allegations against [D.] appeared Monday in the comments on a School Library Journal article about abuses in the children's literature industry, where multiple anonymous posters claimed that they'd been harassed by [D.], or seen him harass aspiring female writers or first-time novelists. (From the Salt Like Tribune, 2018)

Finally, a well-known children's writer Jane R. was accused of hate speech due to a series of public posts on social media that were perceived to be transphobic:

> Series author [Jane R.] made headlines earlier this summer with multiple posts online voicing opinions on the trans community that conflated sex with gender and defended ideas suggesting that changing one's biological sex threatens her own gender identity. (From the Washington Post, 2017)

Field-specific transgressions refer to norm-transgressions allegedly committed by young adult fiction writers that are local to the field of young adult fiction writers. This is to say that these norms are particular to the field, although not necessarily in an exclusive sense. The majority of transgressions that are reported in media coverage are field-specific transgressions; in total, there were 17 young adult writers who implicated in field-specific transgressions in media coverage. These field-specific transgressions are all involve disputes over the propriety of the cultural content produced by a YA writer. We have tried to identify as precisely possible the alleged norm a writer is accused of transgressing, but in many cases this is a challenging task because of multiple claims, vague claims, competing claims, and so on. We encountered two particular kinds of field-specific transgressions in our sample. One, there were norm transgressions that involve a writer's inclusion of cultural elements that are profane by a norm audience, or a segment of the norm audience. Some young adult fiction writers, such as Keira M. and Chad C., were accused of including cultural content that was "too dark" or "depressing" for its intended audience. Young fiction writers were also often taken to task for their inclusion of "age-inappropriate" content, such as depictions of sex, drugs, and violence. Alex T's was a case in point. Alex T's work was generally well-received by both the popular audience and critics; however, it was accused of containing age-inappropriate material; a parent complained about the book's discussion of drug use and explicit language:

> But in the city of Katy, Texas, one parent was unimpressed by [T's] frank portrayal of her teenage characters — and Katy Independent School District superintendent Lance Hindt appears to have flouted his district's own policies to pull the book from shelves. The complaint dates to November 6, 2017, at a board meeting for the district; in a recording on the

> district website, a man who identifies himself as Anthony Downs holds a copy of [T's work] and says, "I did read some of the pages. I read 13 pages, and was very appalled." Downs's complaint centers on the book's discussion of drug use and explicit language — and in the video, the school board president can be heard promising that the district's textbook review committee would look into the situation. [...] Some time in the intervening two weeks, Hindt reportedly made the unilateral decision to skip the review process and ban the book districtwide. (Rosenfeld 2017)

The School District superintendent pulled the book from the school library, a decision that upset many others in the school administration. These allegations received nation-wide media coverage. Other writers accused of similar transgressions include Regina S. (LGBTQ inclusion), Sam E. (inappropriate language, depictions of sex and drugs), Rayna R. ("vile profanity") and Gina F (language, depictions of sex).

Two, there were norm transgressions that involve a writer's disrespectful inclusion or treatment of cultural elements considered to be sacred. Often, this involved an interpretation of cultural tradition from marginalized communities that the norm audience perceived to be inappropriate. Eve C. was harshly criticized for her "deeply offensive" use of an invented black vernacular in her work. Kyra D.'s work was described as "racist trash" and "offensive" in early reviews for its portrayal of people of color. Elizabeth R. was accused of disrespectful treatment of venerated Navajo religious beliefs and teachings. Another writer, Amy D., was accused of adopting an offensive "white savior" narrative in her work,

> Last Saturday, an author on Twitter raised concerns about the book with D., 11I'm immediately concerned about an apparently white author not only writing a Gullah character, a very underrepresented and erased people group, but then writing about a Conjure woman....and how/what is she 1hiding in plain sight'?" D. initially defended her book, but on Wednesday, D. posted an apology on Twitter, writing that she had decided to withdraw the book, saying it was a 11misguided attempt." 11I wholeheartedly apologize to those who reached out to me for having to spend their time and energy speaking to me about this issue," she wrote. She ended her apology with a list of 11 young adult fantasy novels by Black authors, urging her

> readers to buy them. (Schaub 2020)

Lorelai M's work attracted similar criticism:

> Just last week, the young adult novel [M's work] by [Lorelai M.], had its glowing write in Kirkus Reviews retracted because a social-media mob took issue with parts of the book that supposedly promote white supremacy and unfavorable assumptions about Muslims. This even though the novel — which won't be published until January — was reviewed by a Muslim woman who is an expert in children's and young adult literature. (From the Wall Street Journal, 2018).

In other instances, writers were accused of including or interpreting solemn and sacred cultural elements in ways that diminish the latter. Ariel Z.'s was criticized for her portrayal of slavery in her debut work:

> Some readers argued that [Z's] depiction of slavery was racially insensitive. It quickly snowballed into an online pile-on, as some commenters who hadn't read the young adult fantasy book expressed outrage about its contents. (From the New York Times 2019)

Some writers, such as Vera R., are accused of committing multiple norm transgressions within a single work (racism and for its insensitive portrayal of chronic pain). Kevin J. (disrespectful treatment of genocide and alleged islamophobia) is another.

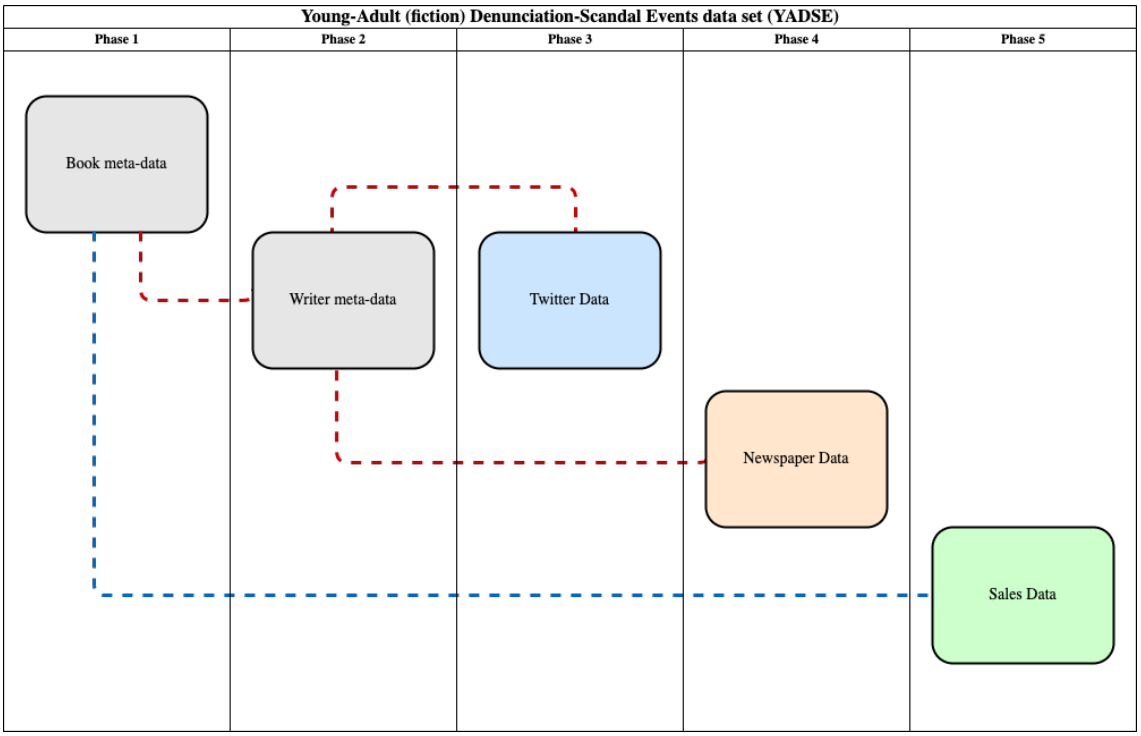
We ask if there are significant differences in the direct effects of scandals involving field-specific and field-agnostic transgressions. More specifically, we test the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 4B**: Field-specific and field-agnostic norm transgressions are associated with different cumulative abnormal returns over a mediated scandal window.

Data

Our data comprises of an unbalanced panel data of young adult fiction writers that most notably tracks (a) the media attention each writer receive from mass circulation newspapers, (b) Twitter discourse particular to each writer, and (c) books sales from 2015 to 2020. This data set comprises five major parts constructed over five phases (see Figure 17). Our final sample frame includes all young adult fiction writers who are active from 2015 through 2020 received media attention for the norm transgressions they were alleged to have committed. In total, there are 22 such writers in our sample.

Figure 17: Data construction



Book data

During phase 1 of data collection, we construct the young adult fiction books data set. This comprises b, a list of all works of YA fiction published from 1/1/2015 to 1/1/2020, along with other book-level descriptors for each book b in B. YA fiction, as with other cultural genres, is a stylized construct. YA fiction is an ill-defined category, particularly when it comes to its boundaries. Some consider YA fiction to be coextensive with "middle-grade fiction" (fiction aimed at readers from the age of 8 to 12), while others

draw a distinction between the two. Others consider YA fiction to be a subcategory of children's fiction. We draw on the classificatory efforts of a prominent book-reading community. A book is considered to be a work of YA fiction if it is classified as such by Goodreads. Each book is assigned a unique book-id, and each writer a unique writer-id. From this process, we have identified at least 6,100 works of YA fiction published during this time. From this, we derive a set of prominent works of young adult fiction. These refer to works in YAB that were reviewed by seven major periodicals in the United States (the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* and *Publishers Weekly*. To do so, we search through all reviews of the hardcover editions of the titles published by the aforementioned periodicals using a boolean keyword query with the author's name as well as the book title. We then manually validated these labels. In total, there are 1861 unique titles written by 1159 unique writers.

We gather a set of ISBNs for each book in B. We retrieve the earliest, English-language, hardcover edition of the book as the representative ISBN of each book b. ISBNs, an initialism for the International Standard Book Number, are product identifiers used by publishers, booksellers, libraries, internet retailers and other supply chain participants for ordering, listing, sales records and stock control purposes (International ISBN 2022). The ISBN identifies the registrant (typically, the publisher or imprint of the book) as well as the specific title, edition and format. ISBNs comprise 5 elements: (1) a prefix element, (2) a registration group element that identifies a particular country, (3) a registrant element that identifies a particular publisher or imprint, (4) a publication element that identifies the particular edition and format of a specific title, and (5) a check digit that validates the rest of the number. This means that hardcover and paperback editions of the a title do not share the same ISBNs; likewise, books that are republished at a different publisher or imprint; books of different production forms, such as ebooks, audiobooks, paperbacks are all identified separately. One agency per country is designated to assign ISBNs for the publishers and self-publishers located in that country (Bowker 2022). We use this to collect book-level data associated with each YA work. Through Goodreads, Publishers Marketplace, and Google Trends, we construct the following book-level information: name of author, a unique writer-level identification number, type of publishing house/imprint, time of publication, honors conferred, age of writer at time

of publication, plot summary, a binary indicator for debut works, and associated genres (e.g. Montoro-Pons & Cuadrado-Garcia 2020).

Writer data

We collect writer-level data for each writer in B. We retrieve the full name and possible spelling variations of every writer. We also obtain and verify the Twitter handles of each writer through manual search queries. We collect two important time-variant characteristics. We measure a writer's public prominence through the relative frequency of Google searches for their name. Data from Google Trends, accessed through the *pytrends* library in Python, provided indexed values of the relative frequency of Google searches for a particular term over time. A writer's public prominence at over any one month is determined by the number of searches conducted in the United States over the same month. Google creates this index by sampling from its underlying database. The index values are strictly ordinal. Google Trends data has been used elsewhere in sociology and economics to construct measures of aggregate interest in cultural activity (e.g. Stephens-Davidowitz 2013; Kearney & Levine 2016; Bail et al. 2019; Silva et al. 2019). This produces an ordinal measure that ranges from 0 to 100, where a higher value indicates higher search prominence. Only within-writer comparisons across time are possible. This is to say, if J.K. Rowling were to have a public prominence of 60 in 2016, and 70 in 2017, she'd be more publicly prominent in 2017 than in 2016; however, her public prominence value cannot be compared to another writer's since these values reflect relative orders in the set of an API query (i.e., we cannot compare J.K. Rowling's score to John Green's and say if she were more or less prominent at a time t). Note that is not a problem for our analysis since we use writer-fixed effects in our analysis.

We also create a binary measure of a writer's critical acclaim, as measured through their receipt of field-specific awards. A writer is considered to be critically acclaimed at time t if they were ever awarded a young-adult fiction book award in the years before t. We include all YA book prizes catalogued by the American Library Association (ALA 2022). These include the AILA Youth Literature Award, Amelia Bloomer List, APALA Literature Award, CALA Annual Best Book Award, CSK Book Awards, Margaret A. Edwards Award, Rainbow Book List, Sydney Taylor Book Award, William C. Morris YA Debut

Award, to name a few. A full list of these awards can be found at the ALA site here.

Twitter data

We collect a set of Twitter text corpora, TC_w, for each writer w. Each corpus is intended to reflect the public discourse on Twitter around the writer w. These corpora are constructed by tracking social media activity on Twitter from 1/1/2014 to 1/1/2021 through Twitter's academic track REST API. We use the full-archive search endpoint that allows researchers to "programmatically access public Tweets from the complete archive dating back to the first Tweet back in March 2006" (Twitter 2022). This endpoint accepts a single query with a GET request and return a set of historical tweets that match the queries. The endpoint is rate-limited to 500 tweets per request. We note that public tweets do not include user-deleted tweets, tweets from suspended accounts, or "country withheld content" (tweets that violate local laws) (Twitter 2022).

For each writer w, we construct a TC_w corpus using a search query, Q_w, particular to w. Each Q_w comprises a set of search terms,

$$\text{searchterms}_w = \{\text{@handle}_w,\ \text{name}_w,\ \text{aliases}_w\},$$

as well as conjunction-required operators. We include re-tweets and replies to tweets in our corpora because they comprise important parts of the Twitter discourse writ large. We exclude promoted tweets because they do not correspond to community discourse. We include text-only tweets for tractability. We do not include any geographic restriction due to inconsistent geo-tagging practices across users. Finally, we exclude the tweets coming from the writer's Twitter handle (if they have one.)

We pre-process the raw text in each corpus. Our pre-processing focuses on two things. Tweets contain textual features, such as emojis, emoticons, user mentions, emails, and URLs that can impede textual analysis. We use regular expressions to replace dates, email addresses, numbers, percentages, phone numbers, and time into normalized tokens. For example, a tweet containing an email address ("abc@123.com") would be transformed into an email token ("<email>"); an URL link to other web

pages would likewise be reduced to a token ("<url>"). Most important, we tokenize mentions of a writer within a tweet. Every mention of a writer's name, a writer's alias, or their Twitter handle is normalized to a common token ("<writer>"). The grammar and syntax of each tweet is preserved as is.

Newspaper data

We collect media coverage of each writer from mass circulation newspapers using an automated keyword-based approach that's common to similar to previous studies of scandals and social movements (e.g. McAdam & Su 2002; Puglisi & Snyder 2011; Hallet et al. 2019). We include news coverage from 143 English language daily newspapers from ProQuest in our analysis. These include the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the Christian Science Monitor, and USA Today. We search for all news items whose document text contain mentions of young-adult fiction.[26] We exclude news items from wire services and letters to the editor from our corpus. We link writers with all new items that mention their full name or known aliases.

Sales data

Finally, we collect the Amazon best-seller ranks associated with each book in our sample from the periods of 2015 to 2021 as our measure of book sales. Amazon best-seller ranks have been used as a proxy of revenue in a number of recent articles of cultural consumption in the sciences (e.g. Sun 2012; McKinnon 2015; Maity et al. 2017; Reimers 2017; Reimers & Waldfogel 2017; Spencer 2017; Sharma et al. 2019; He et al. 2021; Kaur & Singh 2021; Reimers & Waldfogel 2021). We obtain panel data of Amazon best-seller ranks through keepa.com using using the ISBNS obtained from our book data collection. Keepa.com is a third party service that provides provides high frequency, historical tracking of Amazon sales ranks of vast range of products. We aggregate Keepa's records of hourly sales rankings on the daily level by taking the mean of a book's daily rankings.

[26]The exact search query we use is the following:
((((((("young adult fiction" OR "young-adult fiction" OR "Y.A." OR "adolescent fiction" OR "teenage fiction" OR "YA fiction" OR "teen fiction" OR "young-adult fantasy" or "young adult romance" or "young adult science fiction" or "young adult sci-fi" OR "young-adult fantasy" or "young-adult romance" or "young-adult science fiction" or "young-adult sci-fi" or "children's book*" or "children's fiction" or "young adult book*" or "young-adult book*") NOT AU("associated press" OR "reuters" OR "ap")) NOT TI("letter")) and pd(>=20150101)) and pd(<=20210101)) and pd(>=20150101)) and pd(<=20210101)

We use Amazon best-seller rankings for two main reasons. First, best-seller rankings such as Amazon best-seller rankings are more accessible than the industry-standard of sales revenue as reported by NPD Bookscan. NPD currently does not work with academic researchers, and do not permit their data to be used in publicly accessible research (personal correspondence). Second, among best-seller rankings, Amazon best-seller rankings is preferred because they have some important advantages over other types of sale rankings. The most prominent example of such sales rankings is the *New York Times,* the *Wall Street Journal*'s and *Publisher's Weekly*'s best seller lists.[27] Although it covers only one retailer, Amazon, and not the entire market, Amazon accounts for over 44 percent of US sales of books in 2017 alone (Reimers & Waldfogel 2021). Amazon's best-seller ranks reflect a book's ordinal ranking in sales value (both digital and physical) among all books within the Amazon system, and not the sales volume itself (Amazon 2021). However, they still work well as a linear proxy of sales revenue since logged sales ranks scale linearly with sales volume (it's simply that the constant is difficult to estimate).

[27]Among the criticisms are the following (Miller 2000). First, it's not clear if what kinds of sampling best-seller rankings uses. Second, they do not take into account cumulative sales. Third, they are subject to manipulation from the demand side, such as strategic purchases of book from bookstores that have been identified to be in the newspaper sales sample, and are subject to manipulation from the supply side by the booksellers themselves (Miller 2000).

Table 9: Summary Statistics of Key Measures

	Mean	Min.	Max.	SD
Media Attention to Transgression	2.85	1.00	19.00	4.13
Media Attention (progressive)	0.85	0.00	5.00	1.23
Media Attention (centrist)	0.80	0.00	2.00	0.70
Media Attention (conservative)	1.20	0.00	17.00	3.85
Total tweets	1500.27	16.31	9329.01	2543.93
Pseudonymous tweets	1461.94	15.87	9085.54	2496.09
Verified tweets	38.33	0.44	243.47	61.19
Discourse valence	0.17	0.05	0.55	0.11
Discourse entropy	1.27	1.06	1.46	0.10
Political orientation of news.	0.47	-0.08	0.59	0.05

Measures

There are 7 measures that are key to the paper: 1) media attention paid to alleged norm transgressions by young adult fiction writers, (2) discourse valence, (3) discourse entropy, (4) pseudonymity, (5) political orientation of mass circulation newspapers, (6) logged sales ranks, and (7) writer acclaim. Table 9 provides summary statistics of these measures. We discuss them in rough order of their importance to the study.

Media attention to transgression

We measure scandal exposure through the media attention to paid to alleged norm transgression for each writer in the following way. For every writer w, we identify a set of news articles, N, that mention either w's full name or w's known aliases. We then code for mentions of alleged moral transgressions committed by w. We create a dummy variable $\tau_{i,w} = 1$ if an article mention alleged moral transgressions committed by w, and 0 if otherwise. We sum up the counts for each month to arrive at a measure of media attention per month. We note that it is insufficient for a writer to simply be mentioned in an article about a transgression. It is common for writers to be asked to comment on a past or ongoing scandals occurring within the field. For example, they may be asked to give their thoughts over a writer's #MeToo allegations, or the role of sensitivity writers in ameliorating "cultural appropriation" accusations. These would not be coded as media attentions to transgressions. For a writer to be coded as the subject of media attention to transgression, they must be clearly identified as the subject accused of committing a norm transgression.

We code media attention to norm transgression through the following process. We begin by reading and coding media coverage of moral transgressions. For every writer w in W, we identify a set of news articles N that mention either w's full name or w's known aliases. For each article i, $i \in N$, we code for mentions of alleged moral transgressions committed by w. We create a dummy variable = 1 if an article mention alleged moral transgressions committed by w, and 0 if otherwise. The following are some examples of four different writers implicated in different alleged moral transgressions:

- Some readers argued that w's depiction of slavery was racially insensitive. It quickly snowballed into an online pile-on, as some commenters who hadn't read the young adult fantasy book expressed outrage about its contents.

- Numerous controversies have sprouted up around w', including one about a teaching appointment, a literary prize that was rescinded, questions about the authenticity of quotes prizing smelter and accusations that w' misrepresented [themselves] as Alaska Native.

- w withdraw [their] novel (w's work before publication by Sourcebooks after a social-media firestorm over his choice of an Albanian Muslim as the book's villain.

- w, author of the best-selling novel (w's work) that became a Netflix series, is seeing an authors' group over allegations that he harassed women. Asher's defamation lawsuit, filed Friday in Los Angeles, contends that his family, creed and reputation were damaged by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and its executive director, Lin Oliver. Oliver told the Associated Press last year that the group had investigated and found w violated its code of conduct. w says both claims are false.

Discourse valence

We measure the valence of the Twitter discourse surrounding each writer over a discrete period of time as follows. Let $D_{i,t}$ be the Twitter discourse for writer i at time t. The valence $V_{i,t}$ of $D_{i,t}$ is simply the proportion of tweets in that are classified as bearing negative sentiment ($\mathbf{L}_{\text{neg}}$) is an indicator label

indicating a tweet bears negative sentiment), normalized over the total number of tweets in $D_{i,t}$,

$$V_{i,t} = \frac{\sum^{D_{i,t}} d \times \mathbf{L}_{\text{neg}}}{D_{i,t}},$$

We perform the classifications of tweet sentiments using a RoBERTa language model that has been fine-tuned on Twitter data to classify tweets according to their expressed sentiments (Liu et al. 2019). RoBERTA variants have been shown to perform particularly well on the classification of short-form texts on Twitter, even when they are not trained on the specific data-set (Barbieri et al. 2020). RoBERTa classifies all tweets into three categories, "negative" tweets, "neutral" tweet, and "positive" tweets, along with a corresponding confidence of its label. RoBERTa is a "robustly optimized" variant of the BERT language model. RoBERTa is a "robustly optimized" variant of the BERT language model. BERT is a pre-trained word embedding model that uses bi-directional encoder representations from transformers (Devlin et al. 2019). Transformer-based models first pre-train embedding-based language representations using both the left and right context around words from a large language corpus. These pre-trained representations are then be fine-tuned to create models for a wide variety of natural language processing tasks, such as masked-language modeling, next sentence prediction or, as in our case, sentiment analysis. RoBERTa makes a number of simple modifications to the pre-training of BERT model, resulting in substantial improvements on language benchmark tests (Liu et al. 2019). We use a RoBERTa-based language model (Lorreiro etc al. 2022) that is fine-tuned for sentiment analysis on ~124M tweets from January 2018 to December 2021 and validated against the TweetEval benchmark (Barbieri et al. 2020). BERT and its variants have become standard building blocks for natural language processing since their introduction in 2019 (Gu et al. 2021; Yin & Zubiaga 2021), and their use is becoming widespread in the social sciences as well (e.g. Fradkin & Holtz 2022).

Discourse entropy

We measure the Shannon entropy of the Twitter discourse surrounding each writer over a discrete period of time. Shannon entropy measures the uncertainty associated with a probability distribution that

originated from information theory (Shannon 1948). Shannon entropy has been used as a measure of information in both the biological and social sciences (Theil 1970; Agresti 2002; Smaldino 2013). The Shannon entropy, $E_{i,t}$, of the Twitter discourse $D_{i,t}$ is measured as the following,

$$E_{i,t} = -\sum_{l=1}^{3} p_l \log_2 p_l,$$

where l is classification label (either negative, neutral or positive) assigned by RoBERTa to the tweets about writer i in period t. Discourse entropy is non-negative. Discourse entropy is zero when the probability of one of the three sentiment categories occurring is zero. Discourse entropy is maximized when the probability of each of the three classifications are equal.

Pseudonymity

We classify tweets based on the pseudonymity of the author's Twitter identity, using Twitter's "verified" account tagging ("blue-check"). Beginning in 2009, Twitter began identifying user accounts it deemed to be of public interest, labeling these as "verified" accounts. A "verified" Twitter user account is one that Twitter considers to be "authentic, notable and active" (Twitter 2022). We use these labels as our measure of pseudonymity. Tweets are classified into two categories, those from verified Twitter accounts, and those from non-verified Twitter accounts.

Political leaning of newspaper

We classify newspapers into three categories, using Gentzkow and Shapiro's (2010) index of ideological slant in US newspapers. The lower a newspaper's ideological slant score, the more progressive its ideological orientation; conversely, the higher its score, the more conservative its ideological orientation. We classify the bottom quartile of newspapers as "left-leaning," the two middle quartiles as "centrist," and the top quartile as "right-leaning." Gentzkow and Shapiro computed these ideological slant scores by measuring the similarity between the language of a mass circulation newspaper to that of a congressional Republican or Democrat. They examined the set of all phrases used by members of the U.S. Congress in

the 2005 Congressional Record, and identified those that were much more frequently used by one party than by another. They then indexed newspapers by the extent to which the use of politically charged phrases in their news coverage resembled the use of the same phrases in the speech of a congressional Democrat or Republican.

Logged sales ranks

We rely on logged Amazon best-seller ranks as a linear proxy of book sales. Amazon best-seller ranks have been used as a proxy of revenue in a number of recent articles of cultural consumption in the sciences (e.g. Sun 2012; McKinnon 2015; Maity et al. 2017; Reimers 2017; Reimers & Waldfogel 2017; Spencer 2017; Sharma et al. 2019; He et al. 2021; Kaur & Singh 2021; Reimers & Waldfogel 2021). We aggregate Keepa's records of hourly sales rankings on the daily level by taking the mean of a book's daily rankings. Amazon's best-seller ranks reflect a book's ordinal ranking in sales value (both digital and physical) among all books within the Amazon system, and not the sales volume itself (Amazon 2021). However, they still work well as a linear proxy of sales revenue since logged sales ranks scale linearly with sales volume (it's simply that the constant is difficult to estimate). Amazon reports that

> when [Amazon] calculates Best Sellers Rank, we consider the entire history of a book's activity. Monitoring your book's Amazon sales rank may be helpful in gaining general insight into the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns and other initiatives to drive book activity, but it is not an accurate way to track your book's activity or compare its activity in relation to books in other categories. [...] Rankings reflect recent and historical activity, with recent activity weighted more heavily. (Amazon 2021)

While the exact way Amazon's Best Sellers rankings correspond to book sales is a trade-secret, scholarly and popular analysts have tried to build reasonable approximations of how they correspond to one another. Chevalier and Goolsbee (2003) show that, assuming a Pareto distribution for book sales with 1.2 as the base estimate for the θ shape parameter, the log of a book's sale ranking scales linearly with the log of its sales, i.e.

$$\ln(\text{Rank} - 1) = c - \theta \ln(\text{Sales}).$$

Foner Books (2021), a resource popular among self-published authors, reconstructs book sales from sales rankings by making similar assumptions. Much of the recent contemporary scholarship that use Amazon sales ranks as a measure of sales have similarly followed in using the log of Amazon sales ranks in their work (e.g. Reimers & Waldfogel 2017; He et al. 2021; Kaur & Singh 2021; Reimers & Waldfogel 2021).

Writer acclaim

We also create a binary measure of a writer's critical acclaim, as measured through their receipt of field-specific awards. A writer is considered to be critically acclaimed at time t if they were ever awarded a young-adult fiction book award in the years before t. We include all YA book prizes catalogued by the American Library Association (ALA 2022). These include the AILA Youth Literature Award, Amelia Bloomer List, APALA Literature Award, CALA Annual Best Book Award, CSK Book Awards, Margaret A. Edwards Award, Rainbow Book List, Sydney Taylor Book Award, William C. Morris YA Debut Award, to name a few. A full list of these awards can be found at the ALA site here.

Control variables

Aside from this, we also include a suite of control variables include (a) the textual qualities of book synopsis, (b) page length of books, (c) year of publication, and (d) genre membership.

Methods

Poisson fixed effects models

We evaluate the relationship between denunciations and mediated scandals by estimating a Poisson fixed effects model for media attention to alleged norm transgression. Poisson fixed effects models are commonly used in event history analysis when the dependent variable is a positive integer without an upper limit (Lindsey 1998; Allison & Waterman 2002; Cameron & Trivedi 2013; Brostrom 2022). Media mentions of alleged transgressions of writer i at time t, y_{it}, is assumed to have a Poisson distribution,

$$E(y_{it}|\mathbf{x}_{it}, \alpha_i) = \alpha_i \exp(\mathbf{x}'_{it}\mathbf{b}),$$

where **x** is a vector of time-varying covariates, **b** is a vector of regression coefficients, and α_i is a writer-specific fixed effect.

Cumulative abnormal returns

We evaluate the impact of scandals by estimating cumulative abnormal returns of books over the scandal window. We do this by first estimating a market model for each book. The sales rank of book i on day t is expressed as

$$\text{Rank}_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_i \text{Rank}_{mt} + \epsilon_{it},$$

where Rank_{mt} is the mean sales rank of a matched portfolio of books m on day t, α is the intercept term, β is the systematic risk of book i and ϵ the disturbance term for book i on day t. The market models for each book are estimated using a 21-day window ending 7 days (-28 to -7) before the start of the scandal window (we will explain how the scandal window is constructed shortly). We build a matched portfolio for each work by choosing of five books are considered most "similar" to the work according to book recommendations generated by co-purchasing behavior from Goodreads (e.g. Shi et al. 2017). The rate

of return on the books is adjusted by subtracting the expected return from the actual ex post return of the book. More precisely, the daily abnormal returns for the sales rank for the i-th book can be estimated with the following:

$$\text{ARank}_{it} = \text{Rank}_{it} - (a_i + b_i \text{Rank}_{mt})$$

Any statistically significance difference is considered to be an abnormal, or excess, return on the sales rank of a book. As mentioned before, we calculate the scandal-period *cumulative abnormal returns*,CARank_{it}, for each book i by taking the sum of the daily abnormal returns, ARank_{it}, over an 11-day scandal event window surrounding the scandal. The construction of the scandal event window for book i begins with the accusation event where a national newspaper first mentions a norm transgression allegedly committed by the author of book i (Figure 1 above). We also include the day immediately preceding (-5) and succeeding (+5) the first accusation event. This is to say

$$\text{CARank}_i = \frac{\sum_{t=-1}^{1} \text{ARank}_{it}}{T},$$

where T is the total number of days in the scandal event window.

Following recommendations from the literature (Brown & Warner 1985; De Jong & Naumovska 2015), we conduct a t-statistic using the dependence adjustment method, a cross-sectional T-test in conjunction with the traditional sign test to assess the statistical significance of the cumulative abnormal returns for each book. A combination of these statistics makes for a way of testing the statistical significance of cumulative abnormal returns that is less sensitive to event induced variance, low n and outliers (De Jong & Naumovska 2015). First, we create a t-statistic using the dependence adjustment method. This lets us assess the statistical significance of the cumulative abnormal returns for each book i.

The cross-section t-test and traditional sign test lets us assess the cumulative abnormal returns across all of the scandalized books in our sample. The cross-section t-test is a parametric test based on the standard errors from the cross-section of the event window abnormal returns. The cross-section T statistic is taken to be

$$T = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} \frac{|\text{CARank}|_i}{N}}{\sqrt{\sigma^2 |\text{CARank}_i|}},$$

where N is the total number of books that were the subjects of scandals andσ^2 is the sample variance from of the average abnormal returns (De Jong & Naumovska 2015).

Results

How discourse valence and discourse entropy relate to scandal

Table 10: Poisson fixed effects model for media attention to norm transgressions

	DV: Media attention	
	Coef.	P
Discourse valence	3.51***	<0.01
Discourse entropy	1.71	0.10
Volume of tweets	0.00	0.77
Search Prominence	-0.04**	0.02
Critical Acclaim	1.14	0.09

We find that negativity in the public discourse is positively correlated with media attention to alleged norm transgressions. We find no such relation with the entropy around public discourse. Table 10 reports the coefficient estimates from our Poisson fixed effects model of media attention to norm transgressions. We find evidence supporting hypothesis 1A. The more negative the discourse valence surrounding a YA writer, the more likely they are to be subject to media attention of norm transgressions. We find that a 1 percent change in the proportion of public discourse bearing negative sentiments around a writer is associated with a 3.51 increase ($p < 0.01$) in the counts of media mentions of an author's alleged norm transgressions. On the other hand, we find no evidence supporting hypothesis 1B. We find no statistically significant association between the entropy of public discourse and media attention. Changes in the discourse entropy surrounding a YA writer are not associated with changes in media attention to the norm transgressions.

The anonymity discount

Next, we find evidence of an anonymity discount where the qualities of public discourse contributed by verified and pseudonymous actors on Twitter are different associated with media attention to norm transgressions. Table 11 reports the coefficient estimates from our Poisson fixed effects where discourse valence and discourse entropy from verified and pseudonymous sources have been separated and identified as distinct measures.

First, we find evidence supporting hypothesis 2A. Changes in the valence of public discourse among verified Twitter users share a strong association with media attention to alleged norm transgressions than changes in the same among pseudonymous Twitter users. A 1 percent change in the proportion of negative tweets in the public discourse from verified users on Twitter around a writer is associated with a 7.23 increase ($p < 0.01$) in the count of media mentions of the writer's alleged norm transgressions. We find no such association when it comes to the public discourse from pseudonymous users on Twitter.

We also find evidence supporting hypothesis 2B, although in the obverse direction. Changes in discourse entropy around the public discourse among pseudonymous Twitter users share a strong association with media attention to alleged norm transgressions than changes in the same among verified Twitter users. A 1.0 change in the entropy of sentiments around the public discourse around a writer among the pseudonymous users on Twitter is associated with a 7.60 increase ($p < 0.01$) in the count of media mentions of the writer's alleged norm transgressions. We find no such association when it comes to the discourse entropy from verified users on Twitter.

Table 11: Testing for the anonymity discount

	DV: Media attention	
	Coef.	P
Discourse valence (verified)	7.23***	<0.01
Discourse valence (pseudonymous)	-1.75	0.52
Discourse entropy (verified)	-1.38	0.46
Discourse entropy (pseudonymous)	7.60***	<0.01
Volume of tweets	0.00	0.69
Search Prominence	-0.02	0.23
Critical Acclaim	0.36	0.62

The agitprop effect

Third, we assess the plausibility of an agitprop effect among newspapers reporting on norm transgressions in young adult fiction. To reinterate, the agitprop effect refers to the tendency among media outlets to selectively cover and report public denunciations in alignment with the outlet's political orientation. Table 12 reports the coefficient estimates from our Poisson fixed effects models for media attention to norm

Table 12: Testing for the agitprop effect

	DV: Media attention	
	Coef.	P
Progressive-leaning papers		
Discourse valence	3.11	0.16
Discourse entropy	1.84	0.33
Volume of tweets	0.00	0.98
Search Prominence	-0.04	0.19
Critical Acclaim	-0.11	0.94
Center-leaning papers		
Discourse valence	4.06**	0.02
Discourse entropy	1.58	0.35
Volume of tweets	0.00	0.57
Search Prominence	-0.03	0.14
Critical Acclaim	-3.18	0.09
Conservative-leaning papers		
Discourse valence	6.16**	0.04
Discourse entropy	0.49	0.83
Volume of tweets	0.00	0.13
Search Prominence	-0.05	0.12
Critical Acclaim	9.72	0.85

transgressions as reported by progressive-leaning, centrist-leaning, and conservative-leaning newspapers. We find some limited evidence supporting such an agitprop effect. The associations between discourse valence and media attention to transgressions differ across newspapers of different political leanings while the associations between discourse entropy and media attention to transgressions do not.

To begin, we find evidence supporting hypothesis 3A. Progressive-leaning, center-leaning, and conservative-leaning newspapers's coverage of alleged norm transgression are differently associated with changes in the discourse valence around a writer. Conservative-leaning newspapers are the most responsive to changes in discourse valence. Conservative-leaning newspapers contain 6.16 more mentions (p = 0.04) of norm transgressions by YA writers for every 1 percent increase in the proportion of public discourse bearing negative sentiments. They are followed by center-leaning papers. Center-leaning papers contain 4.06 more mentions (p = 0.02) of norm transgressions by YA writers for every 1 percent increase in the proportion of public discourse bearing negative sentiments. On the other hand, media mentions

of norm transgressions from progressive-leaning newspapers are not responsive to changes in the proportion of public discourse bearing negative sentiments.

On the hand, we find no evidence supporting hypothesis 3B. Among newspapers of all three political orientations, there are no associations between discourse entropy and media mentions of norm transgressions.

The effects of scandals

Figure 18: Time series of average abnormal returns

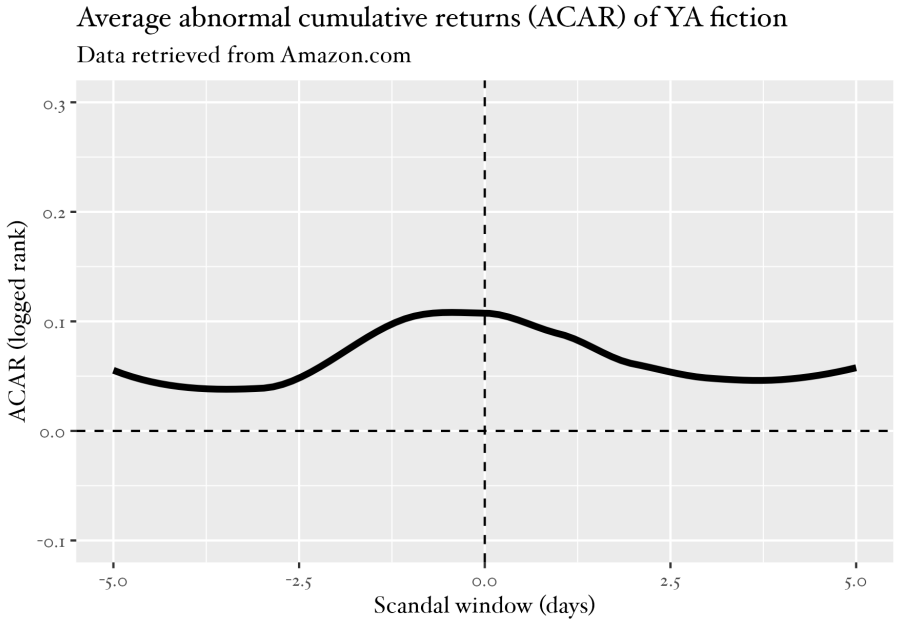


Table 13: Cross-section T-test for Average Cumulative Abnormal Returns (ACAR)

	ACAR	T	P-value
All transgressions	0.71	0.35	0.11

Finally, we estimate the direct effects of scandals. We find that there are significant heterogeneity in the direct effects of scandal, such that the subjects of field-specific transgressions on average experience greater decline in book sales after allegations of field-specific transgressions than field-agnostic transgressions.

On average, young adult fiction writers who are implicated in scandals do not experience statistically significant changes in book sales. Figure 18 shows the time series of average abnormal returns

for the cross section of scandalized works across the scandal window. Table 13 shows the cumulative abnormal returns over the scandal window for the entire cross section of scandalized works in our sample. We are unable to find conclusive evidence supporting hypothesis 4A. On average, we find that scandals do not produce a statistically significant direct effect on the sales of scandalized works. While we observe an average cumulative abnormal return of 0.71 sales ranks over the scandal window, this estimate is not statistically significant (p = 0.11).

We find that this is attributable to the differences between the direct effects of scandals associated with field-agnostic and field-specific transgressions. Figure 4 shows how the time series of average abnormal returns varies according to transgression types.

Figure 19: ACAR by transgression type

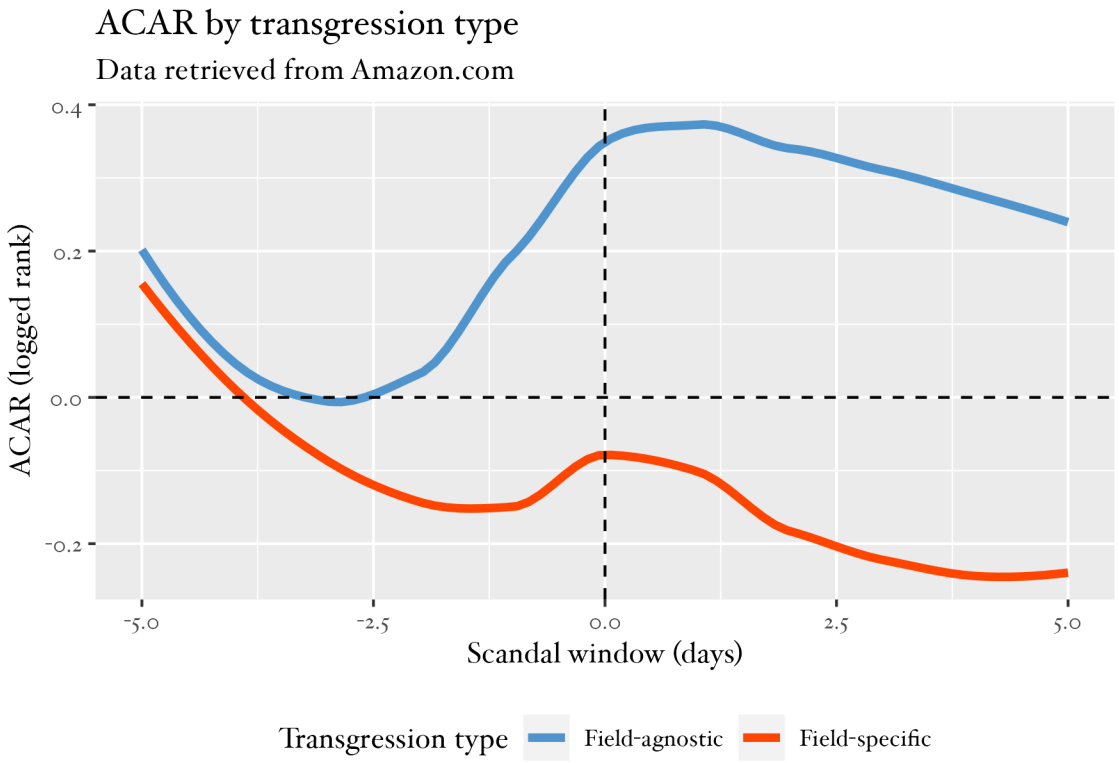


Figure 19 suggests there is significant divergence in how abnormal returns for scandals of each transgression types change across the scandal period. While they're closely approximate to each other in the early periods of the scandal window, they quickly diverge, with books associated with field-specific transgres-

Table 14: ACAR across Transgression Types

Transgression	ACAR	T	P-value
Field-agnostic transgressions	2.19	3.09	0.16
Field-specific transgressions	-1.37**	-3.48	0.04

sions experiencing a sharp decline in best-seller ranks while books associated with field-agnostic transgressions experience instead a possible improvement in sales ranks. These initial impressions are corroborated by our model estimates. Table 14 shows the cumulative abnormal returns over the scandal window for field-agnostic and field-specific transgressions respectively. We find strong evidence supporting hypothesis 4B, that field-specific and field-agnostic norm transgressions are associated with different cumulative abnormal returns over a mediated scandal window. We find that books whose authors are implicated in scandals involving field-specific transgressions experience an average decline of 1.37 sales ranks a day ($p = 0.04$) across the period of scandal. In contrast, we do not find a statistically significant decline in book sales among books whose authors are implicated in scandals involving field-agnostic transgressions.

We extend our analysis by controlling for a set of book-level variables that may introduce omitted variable bias in our earlier analysis. To do so, we estimated a series of logistic regression models where the outcome variable is a binary variable that indicates whether a book experiences a negative abnormal return on book sales on any particular day over a scandal window. Table 15 reports the results from these logit models. Comparing the base model 1 to model 2, we find that our findings on the divergence between field-specific and field-agnostic transgressions survive even when we control for variations in the book synopses and page length of the books. Books whose authors are implicated in scandals involving field-specific transgressions are more likely to experience a negative direct effect of scandal (+1.53 in odds ratio of experiencing negative abnormal returns, $p < 0.01$). Intriguingly, we find that the divergence between these two types of transgressions disappears once we control for other genre memberships a book may hold (model 3). This suggests that negative direct effects stemming from field-specific transgressions may be particular to books that span multiple categories (i.e. young adult fiction work that are cross-classified as fantasy or romance novels).

Table 15: Likelihood of negative abnormal returns on sales ranks

	Dependent variable:		
	Negative Abnormal Returns		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Field-specific transgression	1.28***	1.53***	0.23
	(0.37)	(0.42)	(1.13)
Synopsis sentiment		-0.32	-0.51
		(0.44)	(0.47)
Sentiment score		2.73	0.43
		(2.08)	(3.02)
Page length		0.0003	0.003
		(0.002)	(0.003)
Genre (romance)			−0.51
			(0.65)
Genre (fantasy)			−1.40
			(1.11)
Constant	-0.56**	-3.13	-0.27
	(0.24)	(2.08)	(3.31)
Observations	132	132	132
Log Likelihood	-85.24	-83.62	-82.81
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	180.26	191.66	199.80
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Conclusion

Public denunciations of alleged norms transgressions have become zeitgeist in contemporary cultural industries. Our study is a prolegomenon that contributes to our understanding of the processes through which such denunciations cascade into mediated scandals, and of the direct effects that they leave on actors implicated within them. To do so, we collected and examined public discourse that is known to contain public denunciations, Twitter discourse among the young adult fiction community. We then

conducted a two-part analysis that begins with an analysis of how such denunciatory public discourse contributes to the publicization of norm transgression, before considering how such publicizations directly affect the livelihoods of the writers implicated within them.

First, we used a deep learning classifier, RoBERTa, to measure the discourse valence and discourse entropy associated with the public discourse of writers who are implicated in scandals. We then use a Poisson fixed effects model to estimate their relationship to subsequent media coverage of alleged norm transgression. We found the negativity of Twitter discourse around a writer to be positively associated with media attention to alleged transgressions committed by the same writer. We then considered how the anonymity of public discourse and the political orientation of newspaper moderate such associations. We found evidence of what we term as an *anonymity discount*. Anonymity moderates the relationship between Twitter discourse and media attention. The negativity of Twitter discourse around a writer from verified sources are positively associated with higher media attention. The discourse entropy around a writer from pseudonymous sources are positively associated with higher media attention. We found evidence of what we term an *agitprop effect*. The political leanings of a newspaper moderates the relationship between Twitter discourse and media attention. Only among center-leaning and conservative-leaning newspapers do we find negativity of Twitter discourse around a writer to be positively associated with media attention. What is more, this association is stronger in magnitude for conservative-leaning newspaper then for center-leaning ones.

Second, we asked if and how a scandal affects the young adult fiction writers implicated in them. Drawing on the literature on event analysis from economic sociology, we measured and tested for the cumulative abnormal returns in book sales for each of the works whose authors are implicated in widely-publicized allegations of norm transgressions. We found that, on average, young adult fiction writers who are implicated in scandals do not experience statistically significant changes in book sales. This was largely attributable to heterogeneity in the direct effects of scandals across transgression types. Within our sample, the negative direct effects of scandal are exclusive to scandals involving field-specific norm transgressions, and not field-agnostic norm transgressions. Further, these negative direct effects

stemming from field-specific transgressions may be particular to category-spanning books that span multiple genres (i.e. young adult fiction work that are cross-classified as fantasy or romance novels).

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