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Precariousness and Adaptability in Creative Industries:
The Case of Film Critics

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Abstract

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By Dimitrios Zaras

This dissertation is a study of the evaluation of cultural products and of how individuals who work as critics perform their work and adapt to challenges in their environment. I investigate these topics by examining film, the cultural products, and film critics, the creative workers. My analysis utilizes data on the critical recognition of films, review assignment among critics, interviews, and film review texts across three decades. I draw mainly from the literatures of the sociology of culture, the sociology of valuation and evaluation, and the sociology of work. I approach film critics' struggles in the modern media landscape as a case study of how work in creative industries has been cast and recast by recent broad technological and structural changes. I employ various statistical techniques, from logistic regression for rare events to hierarchical linear modelling, as well as natural language processing. My findings demonstrate the ways that professional film critics have attempted to maintain their relevance by embracing new media and by changing their evaluation practices to fit the demands of audiences in an era dominated by user-generated content.

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Introduction

This dissertation is a study of how cultural products are evaluated and how individuals who are working as critics perform their work and adapt to challenges in their environment. The particular context I am focusing on is film and film critics. My analysis utilizes data about the critical recognition of films, the process of film review assignment among film critics, interviews with film critics, and film review texts. I approach my topic drawing mainly from the literatures of the sociology of culture, the sociology of valuation/evaluation, and the sociology of work. I employ various regression analysis techniques, from multiple linear regression to hierarchical linear modelling—as well as multiple correspondence analysis, and natural language processing. In what follows I outline the unifying theoretical and empirical considerations that are found in each of the three empirical chapters.

Theoretical Motivation

My dissertation is fundamentally based on the question of who gets to decide about the value of cultural products and how that evaluation process is affected by larger social factors—such as the structure of the job market, technological developments, and social inequality. From that starting point, I go on to examine the work situation and work practices of individuals who perform the task of cultural evaluation as a profession. I am intrigued by the balancing act that professional critics must maintain by offering critiques that are accepted both by their peers but also by their audience. The challenges that critics face trying to become accepted by their peers and industry insiders when they first break into this field and capture the attention of a portion of the public is interesting as a case study of an example of creative work. I take the term “creative work” or

“creative industries”—and adjacent terms such as “knowledge” industries—to mean those jobs and occupations that are associated with work in the media and the arts. Most creative workers must overcome immense challenges when it comes to entering the field of their choice, and even when they achieve that goal, they must live under conditions of constant precariousness and competition. Initially choosing to examine film criticism from a purely “sociology of culture” perspective that focuses more on the process of evaluation and its consequences for cultural production early on in my graduate studies, I gradually started paying more attention to the problems film critics as creative workers faced due to the precariousness of their profession and the legitimacy crisis they faced as judges of taste.

Looking at creative fields—professional criticism being, of course, one of them—many scholars have noted the hierarchical ranking of works based on their preferable attributes. The hierarchical ranking of cultural products matters for two reasons. First, it provides ways of signifying what type of creative works are “legitimate” in a given field. When speaking of “high culture,” for example, Bourdieu (1993) famously described it by another moniker: the “legitimate” culture that is cast by powerful actors and entities as worthy of consideration and the font of cultivation (see also Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway 2006). Meanwhile, those works receiving more positive attention and coverage are likewise described as being “legitimate” given the prominence that they secure from well-positioned actors in a creative field (Schmutz 2009). Second, each form of aesthetic hierarchy is simultaneously the purview of a particular type of worker in a creative field: the critic. In fact, previous scholarship emphasizes that critics have played central roles in both creating and upholding the distinction between high culture and popular culture (DiMaggio 1987; Glynn and Lounsbury 2005), as well as in making fine-grained

evaluations of which creative works are most worthy of praise and attention (Baumann 2002, 2007; Chong 2015, 2020).

A focus on critics also reveals another aspect of the evaluation of cultural products: that evaluation is not immune to broader societal shifts and, hence, it is embedded in a particular time and place. DiMaggio (1987) and others, for instance, have famously theorized about, as well as documented, a broader trend of “de-hierarchicalization,” whereby the once solid distinction between high culture and popular culture is becoming less and less salient within various creative fields (see also Janssen, Kuipers, and Verboord 2008). This kind of top-down model of cultural evaluation seems not to be compatible with the era of the Web, where peer-to-peer communication allows for a bottom-up model of creation and evaluation of culture (Baumann 2007; Verboord 2009). While critics have played a role in this process, such as by shifting their attention and coverage of high culture works to popular culture works, they are also involved in another shift. As Phillipa Chong (2018) and others have noted, the proliferation of web-based evaluations by broad swaths of the population have resulted in a situation where professional critics are conducting their evaluative work in an era where “any one is a critic.” This process of decreasing influence of formerly established cultural hierarchies can be viewed as a force that brings about the “de-legitimation” of professional critics. The individuals who have been responsible for upholding cultural hierarchies would probably not be able to avoid the consequences of such a major shift.

Legitimacy is a concept of considerable importance in sociology, particularly in such subfields as social psychology and organizational sociology. Scholarship in those two subareas reveals, among other things, that legitimacy is an ongoing activity rather than a fixed object; that activity, in turn, requires key actors who mobilize resources and/or win consent. Such activity

unfolds both across *grand sweeps of time* and in *everyday moments*. Scholarship on the grand sweep tends to focus on how legitimacy arises (if not falls), while scholarship on the everyday moments tends to focus on the consequences of that legitimacy, on what its application affords. We could say the former treats legitimacy as a “dependent variable” (what is explained) while the latter treats legitimacy as an “independent variable” (what explains; see Deephouse and Suchman 2008). That being said, both approaches emphasize power—if not power struggles—as actors vie both to establish what is legitimate and to uphold what is legitimate.

Johnson and colleagues (2006) capture this grand sweep by emphasizing how the process of “legitimation” (i.e., whereby an object or person attains the designation of “legitimate”) proceeds across common stages: (1) some actor innovates in a local setting so as to address a particular goal (e.g., building a non-profit organization that celebrates “high culture”); (2) that actor develops an explanatory account to persuade other local actors to endorse this innovation (e.g., high culture is good for society due to its edifying properties); (3) the innovation diffuses to other locales (e.g., other actors likewise build their own non-profit organization to disseminate high culture and tout its edifying properties); and (4) that innovation attains a “fact-like” character as it and its explanatory account are now widely enacted and accepted (e.g., the high culture featured in non-profit organizations is also taught in higher education curriculum). Note that Johnson and colleagues explicitly draw upon the aesthetic hierarchy stream of scholarship when detailing this grand sweep. Note also that DiMaggio (Italy) and others have emphasized the role of critics in offering an explanatory account regarding the merits and benefits of high culture—explanatory accounts that Baumann (2001) has described as being a “legitimizing ideology.”

When it comes to legitimacy as an everyday activity, Bourdieu's scholarship has had considerable impact, particularly in cultural sociology. While aware of the grand sweep which resulted in high culture's privileged position, Bourdieu mostly focuses on the implications of that high culture in the rough-and-tumble struggles of daily life. Drawing often on case studies, survey data, and educational curricula from the mid-1900s, Bourdieu writes about a period in which high culture had attained a "fact-like" character in France; in fact, he goes so far as to call it "legitimate culture." In doing so, Bourdieu forcefully argues that aesthetics (i.e., those principles that underlie notions of beauty, quality, and artistic heritage) are fundamentally shaped by sociocultural factors, thereby showing that these principles are embedded in the social order rather than set apart from it in transcendent fashion (Bourdieu 1984). Indeed, he further argues that powerful actors (e.g., those of the upper class) define broadly what passes for "legitimate culture," while on the one hand, acting as if that legitimate culture is simply natural and not a category of their own creation, and while on the other hand, claiming the superiority of their own tastes and discounting the tastes of those of lower standing (e.g., those in the working class). Put another way, Bourdieu overlays aesthetic hierarchy on top of a class hierarchy. As part of that overlay, Bourdieu famously introduces the concept of cultural capital. The definition of cultural capital has been muddied by Bourdieu's varied usages of the term; hence, Lamont and Lareau (1988, p. 156) summarize cultural capital as, "...widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion, the former referring to exclusion from jobs and resources, and the latter to exclusion from high status groups."

Bourdieu emphasizes that, although cultural capital is currency like social capital (e.g., connections to others) and economic capital (e.g., money) that can yield dividends for those who

hold it, cultural capital is also context specific. That is, while connections and money can easily translate from one context to another, what passes for signals of high status does not easily do so. For example, being known for offering fervent prayers could be a form of cultural capital in the field of religion but not in the fields of high finance or physics (Verter 2003). Thus, in what Bourdieu calls “fields of cultural production” (i.e., those devoted to the creation and dissemination of aesthetic goods like film, music, and literature), cultural capital is very much about tastes and evaluation—with critics playing an important role therein.

Writing about the field of cultural production, Bourdieu argues that there are, not one, but three principles of legitimacy that are in competition with each other: the *specific* principle of legitimacy, the principle of legitimacy corresponding to *bourgeois* taste, and *popular* legitimacy (Bourdieu 1993). Each legitimacy principle is associated with a particular type of collective actor in fields of cultural production. Drawing upon their distinctive standing in the field, each collective actor operates to identify which works and creators are worthy of esteem in a given field, such as that of film or music (i.e., esteem that is sometimes labelled “symbolic capital”). *Creators* within a given field of cultural production are the ones who confer specific legitimacy, doing so based on their familiarity with what the creative process requires and afford. *Critics* are the ones who confer bourgeois legitimacy, doing so based on their familiarity with the historical arc and aesthetic concerns, found in a given field of cultural production. Bourdieu treats critics as a stand-in for the bourgeois (e.g., upper class) given that, in his view, both share similar levels of cultural capital. If creators are passionate participants in the field (given their direct involvement in the creative process), then critics are those who write with a cool engagement—a “disinterestedness,” to use Bourdieu’s term. Finally, the mass audience confers popular legitimacy. This mass audience is not to be confused with connoisseurs of the upper class (those

with studied and discerning tastes), as the mass audience relies upon a more basic type of tastes that emphasizes entertainment more than edification and analysis. Note, then, that each collective actor offers its own “stamp of approval” for what is worthy in a given field of cultural production, and according to Bourdieu, they do so based on different principles.

Bourdieu thus views fields of cultural production as arenas of power and contestation. Some of this struggle is because actors in a given field struggle to maximize their positions through the acquisition of capital (e.g., cultural, social, economic). Yet the struggle is also a definitional one as well as positional one: Beyond just the accumulation of capital, actors compete for the definition of the resources that are perceived as valuable in a given field. In general, fields can be thought of as “arenas of struggle for legitimation” (Swartz 1997:123). Once a field begins to award objects (e.g., creative works, genres) and people (e.g., creators) with its own, specific kind of symbolic capital (which is different from that of other fields), it then starts to become autonomous. The autonomy of a cultural field is related to the consecration of cultural products via the accumulation of symbolic capital that is specific to the field under question. The influence of individuals who are engaged in awarding and creating symbolic capital in a field will grow as the degree of autonomy of the field grows. Baumann (2002) argues that this process describes the evolution of the role of film critics and the cultural field of film in the US. As film went on to become a legitimate, consecrated art form in the second part of the 20th century (largely due to the efforts of film critics), the importance of film critics as intermediaries between audiences and cultural producers also grew.

The interesting question that drives the present dissertation is what happens when the cultural hierarchy of an autonomous field starts to fall apart. What are the consequences for the field overall and for the group of individuals responsible with upholding that hierarchy (i.e., the

critics). In this dissertation I study the impact of the de-hierarchicalization of culture and the de-legitimation of professional critics within a particular creative field: the US motion picture industry. The type of structural change that can alter the very structure of a cultural field has taken place in the field of film criticism in the past two decades through the appearance of review aggregator websites and streaming services. Those platforms are directly related to the spread of the Web and user-generated content. In this dissertation, I attempt to examine the possible consequences of that phenomenon. Through the social adaptations of new technological advancements, some scholars had argued that a more egalitarian or democratic form of cultural evaluation would emerge (Benkler 2006). This type of argument has been made for other types of cultural fields and critics, such as literary critics (Verboord 2009).

The seemingly decreased influence of professional critics due to broad structural changes that have to do with the emergence of the Web and increasing cultural omnivorousness of sections of the public creates a more precarious working environment for them where the (already previously limited) employment opportunities are becoming even more sparse and casual in nature. The evaluation of cultural products is one of the many areas that has become more accessible for the public due to those technologies, resulting in a possibly less hierarchical ordering of the aesthetic criteria employed in cultural evaluation. Securing the acceptance of their judgements by the public requires from professional critics to maintain their legitimacy as the official judges of taste. That task seemingly becomes more difficult in an era that is characterized by a less established hierarchy of aesthetic criteria. Therefore, this dissertation is a study of how, and to what extent, the de-legitimation of professional critics has taken place and whether the vacuum that professional critics left has been filled by amateur critics who now

have access to media that allow them to publish their critiques and potentially impose their own criteria.

In addition to the study of de-legitimation of professional film critics – and the potential implications for the democratization or not of cultural evaluation from a cultural sociology perspective—this dissertation also looks at that phenomenon from a sociology of work point of view. The study of work in the creative industries is at its face important for gaining a better understanding of the problems that the people who are working in them face and the implications regarding for the content of their work. Moreover, developments in the creative industries in terms of casual forms of employment have appeared much earlier than in other sectors of the economy, such as the spread of what has been called the “gig economy.” In that sense, creative workers seem to be a “canary in the coalmine” (i.e., an interesting case study of what could become a much more widespread form of employment in the future). In this dissertation I examine some of the ways that precarious work affects workers, specifically in relation to rapid technological developments and gender inequality in the workplace. By doing so I attempt to present one small part of the whole picture that consists of the multiple challenges associated with work in the creative industries.

Analytical Agenda

My dissertation consists of three empirical chapters—with the overarching theme being the study of the evaluation process of film by professional and amateur film critics and its relation to the de-legitimation of professional film critics. Studying film critics is my attempt to examine how creative workers potentially change their work practices in response to rapid structural changes in their field. In the first and second chapter, I turn my attention to whether

rapidly changing structural conditions in a creative industries sector, such as film criticism, can potentially change individuals' work practices. In the first chapter, I employ text data collected at three different points in time (1998, 2008, 2018). By utilizing various computational text analysis techniques ranging from relatively simple to more advanced (e.g., structural topic modelling), I examine the similarities between amateur and professional film critics in terms of the topics they write about in their reviews. This approach allows me to explore the possible ways that film critics have adapted to the change of global access to film evaluation by changing the way they perform their job (i.e., potentially adopting criteria that are closer to popular aesthetics or changing their style of writing compared to amateur film critics).

The second chapter of my dissertation is a study of the level of influence that film critics have on a film's success in an era when review aggregator websites like Rotten Tomatoes have given the opportunity to amateur reviewers to also evaluate films. Comparing between professional and amateur film critics, and also between critics who are among the top in their field and those who are not part of that elite category, I examine whether there is a convergence between the evaluation criteria of the public and professional critics when evaluating "popular" and "highbrow" films. Furthermore, I investigate to what extent this possible similarity between criteria is evident in the evaluation of different types of films (e.g., popular, highbrow) and factors that shape films' critical recognition (evidenced through nominations for critics' awards and Oscars). This analytical approach allows for a nuanced examination of the condition of the genre hierarchy in the film industry as it has potentially evolved in recent years and the role that the change in critics' legitimacy levels has played in that process.

Finally, in the third chapter I turn my attention to the field of newspaper film criticism in the US and investigate the extent to which film genre hierarchy is still present among

professional film critics in traditional media organizations. I analyze data from the past thirty years regarding the patterns of review assignment and evaluation among newspaper film critics for seven newspapers of different sizes and reach. The motivation behind the research design of this chapter is to explore to how arguments about the “de-hierarchicalization” of the cultural field of film as expressed by the alleged reduced importance of the raking of genres are actually present among professional critics. By examining the review assignment patterns of films, taking into account the gender and experience level of newspaper critics I attempt to establish a connection between the symbolic value of films belonging in traditionally considered “highbrow” or more serious genres and the hierarchy among professional critics. A connection of that sort would indicate that there still exists a strong hierarchy of genres in film criticism that professional film critics maintain, regardless of potential convergences between professional and amateur film critics tastes.

Chapter One:

Professional and Amateur Film Critics' Convergence in Terms of Evaluation Criteria

Introduction

The rise and spread of Web 2.0 and social media have brought many changes to the media landscape for both consumers and producers alike. Unlike the previous era, consumers are no longer merely recipients of content offered and distributed by creative workers and the media companies that employ them. Instead, consumers now have the capability to author and publish their own media content. Some have labelled that development as “prosumption,” whereby once salient boundaries between the production and consumption of media content have now blurred. That notable shift to prosumption, in turn, has required adjustment if not recalibration on the part of “professional” creative workers (i.e., those employed to engage in the production of media content). That adjustment is especially apparent when it comes to the world of criticism. Amateur critics now abound on review-aggregator websites and social media (e.g., Rotten Tomatoes, Yelp), offering a barrage of content that, in terms of sheer volume, can overwhelm the critical commentary offered by professional critics writing for major periodicals (e.g., The New York Times). We are now in an era, as Chong (2020) compellingly demonstrates, where professional critics are having to accommodate to a work context in which, “everybody is a critic.”

Marc Verboord is one of the most prominent media scholars who have argued that professional critics appear to have adopted a style of writing and evaluation that are closer to those of amateur reviewers to remain relevant in this new era of more “democratic” evaluation of cultural products. Verboord (2014) in his study of film reviews of professional critics and

amateur reviewers who post their reviews online finds that there seems to be a considerable similarity between them. Verboord claims that the web has brought about the democratization of cultural evaluation, which has forced many professional critics to use simpler language and criteria to resemble the reviews written by amateur reviewers. If Verboord's assertion regarding the evolution of the field of criticism in this new era proves to be true, then the consequences could potentially be a more general turn toward the popular aesthetic in criticism or even certain art forms being considered incompatible with what is accepted as highbrow or high art. Before considering potential consequences of changes in criticism, it is useful to examine to what extent professional and amateur criticism of different art forms have been changing in the past few years in a way similar to what Verboord describes.

Verboord's findings introduce a different perspective into understanding the evolution of criticism in the recent past. This perspective is largely based on the notion that creative work, like all human activity, is based on collaboration and understanding and monitoring of the work of others. By monitoring and studying what their peers and their predecessors have produced, media producers' content is shaped and influenced by the field they work in (Becker 1982). Professional film critics, the topic of the present study, also follow the same behavior when it comes to monitoring the work of their peers. It is well established in the literature that there are no specific skills that critics possess or no specific attributes of a cultural product that can ensure the correctness of their evaluation. The uncertainty regarding evaluation leads professional critics to tacitly reach a consensus on the few products that are worthy of their attention and acclaim (Janssen 1997). Indeed, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have famously argued that a common way that organizational actors of all types (including creative workers) deal with uncertainty is via monitoring of others and imitation—what they label “mimetic isomorphism.” When gauging

such things as quality and excellence, creative workers often monitor those at a similar level of status and prestige, or those at a higher level. Godart and Mears (2009) provide an example of that process in their study of how fashion houses select models for their fashion shows. Through interviews with individuals who select models for fashion houses, Godart and Mears demonstrated that high status fashion houses tend to choose the same models, while medium status fashion houses somewhat mirror high status fashion houses and simultaneously try to distance themselves from lower status ones. “Yet, Verboord’s research offers another pattern, whereby the “democratization” that he describes involves professional emulating amateurs, arguably monitoring those with less qualifications and credentials.”

The core of Verboord’s argument is what requires content analysis, seeing if, what, and how professional and amateur critics are becoming more similar over time. Fortunately, developments in computer-directed content analysis provide us with the tools to pursue such content analysis in detailed fashion. The present paper is a study of the similarities between professional film critics and amateur film critics in terms of their criteria of evaluation and style of writing and their evolution over time. By analyzing the film review texts of professional and amateur film critics, I intend to explore whether film critics can be grouped into distinct groups based on the topics they write about and their style of writing and how those compare to other characteristics that have to do with their status in their field. The investigation of possible similarities among distinct groups of professional critics is the focus because my goal is to look at possible strategies that individuals follow in order to achieve a certain level of professional success in a creative field, such as the field of film criticism. I examine professional and amateur film reviews in this study to examine whether, and if so to what extent, there is a convergence between them. The possibility of such a convergence can be thought of as the result of the

emergence of the web and the opportunities it has created for audiences to publish and read amateur reviews. That development could potentially have forced many full-time professional film critics out of employment.

The following section offers a review of the relevant literature that situates my case and analysis. The literature review makes explicit the nature of evaluation, which guides and serves as a foundation for the review process. Furthermore, I examine previous research on the review process as it takes place in creative fields, focusing on film, which is the field I use as my case study. Additionally, I present the ways in which the distinction between professional and amateur critics seems to have become more blurred over time. Following the literature review, I provide a description of the methods and analyses I conducted. Informed by exploratory interviews with professional film critics, I employ a “big data” analysis approach. I compare the content of film reviews offered by professional and amateur film critics, with that comparison also occurring across time so as to capture any dynamic changes. I demonstrate below that professional and amateur critics are indeed converging in terms of their content, but that convergence is driven by amateur critics becoming more like professional critics in terms of the evaluative criteria they address. In that way, my results resonate with what finds by Schmutz (2016) – where once a given domain has a certain type of evaluative standard, then others converge with that standard.

Relevant Literature

Types of Reviewing and the Change of Cultural Evaluation

Lamont (2012:5) describes the attributes that make evaluation a social and cultural process as 1) intersubjective agreement/disagreement on a matrix or a set of referents against

which the entity (a good, a reputation, an artistic achievement, etc.) is compared; 2) negotiation about proper criteria and about who is a legitimate judge (often involving conflicts and power struggle; Bourdieu 1993); 3) establishing value in a *relational* (or indexical) process involving distinguishing and comparing entities.”

It is relatively obvious that a professional critique usually meets most of the criteria of what constitutes evaluation a social and cultural process. Specifically, professional critiques are based on several shared conventions (Becker 1982), widely accepted principles about value and a hierarchy of legitimacy. Janssen (1997) in the context of literary criticism and Allen and Lincoln (2004) in film use the term “reputational entrepreneurs” to characterize professional critics. There seems to be a tacit agreement between professional critics as to which works of art and which artists deserve to be critiqued and promoted. The vast majority of professional critics tend to focus on a small group of cultural producers and their work. Those professional critics who do not follow this pattern are either marginalized or they have achieved elite status in their field, thus being able to not conform without consequences to their reputation.

In the case of amateur critics, it seems implausible that similar conditions would be present in the production of evaluation of cultural products, since they would lack a common reference framework and criteria about value (at least according to Beaudouin and Pasquier 2017). It would seem that in the case of amateur evaluation there are no pre-accepted principles of evaluation besides the ones that emerge during the process of evaluation. Beaudouin and Pasquier (2017) note that the criteria that are pertinent to the work or artist being evaluated in the case of amateur critics are being negotiated and elaborated collectively. The agreement between the participants as to what constitutes worth is a point of contention and the result of a dynamic agreement (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

According to Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), a seminal work in the literature of the sociology of culture, professional and amateur evaluators can be distinguished by their approach to works of art. Bourdieu pointed out the difference between the aesthetic disposition, where form is perceived as superior to function, and popular aesthetics, where the opposite is true. Traditionally, the aesthetic disposition was accepted as a characteristic of professional criticism where the aesthetic attributes of the product or performance were the main thing to be evaluated. Similarly, amateur critiques were associated more with the emotional reaction experienced by the consumer of a cultural product (Beaudouin and Pasquier 2017). There have been several studies published in the past twenty five years that challenge Bourdieu's theory about the distinction between popular aesthetic and aesthetic disposition based on the notion that we have witnessed the rise of cultural omnivorism that has diluted the valence of expert opinion and has altered the nature of professional criticism (Bielby and Bielby 2004; Kersten and Bielby 2012; Peterson and Kern 1996; Van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010).

On the other hand, Verboord's (2014) study of film critiques taking into account the size and type of media organization they were published in shows that the aesthetic disposition still holds sway as ones examines film evaluation found higher up in the institutional hierarchy. There was no significant differentiation among professional and amateur reviews when it came to the degree of usage of high art language (e.g., terms like "theme" or "master"), according to Verboord (2014). Professional critics employed by traditional media (i.e., media with a higher number of institutional ties) are more likely to utilize high art criteria (e.g., personal reactions or emotional experiences when watching a film). Verboord decodes those findings as an indication of professional critics' attempt to curb the use of specialist language so as to avoid distancing themselves from their audience. It is Verboord's conviction that this process will go on because

amateur reviewing will become ever more popular. Subsequently, popular aesthetics will ultimately monopolize cultural evaluation discourse.

Professional and Amateur Film Critics

The role of film critics is two-dimensional: they are experts who are valued for their knowledge, and simultaneously operate as servants of average people. Similar to other art critics, film critics are work within the field of journalism. The film reviews they write have as their goal the evaluation of films by employing their expertise and at the same time to provide lead consumers in deciding which movies they would probably want to spend their money buying tickets for. So, film critics serve as mediators between consumers and films. Also, film critics act as gatekeepers who provide critiques of films by comparing them to each other. Serving as gatekeepers gives the opportunity to film critics to participate in the process of consecrating certain films, genres, and artists (Baumann 2001a; Janssen 1997). The review process of a work of art is not linked to any specific ability or course of action that lets critics identify worth based on specific attributes explicitly (Janssen 1997). Nevertheless, critics are able to come to an agreement with each other as to which works of art are notable. It is the unpredictability of cultural evaluation and the critics' apprehension that they might be too different in their evaluation compared to other critics that forces them to continuously think about the tradeoff between conformity and eccentricity (Chong 2015, 2020). Maintaining a balance between eccentricity and conformity is important to critics because of the competition they find themselves in with other critics in their field. Being able to distinguish oneself from competitors without being too different can lead to increased symbolic capital, which is the real currency in creative industries, according to Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1993, 1996).

On the other end of the spectrum of cultural criticism we have amateur critics¹. The characteristics of different populations of amateur critics who publish their reviews of cultural and other products online are not as well-known as those of professional critics. Regarding the motivations of amateur critics, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found that they are mainly their desire for social interaction, economic incentives, their concern for other consumers, and the potential to increase their self-worth. Hennig-Thurau and colleagues found that amateur critics can be categorized into separate groups based on their type of motivation. The findings from Pinch and Kesler's study (Pinch and Kesler 2011) show that top amateur critics are indeed concerned with keeping their high rank in review aggregator websites, like Amazon. The most prolific contributors and successful evaluators among amateur reviewers on those websites are in their majority men with high levels of education – examples of that phenomenon are Wikipedia administrators (Baytiyeh and Pfaffman 2009) and successful bloggers who write about cinema and cooking (Dupuy-Salle 2014; Naulin 2014). What is noteworthy is that most studies that examine amateur reviewers tend to focus on top reviewers, those who tend to be among the more prolific contributors on a certain platform and they are deemed as more “helpful” or knowledgeable by their peers (user of the platform). For the most part, that tendency has to do with the easier access to data on amateur critics who are among the top in their field due to higher visibility. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that researchers are more likely to be intrigued by those amateur reviewers who have gained the favor of their peers by excelling in evaluating products or artists.

In Beaudouin and Pasquier's (2017) study of a large variety of amateur critics of films based on their status who post their reviews on a French film reviewing platform, they found that

¹ I use the terms “critic” and “reviewer” interchangeably.

differences among the characteristics of reviewers in terms of their status—measured by the number of reviews they had posted and the length of time they had been active on that platform—correlated with the style and content of their reviews. Beaudouin and Pasquier (2017) found that amateur critics of higher status resembled professional critics in their manner of reviewing compared to less experienced amateurs. Overall, the authors identified two models of reviewing: film-centered reviews, which correspond to the aesthetic disposition category, and reception-centered reviews, which are closer related to the popular aesthetic. As Beaudouin and Pasquier (2017) note, their findings about the two models of amateur online reviewing are close to what a number of other studies have found about amateur online reviewing (Allard 2000; Legallois and Poudat 2008; Verboord 2013). Although there are differences between the terms used in these studies, they all accept the main dichotomy between aesthetic disposition and popular aesthetic proposed by Bourdieu (1984).

Methods

Data Collection and Processing

The data collection for this project consisted of three stages. First, I collected film reviews published in seven US newspapers in three different years: 1998, 2008, 2018. I collected film reviews from two national newspapers (*New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*) and five regional ones (*Houston Chronicle*, *Miami Herald*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, *Newark Star Ledger*). I collected a random sample from the regional newspapers' film reviews for each year under study. The total number of film reviews added to the samples for each regional newspaper depended on the total available film reviews for each year on the newspaper's website/archive or the databases I searched for this project (Newsbank, ProQuest,

NexisUni). In the case of the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, which were the newspapers I started my data collection from, my approach was to collect the entire population of film reviews for the years under study. My reasoning for that decision was those two newspapers are among the elite newspapers in the US, and their influence when it comes to evaluation of cultural products has also been recognized in other sociological studies (Chong 2013). Additionally, collecting the total number of film reviews published in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* for the three years under study would potentially produce a more balanced dataset between national (or elite) and regional newspapers. In addition to newspaper film reviews, I also collected a smaller sample of film reviews published on online media, such as online magazines or blogs. Those sources were identified through the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), which lists reviews published on various forms of media. Some of those film reviews are media with fewer institutional ties (to use Verboord's terms). For the purpose of exploring some of the general differences between types of publications and how they potentially affect the content that film critics can publish, I have selected a smaller random sample of those online sources. In the analysis results where the data regarding online sources of professional film reviews are included, I combine the two categories, "blogs" and "websites." There are meaningful differences between the two types of online media, but in this paper the focus is mostly on the exploration of differences between traditional forms of professional film criticism (i.e., newspaper film criticism, and newer forms of online professional and amateur film criticism in general).

[Table 1.1 about here]

[Table 1.2 about here]

The second stage of data collection involved the collection of amateur film reviews posted on review aggregator websites. I started with the collection of amateur film reviews from the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), which is a popular film review aggregator website that contains reviews by both amateur and professional film critics. I selected IMDB because of its popularity and for the fact that it has relatively easier to collect data. I scraped the imdb.com website to collect the top twenty-five amateur film reviews that were voted the most helpful by imdb.com users for a given film. The total number of amateur reviews per film that were collected was not stable, since not all films had twenty-five amateur reviews upvoted by users as helpful. This was more often the case for films released in 1998. In order to overcome this issue, I included in my sample amateur reviews about films released in 1998 that were posted on imdb.com in 1999 and 2000. I argue that the small difference in the year that the amateur reviews were posted compared to when the movie was released will not effectively distort any findings from the analysis. My goal was to collect roughly the same number of amateur reviews as the number of professional reviews for each one of the three years under study (1998, 2008, 2018). I was only able to collect a roughly equivalent or higher number of amateur reviews for 2008 and 2018.

[Table 1.3 about here]

The final stage of data collection consisted of structured interviews with professional film critics. The purpose of including interviews as a data collection method was to provide a more well-rounded approach to my project that would combine the advantages of various methodologies. The fact that the present project is exploratory to a considerable extent, led me to think that talking to people who have actively been involved in the field of film criticism would offer insight that quantitative data alone could not. In terms of how I used the data I collected

from the interviews, I tried to follow an approach similar to Zuckerman et al. (2003). I conducted interviews with fifteen professional film critics who were employed by a media company either as full-time employees or freelancers. The interviews took place in the Spring and Summer of 2020, and they were conducted over Skype or phone. My sample comprised of ten male and five female critics. Most of the film critics I interviewed were working part-time as film critics, and one of them had stopped working as a film critic two years before the interview. In order to recruit people for my study, I initially created a sampling frame based on the names included in all of the regional and national film critics' associations in the US. I drew a random sample from that pool of potential participants, and I tried to contact them through their contact information provided on their association's websites. After I successfully contacted a few individuals who were willing to be interviewed, I changed my approach by relying more on snowball sampling by asking my participants if they knew other critics who might be willing to participate. During the interviews, I asked the participants questions mainly about their thoughts on what makes for a good film, how they go about writing a film review, and how they see online film criticism and review aggregator websites affecting professional film criticism in general. Similar to what Chong (2013) mentions about interviewing book critics, the interview questions about the practice of film reviewing allowed film critics to think about the assumptions and principles of reviewing that they had employed in their work.

Analysis Plan

My analytic strategy is to investigate the extent to which professional film critics follow the aesthetic disposition approach in their reviews and, also, whether amateur film critics mimic them by adopting a similar approach that is different to the popular aesthetic that in the past was

associated with non-professional reviewers of cultural products. I start the analysis by examining the interviews I conducted with 15 professional film critics. My rationale for incorporating the interviews in this study was that I could use the insights of professional film critics to ground my analysis of the film review text data. By looking for patterns that emerge from the interviews that are relevant to the goals that the current paper was set out to accomplish, I was able to direct my analysis of the film reviews in a more focused and meaningful way. The analysis of the text data comprised of two separate phases based on the nature of data that was available to me after the data collection process was completed. The initial part of the data analysis focuses on exploring the film review texts of professional and amateur reviewers using relatively simple techniques such as the comparison of word count between groups of documents and descriptive statistics regarding the occurrence of terms related to the aesthetic disposition.

The next step in the analytic process was topic modelling, which is an inductive and iterative machine-learning algorithm that identifies groups of words, or “topics,” that commonly co-occur in a body of text data to represent semantically interpretable themes (Mithe, Indalkar, and Divekar 2013; Roberts et al. 2014). The algorithm, akin to exploratory factor analysis, identifies latent structures in the data—groups of words that co-occur with high frequency, or “topics.” These topics reliably match results from qualitative hand-coding and provide an atheoretical and inductive quantitative procedure to evaluate the thematic content of large bodies of text (Browne et al. 2021). Usually, the topic modelling technique produces both expected and unexpected topics, yielding both face validity and original discoveries. In the present study, I employ structural topic modeling (STM) (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2019) to let topic prevalence to vary by film review source. In other words, I am examining how each of my publication sources give uneven attention to particular topics. This is a different approach

compared to traditional Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling, which assumes a single data-generation process and uniform distribution of topics across all documents. In contrast, STM uses document-level metadata — in this case there are two sources: newspaper or IMDB — to produce estimates regarding the potential variability of topic prevalence. The STM approach provides a better estimation of diverse bodies of texts (Roberts et al. 2014)².

In my topic modelling analysis, I tested a range of topic numbers from 20 to 60. I applied goodness of fit tests (Mithe et al. 2013), but I mainly relied on a careful examination of the top words associated with each topic to decide what number of topics produced the more semantically coherent topics. The substantive labels for the topics produced by the topic modelling algorithm are not created automatically. The researcher must infer what is the substantive subject matter or theme that a topic produced by the algorithm is about. Furthermore, the researcher must determine if there a substantive topic in the first place, as some topics are not meaningful or coherent. Thus, I used my judgement to assign labels to those topics that were of interest to the present study based on the most frequent words associated each topic.

Results

Insights from Interviews with Professional Film Critics

I tried to get a better understanding of the film criticism field by conducting interviews with professional film critics. The rationale behind choosing to conduct interviews with professional film critics is to have the opportunity to gain insights about the review process and the experience of working as a professional film critic before I conduct the computational text analyses of the film review text data. The themes that came out of those interviews were helpful

² See Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley (2019: 3–4) for detailed mathematical formulations.

providing information as to how film critics themselves view some of the issues regarding cultural evaluation that are discussed in the literature. Especially in terms of topics related to the function over form debate of evaluation and how it is being seen by academics, the professional film critics I interviewed had some interesting and to some extent divergent opinions to share.

Purpose of Film Reviewing

Several of the film critics in their interviews emphasized that film criticism is not just about providing information to the audience regarding the plot or the principal contributors. Rather, they thought that writing a film review has as its purpose something more abstract, which they sometimes had trouble defining precisely. Deirdre Crimmins mentioned:

I think the main goal is not merely evaluation, but communication of the value. And I see that as a slightly different thing. There are plenty of people who are really good at judging if a film is good or not, or if it has merit, but whether or not you can then take that and construct almost like an argument and articulate and say like, not only is this good or bad, but here's the way in which it is good or bad, or here's the way in which it has value or not.

Emphasizing the multiple goals that a film reviewer might have when writing a review, long-time full-time film critics Ty Burr talked about the multiple dimensions that a film review might contain:

There's a number of goals. There's not one single one and it can change from movie to movie. But really generally speaking, it really also depends on the readers. It's guidance, is letting people know this movie exists, letting people know what it's about, letting people know whether you think it's good, or it does what it's supposed to (...) So, it's a consumer guide, but then it's also a context provider. So, I not only sort of talk about the movie, I sort of situate in a context of the genre of the filmmaker of where it's coming out in the culture. So, you contextualize it, and on another level, it is about engaging the reader in a cultural conversation, which is about this movie, but can also open the door to other things, what the movie is addressing, what the movie doesn't address and things like that.

On the other hand, there are film critics who are open about having as their goal following what is described in the literature as aesthetic disposition, where form is ranked over function and the film is situated within an index of references. Mike Clark, who was one of the film critics in my sample who had as a full-time film critic for various publications over the years, said:

The purpose for me is to give the reader an idea of what the movie feels like, what it resembles, rather than explain the plot. There's far too many critics who mistake ... plot summation for criticism. That doesn't take a lot of talent to do. The talent is to reference other movies that it might be like, reference why this performance is good, as opposed to another performance this actor might've done before, reference the director and what they might've done before.

Interestingly, there are professional film critics who have no qualms about stating that their purpose when writing a film review is to offer a service to the consumer of films, the person who buys a ticket to see a film. For example, Jonathan Hickman who has worked as a part-time critic for many years, stated: "I consider myself a pedestrian film critic. I believe that the weekly, day in and day out film critic criticism that I write is there to inform and to give an opinion. That's it." Another critic, Steve Mooney, in a similar vein, mentioned: "I think the largest value of it is as a consumer product, as a guide for someone who's looking for guidance in whether or not to pay money to see something and whether to avoid something else."

Jason Evans, who adopts the same outlook regarding the purpose of film critics as "proxy consumers" that can guide the public as to whether a film is worth paying for to watch stated about the purpose of a film review:

It's to inform people about whether whatever I've seen is something they should try to see. I mean, again, that's the bottom line to me. Will you be entertained; will you be enlightened by this thing that I saw? Do I think it's worth you spending 30 minutes, an hour, two hours or more of your life watching, consuming?

Larger Social Issues in Film Reviews

The topic of whether film reviews should refer to larger social issues that are of interest to the larger public as they might be related to a certain film was something that I was interested in. By asking my participants about this aspect of the review process, I attempted to better understand how professional film critics view themselves, how potentially important they consider film criticism to be. Most of the film critics I interviewed mentioned that they do consider larger social issues, with several of them emphasizing that films are not made in a vacuum. One point of difference between some of the critics was that they some of them mentioned that whether or not they refer to larger social issues depends on the topic of the film they review and whether it calls for it. The overall pattern seems to be that those critics who view film reviewing as potentially as something more than guidance to film consumers were more likely to mention that they take into consideration larger social issues, without referring to the topic of the film. A representative example of that category of critics is Sara Stewart:

I personally find it very difficult to review any modern movie without taking into consideration the political climate in which it was made, does the potential metaphorical content of what's going on in the film, and also the representation that's going on in the movie, how are women portrayed, how are black and brown characters portrayed. Are they given equal time?

Another quote from a different film critic corroborates this point of view:

I also think that the reality is that movies are reactions to the world around us just like how you react to the movie in front of you. So, I do think there's somewhat of a responsibility to be able to assess on a grander scale what is the movie saying about the world or attempting to do. I do think that that stuff is important.

Essential Information in a Film Review

Talking about the essential parts of a film review, the professional film critics in my sample seemed to largely agree on what constitutes essential information. Things like the main

points of the plot, the names of the director, the actors, etc. A minority of the interviewees mentioned that it is important to refer to the other works of the main contributors to a film, such as the director, and write about how those compare to the film under question. Thus, indexing the film in a relational way to other works is important to some professional film critics – in accordance with the Bourdieusian aesthetic disposition. Furthermore, the other essential piece of a film review is the film critic’s evaluation: whether they liked the film or not. That is also a point that all of the participants agreed on. A review without an evaluation, an actual critique of the film is considered rather sub-par or lazy. Beyond those two large categories of elements that are required for a professional review, another theme that came up by some film critics was the available word count. One person bemoaned the increasingly smaller size of film reviews that forced critics to limit their elaboration of the critique of a film.

The plot (...) The director, the actors, the genre. My opinion, this is one thing I always say when I’m talking about what I do is that to me a film review is a subjective opinion in outer wrapping of objective context. Like when there’s a taco with subjective opinion, my opinion in the middle, but around it is the shell of facts of objective context. And both of those are important.

Sara Stewart, full-time film critic for the New York Post for over 10 years:

You obviously want to say who the director is, you want to say who the main players are, if there’s any recognizable actors in the movie (...) You want to give a general sense of what the plot is (...) So, hitting those major points while injecting your own opinion. That would become increasingly difficult over the years as movie reviews got smaller and smaller and smaller.

Computational Text Analysis Results

The first part of the text data analysis results shows the differences between the structure and format of the different kind of film reviews by examining characteristics such the length of the review (which is measured by word count). Previous studies have found that reviews that are associated with the aesthetic disposition tend to be longer (Beaudoin and Pasquier 2017). The

first two figures show the average length of professional reviews that were published in newspapers and online media (such as websites, online magazines, blogs, etc.)

[Figure 1.1 about here]

[Figure 1.2 about here]

What we can observe from these figures is that the length of newspaper film reviews has remained relatively stable over time, although the variation of the length has increased. At the same time, professional film reviews published online have shown an increase in total length, potentially indicating the maturation of online media as avenues for professional film reviewing.

[Figure 1.3 about here]

In figure 3, the word count of amateur film reviews is juxtaposed to that of professional reviews in newspapers. The interesting point about the comparison of those two kinds of reviews is that while the word count for professional reviews published in newspapers seems to have remained relatively the same, amateur reviews have had some changes in their mean level of length over the years studied here. In 2008 in particular, the average length of amateur reviews seems to have been higher than in other years and relatively close to that of professional film reviews.

As a different measure of the complexity and level of sophistication of film reviews, I measure the usage of high art and critical terms mentioned by Baumann (2007) in his study of the intellectualization of film in the US. I divide the total number of times each one of those terms are used in a given film review divided by the total number of words. Baumann (2007), came up with a list of “art discourse” terms to capture the degree to which film critics started discussing film as art. The list of terms was divided into two groups based on their rhetorical functions. The “high art” group of terms included "art," "brilliant," "genius," "inspired,"

"intelligent," "master" and "work." The "high art" group of terms "imply an erudite assessment and expert judgment in the context of the evaluation of culture," according to Baumann (2007, p.120). The second group of words is called "critical" and is perceived as being more relevant in the analysis of texts. The terms in the "critical" group of words are: "composition," "genre," "irony," "metaphor," "satire," "symbol," and "tone." In the following graph, we see the average proportion of "art discourse" terms for both types of professional film criticism publications: newspaper and online.

[Figure 1.4 about here]

Although the differences between each year for the proportion of "art discourse" terms used in newspaper film reviews and online film reviews appear to be small, it is evident that newspaper film critics steadily tend to use "art discourse" terminology slightly more often than online professional film critics. The comparison between professional film critics and amateur reviewers in the use of "art discourse" terms produces interesting results, as seen in figure 5 below. Taking the usage of "art discourse" terms as an indication of a more highbrow or intellectual approach to film criticism, which is supported by the literature in this area, would indicate that amateur reviewers are very similar in that regard to professional critics. Of course, this finding is about the amateur reviewers that I have in my sample, who can be considered among the better amateur reviewers because their reviews had been voted as helpful by several users of IMDB. This in turn seems to corroborate the assertion by Beaudouin and Pasquier (2017) that elite amateur reviewers appear to have adopted a writing style and evaluation criteria that resemble professional critics.

[Figure 1.5 about here]

The next section presents the results of the topic modelling analysis, where the goal was to understand differences and similarities in the subject matter. A 60-topic model proved to produce the more meaningful results. Tables 4a, 4b, 4c present the top 30 terms for each of the 18 topics that I identified as semantically coherent and substantively relevant to the present study. At the bottom row of each one of those tables I have included my suggested topic title based on the words associated with a given topic. Some of the topics I selected to present here are about more generic themes, such as positive or negative reactions to a film, while other topics are about specific genres. I expect that the inclusion of topics like those will provide useful information as to how specific or broad different types of critics choose to be in their reviews. There were several topics that I chose not to include in my results because they were about individual films or a small group of films.

[Table 1.4 about here]

[Table 1.5 about here]

[Table 1.6 about here]

The next figure shows to the prevalence of each topic based on the source (i.e., whether it is more likely to be associated with reviews coming from amateur or professional critics). The interpretation of the figure 6 show that amateur critics appear to have adopted several “topics” or themes that have been traditionally associated with professional film criticism, such as offering opinions about the performance of the actors, the director, or the development of the plot. At the same time, amateur critics seem to have maintained their preference for popular aesthetics criteria, such as the personal reaction or emotional response to a film. In terms of discussing topics that have to do with the general characteristics of a film and the genre it belongs in, the distinction between professional and amateur critics becomes more difficult. While discourse

about certain genres seems to be clearly associated with a certain type of reviewers (e.g., crime and amateur critics), overall, the differences between professional and amateur critics in this regard appear small. It would be justifiable based on these results to claim that professional and amateur critics are close in their discussion of genre in their reviews in general.

[Figure 1.6 about here]

Although figure 6 provides an interesting image as to which topics seems to be more likely associated with a certain type of critic, the figure does not provide information about the potential change over time. In order to have a more detailed look at how certain topics might have shifted in terms of their prevalence for both publication types (newspaper and IMDB) over time, I employ regression models that quantify the differences in topic prevalence. This is one of the features of the `stm` package in R, which allows users to estimate the relationship between document metadata and topic prevalence. In table 7, I present the results of regression models for six topics that showed significant prevalence difference. I ran one regression model for each topic, with topic prevalence within the entire corpus as the dependent variable and publication type (newspaper or IMDB) and year (1998, 2008, 2018) as predictors.

[Table 1.7 about here]

Each row represents the estimated prevalence of a given topic in each publication type (with IMDB as reference) and each year (with 1998 as reference year). I chose the six topics presented in Table 7 because they are a representative mix of high art and popular culture criteria, with “Positive Reaction,” “Emotions/Relations,” and “Negative Reaction” belonging in the first category. The results from Table 7 show that amateur film critics are more likely to include both high art and popular aesthetics criteria or discourse in their film reviews compared to professional newspaper film critics. Furthermore, there is not a clear pattern as to the change

over time for these topics and their prevalence in the overall corpus. The topics “Positive Reaction” and “Negative Reaction” appear to have had a statistically significant increase in their prevalence compared to 1998, but for the year 2008 the relationship between these topics and the year of publication is not statistically significant. The same applies to the topic “Acting” that saw a decrease in its prevalence in the corpus in 2018 compared to 1998. Overall, there is not a clear pattern that comes out of the structural topic modelling regression analysis regarding the change over time of the topic prevalence for the topics presented in Table 7.

Conclusion

The present paper examines the differences and similarities between professional and amateur film critics by analyzing the content of their film reviews. The motivation for this study is founded on my interest in the study of cultural evaluation and critics. Considering the tremendous changes that work in the media has undergone in the past three decades due to the rise of the Web and social media, I am interested in exploring the ways that reviewers have adapted to them (or if they have adapted to them at all). I take film reviewing as my case study in this paper and I look at the changes in writing style and content that potentially have appeared in the work of professional and amateur film critics. My theoretical perspective is partly informed by Bourdieu’s assertions about what constitutes the distinction between professional and amateur evaluators of art and, also, the reaction to it by later scholars of cultural sociology. Verboord’s studies on amateur and professional critics have been especially influential for the inception and design of the present study. I view the current project as a continuation and expansion of Verboord’s work that utilizes a somewhat different context and methodologies.

The findings of the computational text analysis provide an interesting image about the state of professional and amateur film reviewing in the recent past. Based on some of the relatively simpler results, such as the comparison of average word count and the usage of “art discourse” terms, it appears that the distance between amateur and professional film critics is closing in some ways while remaining stable in others. There does not seem to be a significant difference in the proportion of “high art” discourse terms used by amateur and professional film critics. It is important to note though, that professional film critics are steadily using those terms a little more often than amateurs. That finding could be indicative of a trend toward greater similarity between top amateur reviewers and professional film critics, but that trend goes in the opposite direction of what Verboord had predicted. It seems possible that amateur film critics are adopting the terminology used by professionals in an attempt to appear to their peers as more legitimate evaluators of films.

The possibility of a convergence between amateur and professional film critics is also evident in the results of the topic modelling analysis. The insights gained from the structured interviews with professional critics are especially important in the interpretation of the topic modelling results. Among the many topics that the software produced, several of which are semantically coherent, I chose to focus on those topics that resembled some of the most interesting themes that came out of the interviews with the professional film critics. Looking at the topics that professional critics mentioned that are essential for a film review, such as a description of the plot and the critic’s opinion of the performances, one can see that all of those topics are more prevalent within the texts of film review written by amateur critics. At the same time, amateur critics’ review texts appear to be more likely to include topics associated with the popular aesthetic, for example writing about their emotional reaction to a film. Combining both

of those types of findings, amateur critics appear to be the ones who are becoming or attempting to become (consciously or not) more like professional critics, while maintaining to some extent the simpler or more direct aspects of film reviewing traditionally associated with amateur reviewing in the literature.

Professional film critics on the other hand do not appear to fundamentally change their writing style or approach to reviewing in general. The text data shows that professional reviewers as a group have not really changed the extent to which they use “art discourse” language. Also, the fact that the topic modelling regression results show that amateur reviews are more dominated by topics that are linked to the concepts of film structure and evaluation, does not mean that professional critics have given up on writing about those topics. The results of the text analysis in this paper are limited to presenting the relative prevalence of certain topics in bodies of text. The same computational text analysis results that show that amateur film reviewers have been adopting “art discourse” language, can also indicate most professional film critics’ writings are more complex. By having more space or a higher inclination to write a longer critique of a film, professional film critics can include a more diverse set of topics in their reviews. For example, a professional film critic writing a film review for a newspaper might write about a larger social issue that is dominating the news when a film is out. The fact that the text analysis I have employed here does not capture that phenomenon does not mean that it does not exist, as indicated by the film critics’ interviews. Thus, the interpretation of the results must take into account the limitations of the data analysis procedure and the nuances of the subject of film reviewing.

The results of the analysis in this chapter point to a new understanding of professional critics’ de-legitimation and how it is affecting the continued existence of the cultural hierarchy.

Based on the findings of this chapter, I lean toward the conclusion that professional critics do not seem to have changed the way they perform their job in order to remain relevant—which is what I was expecting to find due to the influence of Marc Verboord’s work. Of course, this study has several limitations—like most studies—that have to do with the amount of data collected and the methods used. A different approach in terms of the analysis of the textual data might produce more nuanced results, for example looking at film review texts for specific genres or films that share certain characteristics related to the leading actor or director. Future work could build upon the present analysis and expand on what I have found here. Regardless, the results presented in this chapter produce an image of the field of film criticism that is interesting in its implications about the phenomenon of critics’ de-legitimation and the decline of cultural hierarchy in the field of film evaluation. Many scholars accept that professional critics are losing their influence over the public when it comes to the formation of an opinion about film – and several journals and books convincingly argue that that is the case. Interestingly, it seems that the vacuum left by professional critics’ reduced legitimacy is partially filled by amateur film reviewers who (in some measure) imitate what could be considered traditionally professional critics’ style and topic selection. The process of evolution of film criticism into a hybrid between professional and amateur criticism could guarantee the survival of the cultural hierarchy in a new form. Thus, the access to evaluation and legitimation of film of a vast number of amateur critics at the expense of the de-legitimation of professional film critics will potentially bring about the evolution of cultural capital and hierarchy instead of the democratization that would have led to a complete dissolution of the cultural hierarchy in this cultural field.

Tables and Figures

Table 1.1:

Table 1.1 Newspaper Film Reviews Frequencies per Year

Newspaper Name	1998	2008	2018	Total
Houston Chronicle	181	256	94	531
Miami Herald	181	49	14	244
San Francisco Chronicle	13	61	52	126
Newark Star-Ledger	234	156	13	403
Minneapolis Star Tribune	169	5	17	191
Los Angeles Times	0	227	308	535
New York Times	350	370	410	1130
Total	1128	1124	908	3160

Table 1.2:

Table 1.2 Number of Professional Film Reviews Collected by Type of Publication

Publication Type	Year			Total
	1998	2008	2018	
	n	n	n	
blog	4	25	84	113
newspaper	1128	1124	908	3160
website	68	135	250	453
Total	1200	1284	1242	3726

Table 1.3:

Table 1.3 Amateur Film Review Frequencies per Year

Number of Reviews	Year			Total
	1998	2008	2018	
	514	3924	7481	11919

Table 1.4:

Table 1.4 Top 30 words associated with topics 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 18 and suggested topic titles

rank	topic 1	topic 2	topic_3	topic 11	topic 12	topic 13	topic 18
1	great	song	kill	war	life	bad	stori
2	cast	music	guy	soldier	love	plot	charact
3	perfect	one	car	stori	beauti	act	interest
4	amaz	sing	polic	one	live	even	end
5	music	like	end	german	will	charact	tell
6	love	mother	get	nazi	emot	bore	feel
7	actor	juli	cop	world	young	time	first
8	job	mari	murder	men	famili	noth	differ
9	brilliant	norah	man	isra	man	make	narrat
10	oscar	mia	wife	even	relationship	wast	two
11	fan	billi	crime	tell	wonder	just	slow
12	best	play	gun	lee	stori	money	viewer
13	deserv	nick	back	also	feel	poor	way
14	awesom	streep	one	berg	heart	scene	follow
15	fantast	time	shoot	man	father	worst	told
16	will	new	girl	histori	see	script	becom
17	ruin	donna	take	privat	move	complet	point
18	wonder	even	die	children	year	stupid	mysteri
19	soundtrack	mamma	bad	battl	touch	terribl	main
20	director	first	drug	play	one	tri	real
21	absolut	danc	drive	like	find	minut	much
22	total	young	start	time	can	hour	rather
23	top	show	hous	base	way	actor	part
24	also	meryl	leav	find	make	line	event
25	greatest	can	tri	scene	mother	write	happen
26	masterpiec	poppin	friend	take	age	total	present
27	act	nanci	detect	though	world	made	connect
28	direct	abba	scene	save	hope	save	question
29	worthi	work	turn	back	two	annoy	creat
30	favorit	michael	run	armi	woman	ridicul	mani
Suggested title:	positive reaction	musical	crime	war	emotions/ relations	negative reaction	plot

Table 1.5:

Table 1.5 Top 30 words for topics 19, 23, 24, 30, 32,26 and suggested topic titles

rank	topic 19	topic_23	topic_24	topic_30	topic_32	topic_36
1	perform	horror	comedi	review	well	romant
2	role	scare	funni	read	director	love
3	actor	scari	laugh	book	budget	girl
4	play	killer	joke	rate	direct	comedi
5	best	creepi	humor	critic	product	romanc
6	excel	one	play	peopl	script	friend
7	cast	night	will	believ	can	date
8	support	gore	hilari	give	john	wed
9	well	suspens	gag	dont	camera	women
10	lead	jump	get	negat	one	sex
11	charact	genr	night	comment	edit	guy
12	talent	hous	one	opinion	even	shes
13	act	ghost	sandler	god	perform	best
14	one	effect	make	imdb	make	woman
15	give	blood	adam	mani	actor	day
16	direct	dark	ferrel	understand	play	one
17	director	miss	two	write	star	play
18	drama	haunt	time	base	scene	like
19	deliv	mirror	star	star	gotti	look
20	also	origin	role	low	hannaford	dress
21	strong	scream	spoof	messag	seem	jane
22	actress	death	like	agre	also	charact
23	script	kill	charact	deserv	might	two
24	written	supernatur	work	will	low	fall
25	star	build	comic	posit	produc	boyfriend
26	screen	thriller	show	christian	better	charm
27	fine	stranger	hit	ignor	new	night
28	scene	dead	even	can	hollywood	get
29	work	slasher	movi	mind	yet	find
30	jame	call	apatow	pleas	cut	cook
<hr/>						
Suggested title:	acting	horror	comedy	evaluation	director	romcom

Table 1.6:

Table 1.6 Top 30 words associated with topics 46, 48, 50, 53, 54 and suggested titles

rank	topic 46	topic 48	topic 50	topic 53	topic 54
1	presid	charact	alien	peopl	famili
2	polit	scene	earth	polit	christma
3	campaign	feel	game	american	parent
4	bush	much	effect	countri	home
5	vote	howev	one	black	one
6	play	time	action	white	son
7	elect	audienc	sci-fi	live	mother
8	will	work	space	human	children
9	one	quit	human	real	work
10	time	well	monster	issu	hous
11	man	certain	jone	war	like
12	stone	make	will	state	holiday
13	american	seem	creatur	histori	father
14	candid	moment	indi	way	play
15	hart	mani	world	show	girl
16	make	one	adventur	can	time
17	also	far	giant	societi	dog
18	bulworth	main	planet	portray	kit
19	satir	lack	scientist	make	can
20	take	pace	scienc	world	year
21	helen	plot	first	also	daughter
22	show	also	indiana	cultur	live
23	report	develop	like	group	friend
24	stanton	end	spielberg	social	four
25	presidenti	rather	can	realiti	rosco
26	swing	come	still	person	make
27	turn	screen	special	one	lawrenc
28	bud	enough	find	mani	sister
29	though	yet	origin	see	come
30	new	may	cgi	fact	wife
Suggested title:	election	film structure	sci-fi	politics	family

Table 1.7:*Table 1.7 Structural Topic Modelling Regression Results*

DV: Topic	IV: Publication Type + Review Year	Topic Prevalence Estimate (beta)	St. Error	t value	p value
<i>Positive Reaction</i>	(Intercept)	0.0192	0.0011	17.841	< 0.001
	Newspaper	-0.0159	0.0008	-20.622	< 0.001
	2008	-0.0020	0.0011	-1.843	0.065
	2018	0.0023	0.0012	1.918	0.055
<i>Emotions/Relations</i>	(Intercept)	0.0452	0.0023	19.626	<0.001
	Newspaper	-0.0155	0.0017	-9.144	<0.001
	2008	-0.0055	0.0023	-2.422	0.016
	2018	-0.0017	0.0025	-0.681	0.496
<i>Negative Reaction</i>	(Intercept)	0.0486	0.0025	19.418	< 0.001
	Newspaper	-0.0463	0.0018	-25.306	< 0.001
	2008	-0.0020	0.0026	-0.779	0.436
	2018	0.0146	0.0026	5.571	<0.001
<i>Plot</i>	(Intercept)	0.0295	0.0019	15.77	< 0.001
	Newspaper	-0.0182	0.0014	-12.694	< 0.001
	2008	-0.0052	0.0019	-2.675	0.007
	2018	0.0127	0.0019	6.537	<0.001
<i>Evaluation</i>	(Intercept)	0.0242	0.0017	14.444	<0.001
	Newspaper	-0.0245	0.0013	-19.117	<0.001
	2008	-0.0010	0.0018	-0.562	0.574
	2018	0.0095	0.0018	5.387	<0.001
<i>Acting</i>	(Intercept)	0.0354	0.0018	20.056	<0.001
	Newspaper	-0.0187	0.0013	-14.463	<0.001
	2008	-0.0058	0.0019	-3.112	<0.001
	2018	-0.0079	0.0018	-4.308	<0.001

Note: Results from six separate regression models predicting topic prevalence from document source. See native functions from stm package

Figure 1.1:

Boxplot of average word count per article per year for professional newspaper film reviews

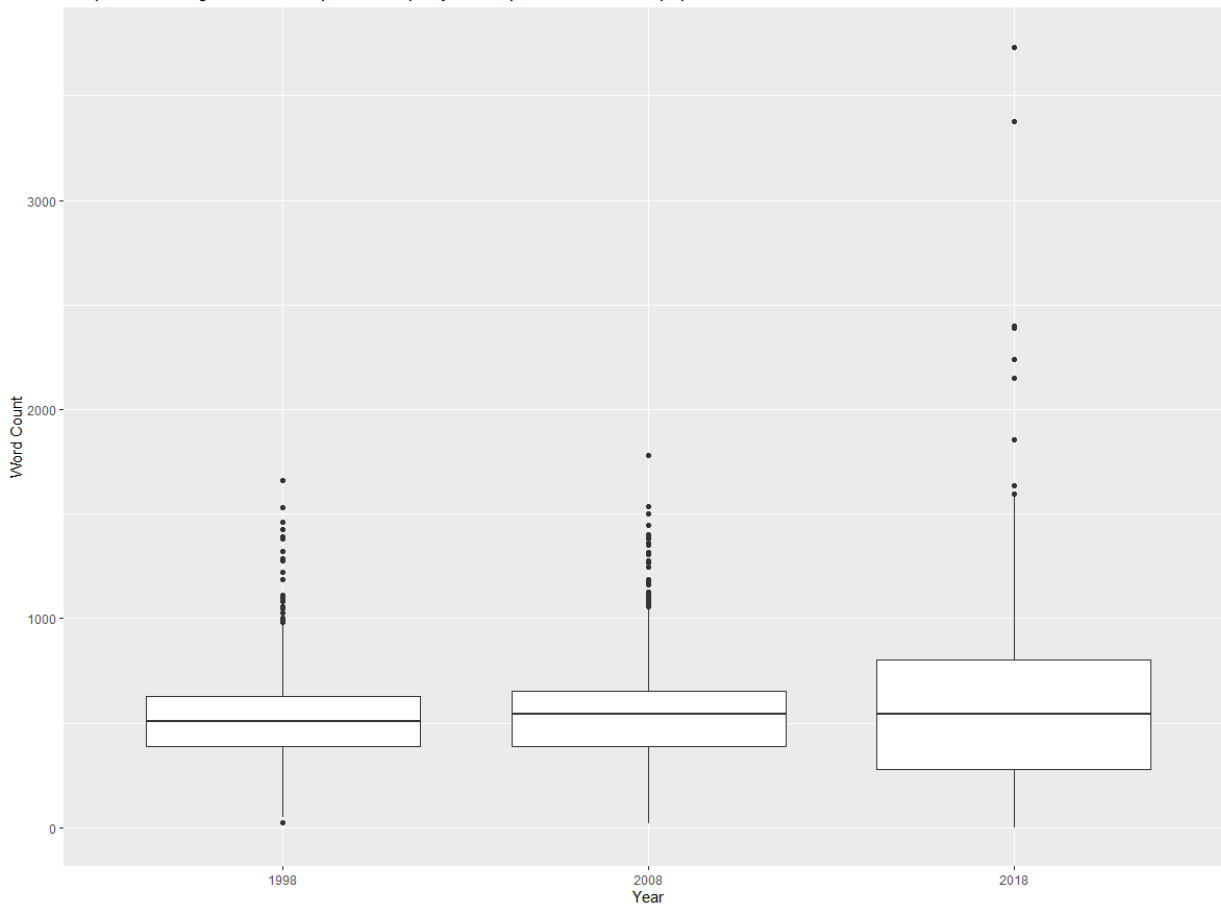
*Figure 1.1 Boxplot of average film review word count for professional film reviews published in US newspapers*

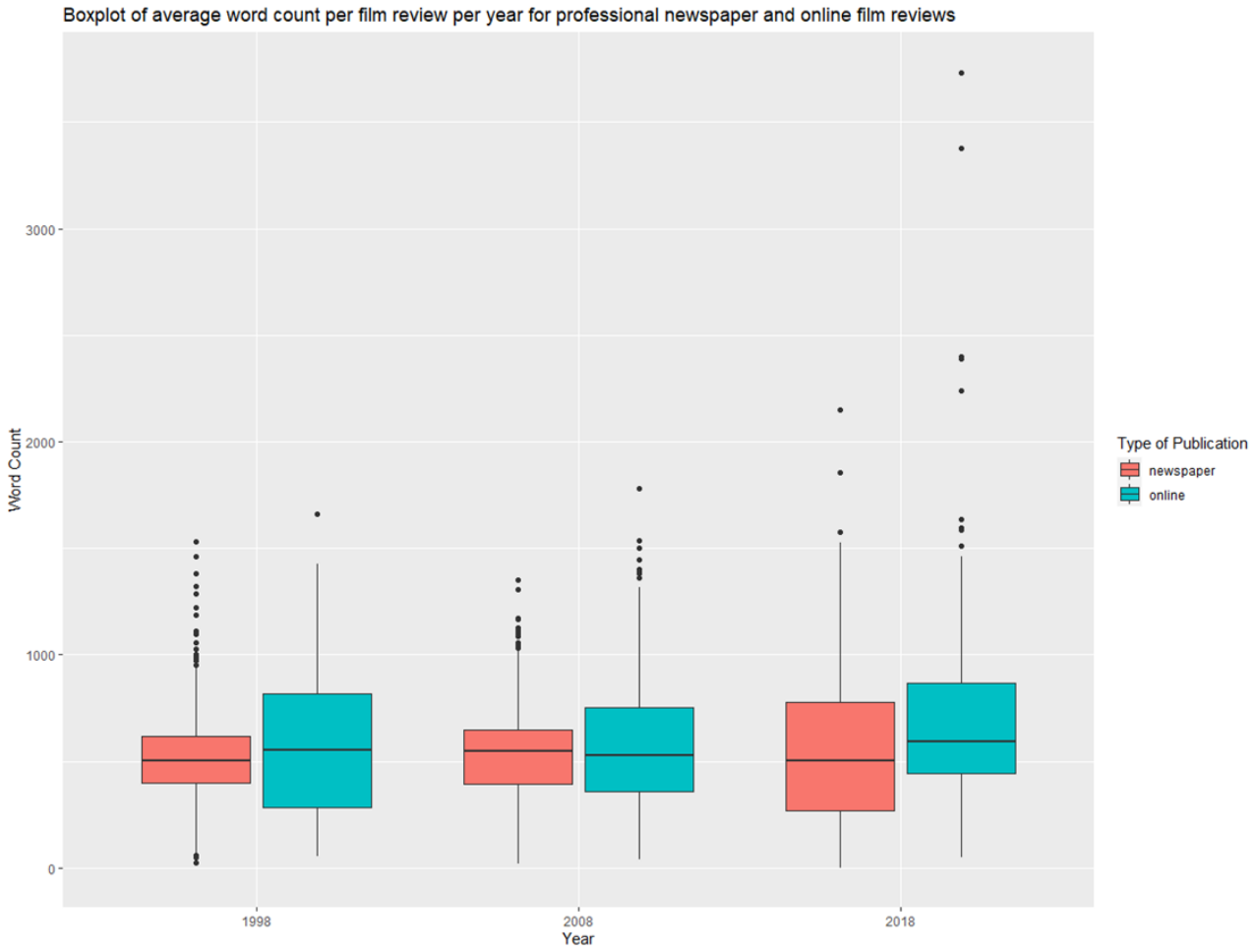
Figure 1.2:

Figure 1.2 Boxplot of average film review word count for professional film reviews published in US newspapers and online media (websites, blogs)

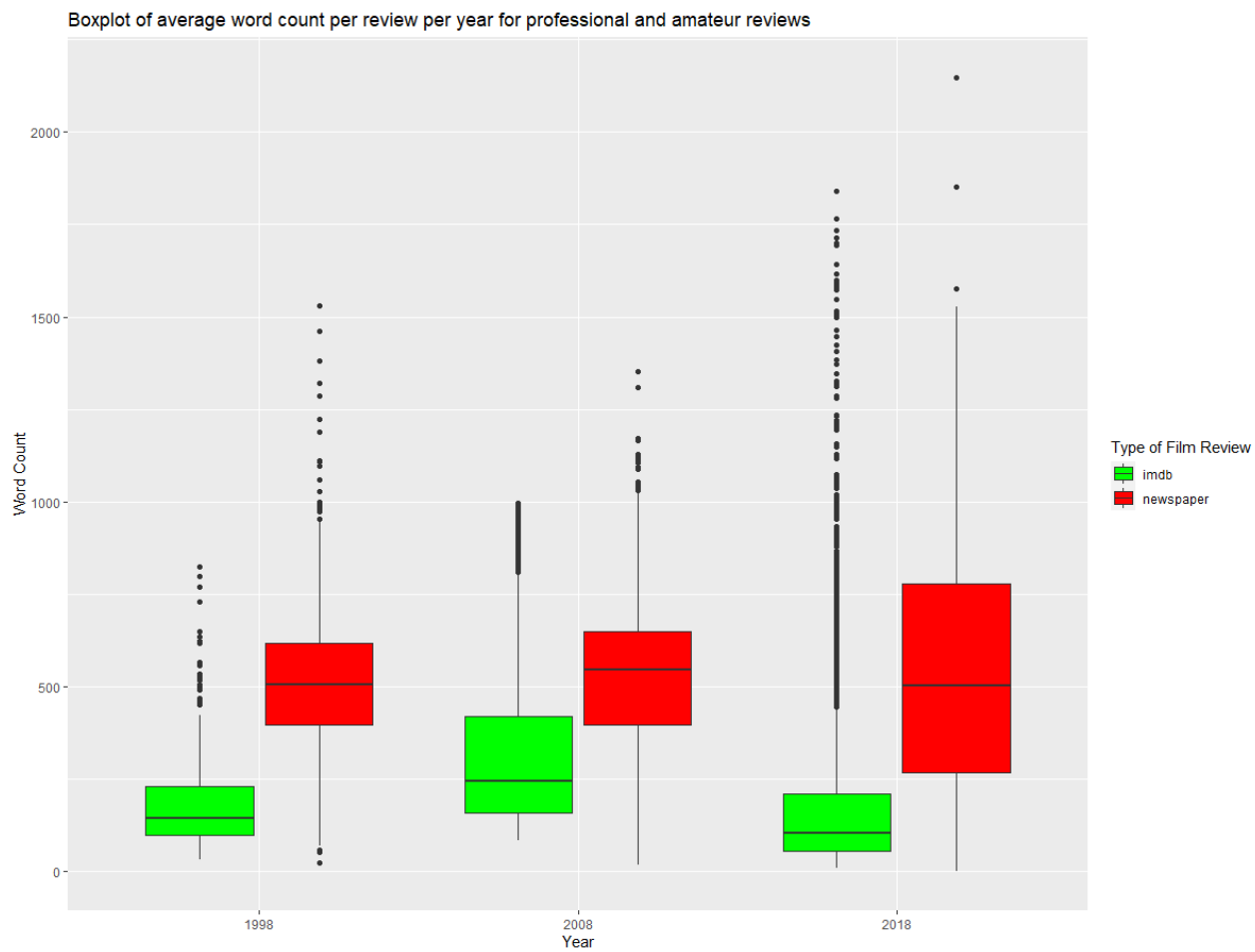
Figure 1.3:

Figure 1.3 Boxplot of average word count per film reviews for professional and amateur film reviews

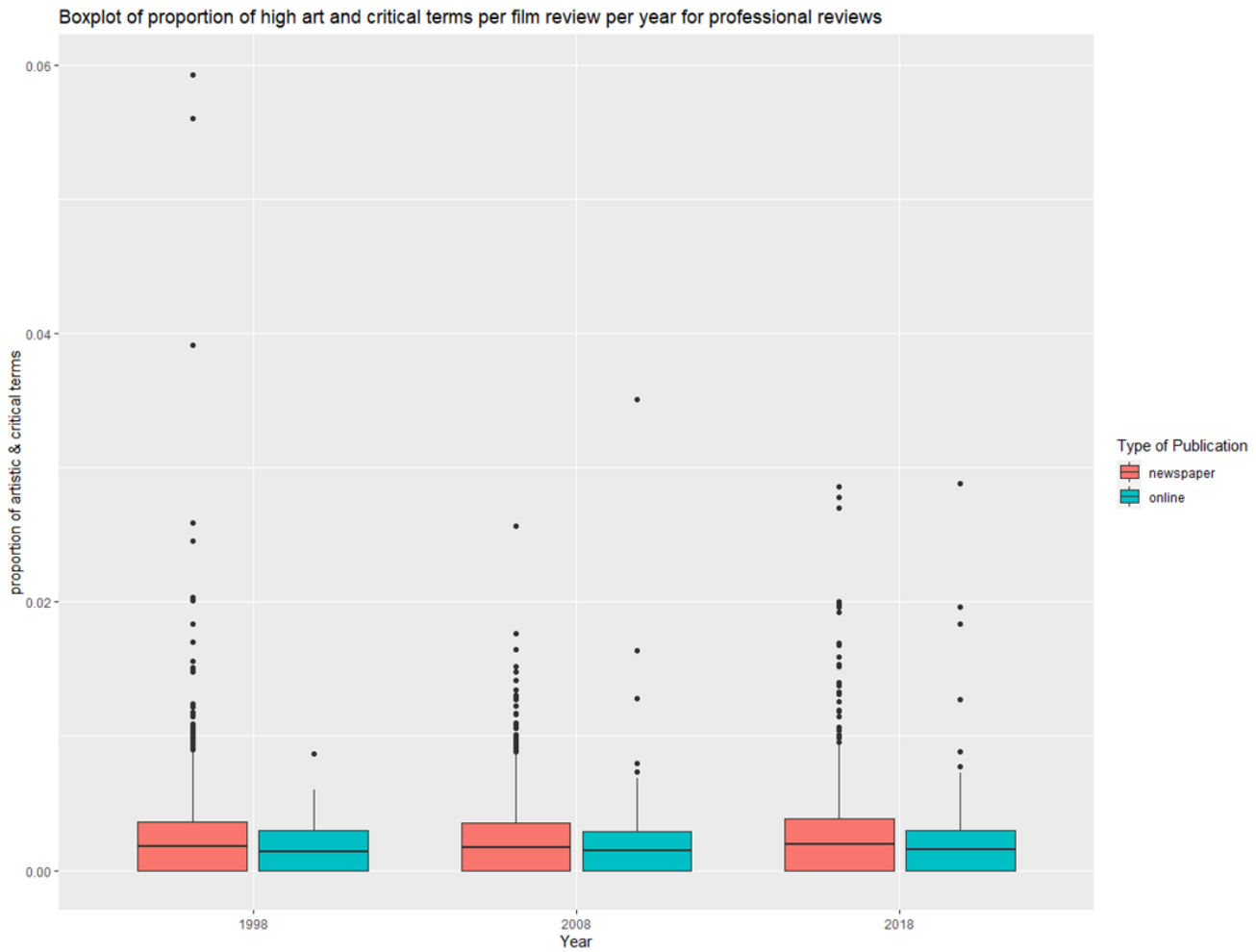
Figure 1.4: Boxplot of Proportions of “Art Discourse” Terms per Professional Film Review*Figure 1.4* Boxplot of proportion of "art discourse" terms per professional film review

Figure 1.5: Boxplot of Average Proportion of “Art Discourse” Terms in Film Review Texts of Professional Newspaper Film Reviews and Amateur Online Film Reviews

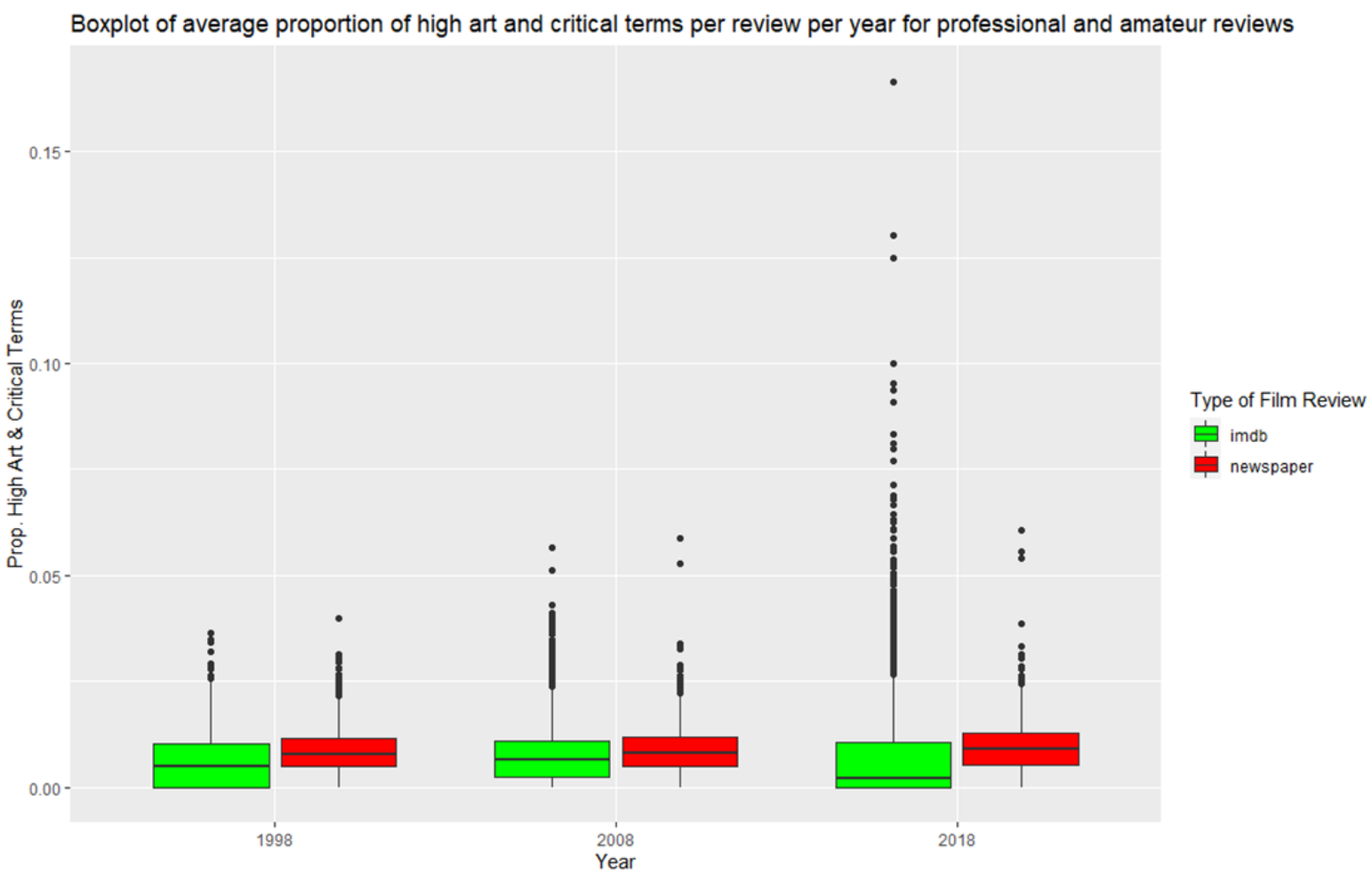
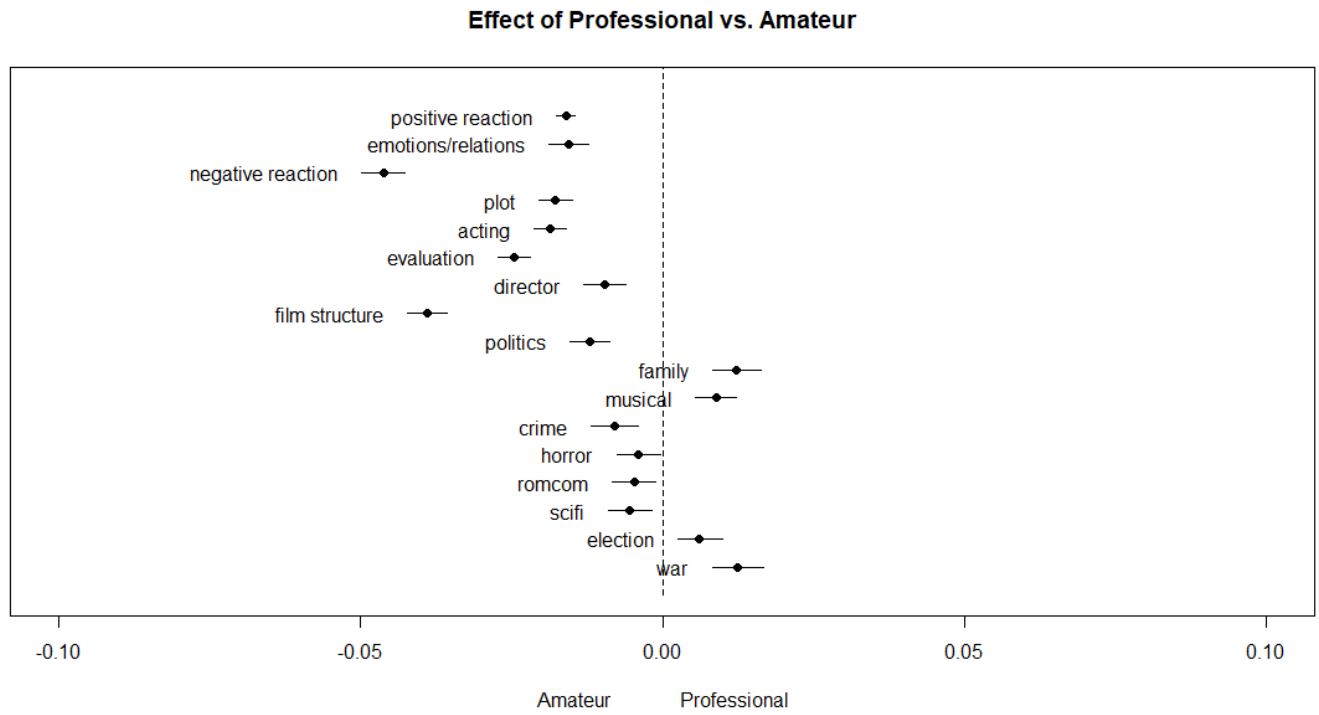


Figure 1.5 Boxplot of average proportion of "art discourse" terms in film review texts of professional newspaper film reviews and amateur online reviews

Figure 1.6: Topic Prevalence Differences by Publication Type*Figure 1.6 Topic Prevalence Differences by Publication Type*

CHAPTER TWO

Now That Everyone Can Be a Critic, Is Aesthetic Hierarchy Dead?

Film Evaluation, Critics, and Audiences

Introduction

The online revolution has brought dramatic changes to the media landscape. This is readily apparent in terms of media production, distribution, and consumption. Brick-and-mortar bookstores and record shops have struggled (if not failed) before the online behemoths of Amazon and Apple (Baidis et al. 2019; Calkins, 2019). Musicians and record companies alike have had to accommodate with newly emergent streaming platforms like Pandora and Spotify, with musicians faring far worse in the process than record companies in terms of earnings (Eriksson et al. 2019; Skaggs 2019). Major film studios have apparently found their careful marketing plans for new movies upended as negative reviews offered in real-time via online sites take the luster off would-be blockbusters—online sites that notably include Rotten Tomatoes, an “aggregator” that collects and disseminates reviews written by professional and amateur critics alike (Fennessy 2017).

That dramatic change is extending to the evaluation of media content, something acknowledged within media industries and academia alike (Chong 2020; Verboord 2020). Indeed, noted film director Martin Scorsese (2017) railed against the impact of these reviews when writing:

...aggregators have set a tone that is hostile to serious filmmakers—even the actual name Rotten Tomatoes is insulting. And as film criticism written by passionately engaged people with actual knowledge of film history has gradually faded from the scene, it seems like there are more and more voices out there engaged in pure judgmentalism, people who seem to take pleasure in films and filmmakers rejected, dismissed and in some cases ripped to shreds...

Scorsese's point, minus the anger, resonates with an important concept in sociology—that of “legitimacy.” Sociologists use that concept to denote “the process by which certain categories of people [and things] come to be perceived as more *competent* and *worthy* than others” (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 63; emphasis added). Scorsese (2017) invokes two types of legitimacy: that of the films themselves (those that are more worthy than others in terms of their filmic content) and that of film reviewers (those that are more competent than others in terms of their filmic expertise). Such legitimacy is paramount in three related streams of research in cultural sociology. Each of these streams, while dealing with different historical periods, focuses on standards of evaluation applied to such aesthetic goods as film, literature, music, and sculpture; each of these streams also focuses on the role that critics play in articulating those standards. We draw upon these three streams because they are also highly suggestive of how to locate the distinctive position of professional and amateur critics, respectively, in these times wherein online reviews are now commonplace. We also draw upon these streams because they each deal with issues of power and uncertainty that abound in creative industries and that shape creative careers (Chong 2020; Franssen and Kuipers 2013). If legitimacy is the common current found in these streams, then power and uncertainty are what shape their flow paths.

Aesthetic Hierarchy, Democratization, and Critics

The first stream flows from the work of DiMaggio (1982, 1987) and others focused on “aesthetic hierarchy”—the widely accepted ranking of a select group of genres and creators as “great” and as set above all “mundane” others (e.g., DeNora 1991; Dowd et al. 2002; Inoue 2018; Santoro 2010). Indeed, this first stream particularly details how but a few genres and creators came to be widely regarded as “high culture” (i.e., aesthetically superior) in the 1800s

and 1900s, which includes such genres as classical music and ballet. The construction of this clearly demarcated hierarchy was based upon the efforts of financially and politically powerful groups—which included the infrastructure of organizations that they constructed for disseminating and celebrating these particular genres. One result of their efforts is that the genres they deemed as “art” often became associated with the output of non-profit organizations (e.g., symphony orchestras, museums) and those genres they deemed mere “entertainment” often emanated from commercial organizations. Professional critics located at high-profile periodicals (commercial periodicals, ironically) played key roles in both espousing and upholding this pronounced hierarchy that placed the edifying “high culture” well above the vast amounts of distracting “popular culture” (DiMaggio 2009; Doan 2010). All these efforts and opinions mattered, as they eventually shaped the curricula of higher education in the US: once overlooked elements of “high culture” (e.g., classical music) now had departments and majors devoted to them, shaping the education and tastes of students in the 1900s and beyond (Dowd et al. 2002).

The second stream branches off of the first by focusing on the “de-hierarchicalization” that DiMaggio and others have identified as proceeding since the 1960s. DiMaggio (1991) initially saw this period as having a notable decline in aesthetic hierarchy, especially because high culture would lose its once vaunted status. However, we join others in saying that aesthetic hierarchy did not go away, but rather, that the range of genres and creators now widely deemed as “great” expanded considerably (Baumann 2001, 2007; Janssen, Kuipers and Verboord 2008; Schmutz and Dowd 2018); moreover, many of those genres that enjoyed “aesthetic mobility” up the hierarchy came from the commercial realms of popular culture or the traditional realms of folk culture, thereby lessening the distance between the great and the mundane (Peterson 2003; Santoro 2002; Schmutz). Thus, driven in part by the increasingly eclectic tastes of the college

educated (DiMaggio 1991), high culture began to lose its monopoly on what passes for “superior” and, instead, the top of the aesthetic hierarchy now included “high culture plus”—with that “plus” being particular genres and creators from film, jazz, rock music, hip hop, television, etc. That “popular” musicians Kendrick Lamar and Bob Dylan have each won a Pulitzer Prize for Literature is but one indicator of this realignment of the aesthetic hierarchy. Indeed, professional critics at major US periodicals made the case regarding the aesthetic worth of cinematic film, increasingly speaking about it in the same manner that critics previously spoke about the worth of classical music (Baumann 2007); meanwhile, mid-level critics writing for emergent periodicals in the US and elsewhere spoke in similar terms when celebrating the aesthetic worth of jazz, rock music, hip hop, etc. (Binder 1993; Lopes 2001; Regev 2013; van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010). As in the previous era, the efforts and opinions of professional critics were amplified as a new infrastructure arose to celebrate these aesthetically mobile genres (e.g., film festivals, halls of fame; Baumann 2001; Bledsoe 2021) and were validated as the higher education curricula in the US and beyond expanded to include film, jazz, hip hop, etc.—thereby furthering the eclectic tastes of student cohorts from the late 1900s onward (Peterson 2005).

The third stream branches off the second by focusing on the “democratization” that has purportedly occurred with the rise of online production and consumption (Hargittai and Waleejko 2008; Schradie 2011; Schmutz 2016; Verboord 2020). In the Web 2.0 era of the 2000s, some creators now bypass large media organizations and directly share their works with consumers (Eriksson et al. 2019); these consumers, in turn, can likewise bypass professional critics and easily share their evaluations with the broader public via sites like Rotten Tomatoes, which has resulted in a burgeoning number of amateur critics now gaining audiences (Jacobs et

al. 2015). With this potential for expanding voices and perspectives of being widely available, some scholars have spoken glowingly about what this era allows; however, other scholars emphasize that research reveals that highly educated consumers have an outsized role in the creation of user-generated content like online reviews (Schradie 2011; Hargittai and Walejko 2008); these are the very people who have encountered the “high culture plus” curriculum of colleges and universities. While debates remain about exactly how democratic this current era is for both creators and consumers, one thing is clear: professional critics, who in years past have acted as arbiters of taste, now find their realm occupied by a host of amateur online critics who also seek to be arbiters (Chong 2018; Jacobs et al. 2015).

Research Questions on Critical Influence and Evaluative Standards

Given the recency of Web 2.0, some key questions remain for scholars—including the research questions addressed by this chapter. The most basic question revolves around the issue of influence:

RQ1: *Has the proliferation of amateur film critics online resulted in them sharing influence with professional film critics regarding what film audiences choose to see (i.e., their influence as the “box office)?*

To be sure, the box office influence of professional critics of the past has been far from absolute, as word of mouth from peers has also long shaped what audiences have chosen to see, hear, read, etc. (Tepper and Hargittai 2009; Verboord 2021). Yet, in the Web 2.0 era, in which electronic word of mouth abounds, as do amateur reviews, some research suggests that professional critics remain an important source of information for audiences—both in the short-term, as audiences seek out and decide what to consume (Verboord 2021), and in the long term, as audiences debate

and define which content and creators are among the “greatest of all time” (Van Venrooij and Schmutz 2021).

The most prominent questions arguably revolve around standards of evaluation. After all, professional critics supposedly occupy their particular role given the competency they possess—namely, expertise in terms of aesthetic matters (e.g., history of the genre, the construction of content within that genre, and knowledge regarding what passes for “greatness;” Baumann 2007; Chong 2013; Glynn and Lounsbury 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2006). That expertise is often found, not only among the elite critics working for high-profile periodicals, but also among the mid-level critics working for specialized periodicals (Lopes 2002; Dowd et al. 2021). In contrast, one prominent assumption is that members of the general audience often evaluate aesthetic content in terms of its entertainment value—more the corporal enjoyment of the content than a careful analysis of that content and its location in a broader oeuvre (e.g., more from the heart or the “gut” than from the head). Yet, many amateur reviewers are also highly educated, and hence well versed in terms of how to offer an “artistic” evaluation rather than an “entertainment” evaluation. With that in mind, we ask, on the one hand, the following:

RQ2: *Will amateur critics be drawn to similar movies to review—namely, commercial blockbusters versus arthouse movies?*

On the other hand, we also ask this:

RQ3: *When amateur critics and professional critics review the same film, will they be similar or distinctive in terms of the actual ratings they respectively offer films?*

The empirical focus of this chapter, then, is whether professional film critics remain a distinctive and relevant voice amidst the online revolution wherein potentially “everyone is a critic.” That focus is particularly important because professional film critics—like many other creative workers (e.g., musicians, actors)—now face a “precarious” labor market in which full-

time employment is growing increasingly scarce, and freelance and temporary work is becoming the norm (Chong 2020; Frenette and Dowd 2018). That precariousness will only grow more pronounced if the work of professional critics is easily replaced by online amateurs who would offer such reviews “for free” or for “nearly free” (while also adding to the bottom line of media companies that offer such content across various sites and platforms).

We believe that our focus also makes distinctive contributions to scholarship. As the three streams of research above have revealed, professional critics have done more than serve as box-office “barometers,” they have also spent considerable time delving into the quality of the content they review. Hence, our analyses also address the continued relevance of professional critics in terms of the signals of quality they offer versus the signals that amateur critics offer. Namely, are the film evaluations of professional critics distinctive from those of amateur critics? That would be expected if their expertise does indeed differ markedly from that possessed by amateur critics. Or are their evaluations highly similar with those of amateurs? That would be expected, for instance, if in the face of growing precarity spurred by amateur reviewers, professional critics accommodated by offering signals of quality that overlap with the signals offered by amateur critics.

On the other hand, our analyses depart from a fair amount of previous scholarship by not treating professional critics as a monolithic whole; instead, we are attuned to the different position and concerns of elite versus mid-level critics. While elite critics played especially key roles in the building of aesthetic hierarchy, mid-level critics arguably did much to expand what counted as “great” from the 1960s onward (Binder 1993; Regev 2013; Van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010). Yet, in the Web 2.0 era, how are they situated relative one to another as well as relative to amateur critics? Some research suggests that, in the face of uncertainty (such as that

spurred by growing precariousness in the labor market), mid-level critics would emulate their professional counterpart—seeking to bolster their own situation by offering signals of quality comparable to those of those professionals of a higher status (Godart and Mears 2009). Yet, if that precariousness and uncertainty is too pronounced, perhaps mid-level critics emulate the status signals of those who are overtaking the “discourse space” of film reviews (Van Venrooij 2009)—the amateur reviewers proliferating online.

In the pages that follow, we pursue our analyses by focusing on samples of films released in the US during 2015. These films include the top performing films at the box office (e.g., “blockbusters”) versus those films screened at film festivals (e.g., arthouse films). Such films provide us needed leverage for comparing *what* the three types of critics evaluate and *how* they do so in terms of their respective ratings. We do so with data from 2015 because that is a year of particular flux, when the impact of review aggregator websites had started being felt by film industry insiders, critics, and audiences alike—but it is also a year that precedes the dramatic disruption that COVID19 unleashed upon the world as a whole and the film world in particular. Prior to that analyses, we also explicate key concepts and arguments that have both informed the three streams of cultural sociology detailed above, as well as our research that follows. That includes the scholarship of Bourdieu and others that focuses on *power*—power in terms of the abilities to define and evaluate, as professional critics are often portrayed—as well as the scholarship of Chong and others that focuses on *uncertainty*—the uncertainty that occurs as professional critics deal with the logistics of their work.

Literature Review

Legitimacy and “Legitimacies” in Fields of Cultural Production

Legitimacy in the field of cultural production has been defined by Bourdieu (1993) as consisting of three principles. The first principle is the specific principle of legitimacy, which refers to the recognition granted by those producers who produce for other producers (i.e., their competitors). Second, the principle of legitimacy corresponding to “bourgeois” taste. According to Bourdieu, this principle of legitimacy was related to the consecration offered by the dominant fractions of the dominant class. Through the actions of private or officially recognized judges of taste, this principle allows certain cultural products to be considered compatible with the taste of the dominant, thus becoming part of the dominant aesthetic. Finally, there is the popular legitimacy, which is granted by the consumption choices of cultural products by common consumers (i.e., the “mass audience”). Bourdieu claimed that these three different principles of legitimacy are in competition with each other. The competition between the principles of legitimacy affects the position-taking in the field of cultural production, which is further complicated by its structure. Bourdieu views fields in general as arenas of contestation, where actors struggle to maximize their positions through the acquisition of capital. Beyond just the accumulation of capital, actors compete for the definition of the resources that are perceived as valuable in a field. Especially in cultural fields, the fast change of style makes the struggles over definition of legitimate resources more pressing (Swartz 1997:123).

The Power to Evaluate: The Distinctive Position of Professional Critics

Bourdieu’s scholarship thus indicates quite strongly that, when it comes to the relationship between the evaluations of critics (bourgeois legitimacy) and the evaluation of the

general audience (popular legitimacy), that there should be *little correlation* between the evaluation of these collective acts, perhaps there should even be an *inverse relationship* between their evaluations. That is because Bourdieu conceptualizes critics (along with creators and connoisseurs) as having an “aesthetic disposition” that apprehends and evaluates cultural works in a cerebral fashion, focusing on the formal properties of that content (e.g., such as story arc and directorial intentions in film), while the general audience has a “popular disposition” that apprehends and evaluates in a corporal fashion, favoring that which is “immediately fun” over that which inquires introspection. Given that, we would expect audiences to be drawn to different types of films (e.g., blockbusters) than are critics; furthermore, we would expect that movies favored by critics would not be box-office successes (i.e., those favored by general audiences). If amateur reviewers are likewise drawn from the general audience, we would expect them to be situated at odds with professional critics (in terms of focus and preferences), thereby resembling the general audience as a whole.

Bourdieu’s abstract argument regarding the position and role of critics has been demonstrated in a number of studies—showing that the legitimation that their praise offers has reputational benefits for the works and people that they review. Critics have been found to affect the reputations of political actors (Fine 1996) and authors (Van Rees and Vermunt, 1996), as well as the consecration of certain music albums (Schmutz 2005), films (Allen and Lincoln, 2004; Hicks and Petrova, 2006) and literary works (Corse and Griffin, 1997; Corse and Westervelt, 2002; Van Rees, 1983). Furthermore, discourse produced by critics has been shown to have critically contributed to the creation of an entire cultural field more than once; specifically in the case of film in the US (Baumann 2001), jazz music (Lopes 2002), and the gastronomic field in France (Ferguson 1998). In terms of the specific ways through which such

discourse actually contributes to the legitimating process, there are two distinct perspectives in the literature. Some scholars focus on the content of the discourse and how it supplies a “legitimizing ideology” (Baumann 2007), while others take a rather quantitative approach by accepting that the amount of discourse is itself a measure of legitimacy (Schmutz 2009). The latter approach is based on the notion that a critic’s decision to review a cultural product is in itself an acknowledgment on their part that the product is legitimate (Zuckerman 1999).

There are several studies in the sociology of culture where the extent of media attention is taken as a measure of legitimacy. The scope of such studies extends various topics, such as the retroactive consecration of films (Allen and Lincoln 2004), the induction of players into the Baseball Hall of Fame (Allen and Parsons 2006), the relationship between newspaper coverage of popular music and musicians’ gender (Schmutz 2009). Furthermore, the topic of legitimacy has been investigated with similar analytical approaches in organizational studies (Deepphouse and Suchman 2008). The explanation offered by Zuckerman (1999) as to why this phenomenon exists is based on the importance for a product of inclusion in a well-defined category within an established and broadly accepted classification system. Inclusion is crucial because it is by itself enough to legitimize a product, which in turn is based on social actors’ preference to abide by the “categorical imperative.” The usefulness of a classification system lies in its ability to provide order and meaning, limiting uncertainty. A product that is classifiable and is a part of a classification system is viewed as legitimate by consumers. Some studies have found that securing critics’ attention is more important than the tone of those reviews for a product’s success.

The Power to Segregate: The Distinctive Position of Professional Critics

While much research reveals the powerful impact of critics in terms of what they evaluate, the research is more mixed when it comes to whether or not critics stand as distinctive and apart from the general audience in terms of evaluation. Such mixed findings are likely due to another part of Bourdieu's argument—one in which a given field of cultural production can be internally segregated.

Bourdieu argues that, given the differentiation of domains that occurs with modernization (e.g., education, religion, and government each now are distinct domains), we should focus not on society as a whole but instead on distinctive “fields”—social spaces that bring together individuals and organizations collectively devoted to a given endeavor yet spaces that also contain *much* competition for resources and respect (Dowd, Janssen, and Verboord 2009). Yet, just as society now has a distinctive number of fields in operation, so too may a given field of cultural production given way to distinct subfields that operate by different logics, but given an overarching endeavor, are still connected to the whole. Most notably, Bourdieu points to the subfield of large-scale production that operates on a logic of gaining economic success (e.g., the blockbuster-oriented portion of the cinematic film field) and contrasts it with the subfield of restricted production that turns such concerns with profit “on its head” while pursuing critical success (e.g., the art-house-oriented portion of the cinematic film industry). Indeed, in restricted fields of production, there is often a stigma associated with earning too much money—a veritable “selling out,” if you will. This strongly suggests, then, that while professional critics may not have as much import for blockbuster as does the audience (or amateur reviewers), those professional critics should have much more import in terms of art-house films.

In some small fields of cultural production (e.g., those occurring in specific cities with limited numbers of creators), well-positioned and well-regarded creators can simultaneously enjoy acclaim from fellow creators, critics, *and* audiences (see Anheier et al. 1995; Craig and Dubois 2010; Dowd and Pinheiro 2013; Uzzi and Spiro 2005). In such fields, there is a ceiling to how large the audience can get geographically (e.g., you have to be in NYC to attend a Broadway musical). There is also a ceiling because, apart from geography, the audiences for these small fields (e.g., jazz, literature, modern art, poetry) tend to be limited in numbers but also highly educated (Berghman and van Eijck 2009; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Griswold and Wright 2004; Pénet and Lee 2014; Southerton et al. 2012). Hence, securing what passes for a “large” audience in these fields is not typically stigmatizing for creators and creative works, especially given the sophistication of that audience (see Baumann 2001 on the comparison of mass versus educated audiences). In fact, French poets who are published by major publishers (and, hence, are able to reach wider audiences than other poets) enjoy both stable careers and an increased likelihood of eventual consecration by peers, critics, and academics (Dubois and François 2013, 2021). In small fields of cultural production, then, the three groups identified by Bourdieu can (and often do) converge in terms of principles of aesthetic evaluation.

Meanwhile, in some large fields of cultural production (e.g., US cinema, popular music, television), critical, professional, and popular legitimacy can diverge from each other, as when high sales do not necessarily co-occur with critical and professional acclaim. In these large fields, the ceiling for audience size is raised substantially by the geography at play (i.e., one drawn from the nation as a whole, as well as beyond, rather than particular cities) and/or by the broad appeal of the creative works. Regarding the latter, popular music, motion pictures and television each draw audiences from across the educational spectrum, yet they also draw pockets

of highly educated audiences with particular interests in eclectic fare—showing a divide within the audience (Goldberg et al. 2016; Lizardo and Skiles 2009, 2015). Also within these fields are creative workers and entrepreneurs who, while not eschewing large audiences, are driven more by an artistic mission and reaching that pocket of discerning audience members. That tension of art versus commerce is captured by the long-recognized divide between “indie” versus “major” in all three fields, which pits small-scale efforts on the part of creators and entrepreneurs (and small audiences) against the blockbuster efforts of creators and conglomerates (and gigantic audiences; Bielby et al. 2005; Dowd 2004; Zuckerman and Kim 2003). These aspects of large fields of cultural production (divided audiences and divided creators) are possibly why the stigma of commercial success more quickly raises its head there rather than in poetry or literature.

Summary

Whether taking a grand sweep or an everyday moments approach to legitimacy, we see in this section that professional critics have played important roles in terms of aesthetic hierarchy and the alteration of that hierarchy. In terms of the grand sweep, professional critics are those who play key roles in constructing and altering that hierarchy. They offered accounts that validated the worthy of high culture and other genres (both locally and “globally” so to speak; Johnson et al. 2006)—validations that came in the form of a legitimating ideology regarding why those genres are deserving of esteem (Baumann 2001). In terms of the everyday moments, professional critics are also the enablers, if not the enforcers, of this aesthetic hierarchy—offering thoughtful commentary amidst the tumult of industry competition and precarious work (Chong 2020). Indeed, a Bourdieusian approach not only stresses the importance of professional critics

in terms of aesthetic hierarchy, but it also emphasizes the distinctive position that they occupy in fields of cultural production.

The Practicalities of Critics' Work

The approach to critics and their work discussed in the previous section runs the risk of treating professional critics as “heroes of the hierarchy.” That is because legitimation scholars tend to focus on the successes of professional critics—heeding how their evaluations and validations positively mattered in terms of what many now think constitutes “great art”—including the many colleges and universities that teach subjects on that very matter. Yet, as Phillipa Chong (2013, 2020) clearly shows, there is more to critics than the roles of validators and enactors, they also must address the ongoing practicalities of working as critics. Especially in this era of precarious work, professional critics are often balancing their reviews with other work that subsidizes their writing as critics; they are often balancing how negative or positive to be in their reviews given the impact it can have on their social circles as well as their future opportunities to review; and they operate in an era where the tsunami of amateur reviews online threatens to drown out their professional voices. Seen from that light, the uncertainty of reviewing comes to the fore, balancing a one-sided view of critics as hierarchical heroes. That uncertainty includes the very nature of the task, the variation in the extent to which their work is considered, their influence at the box-office, and their standing in the Web 2.0 era.

Bourdieu and others have emphasized that professional critics have an impact given that their assessment of creative works purportedly flows from the detached and dispassionate expertise that they bring to the review process: They know how to locate a particular creative work and its creator in the broader historical arc of its genre (Baumann 2007; Chong 2013; van

Venrooij and Schmutz 2010). Yet, research that examines what critics actually do, shows a different picture (e.g., Chong, 2020). Regarding the issue of how professional critics of cultural products make their judgements, there is sufficient evidence in the literature that there are no specific skills that allow critics to recognize certain properties unambiguously (Janssen 1997). The lack of an objective procedure or skill that can verify the correctness of critics' evaluations does not stop them from coming to a consensus about which products are worthy of their attention. Writing about the literary field, Janssen (1997) notes that critical consensus is erroneously perceived by the public as evidence that the evaluation is valid. That consensus is not the result of an explicit attempt to reach an agreement among critics. It is a gradual process of adjustment of a critic's evaluation to that of their colleagues leading to more similarities in terms of the products they review and how they evaluate them. Janssen (1997) argues that critics try to decrease the uncertainty of which products to turn their attention to and how to evaluate them by looking at the work of their more established and famous colleagues, as well as paying attention to the reputation of the author and the publisher from which books spring. Indeed, amidst this uncertainty, we should remember that professional critics can also be biased, ill informed, constrained, etc. (see Chong 2011; Griswold 1987; Janssen 1997, 1998).

The Uncertainty of Critical Influence

It is not simply the uncertainties of work that mark the lives of critics, there is also the uncertainty associated with the influence that their work yields. In some way, their situation is similar to those involved in advertising. As Schudson (1984) famously details, most individual advertisements do not succeed as intended in shaping consumer behavior; yet the constant flow of advertisements does bring about an acceptance and endorsement of consumer culture. Indeed,

research on the influence of mass media on people's behavior has been a topic of interest for social science research since the first part of the 20th century. In sociology it was mostly the Chicago School that started focusing on communication through mass media. Although in later years this area of research was dominated by the disciplines of public opinion and marketing, significant sociological studies still appeared in the second half on the 20th century (Pooley and Katz 2008). In this section I examine the literature on flow of communication models and opinion leaders, focusing on how patterns have changed in the past few decades.

One of the most important early studies in this area was conducted by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) on the effect of media on the voting intentions of the public during a presidential campaign. Their expectations of finding empirical evidence for the direct impact of the media on voting behavior were disproved. Instead, the researchers found that informal, personal contacts appeared to be more influential on voting behavior than newspapers or radio campaigns. Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) introduced the "two-step flow of communication hypothesis" to describe this finding. The "two-step flow of communication" argued that the influence of mass media is "filtered" by certain individuals, called "opinion leaders," who then pass on the information that they possess to those in their social networks over whom they have influence. The hypothesis was further refined and tested using more empirical evidence by several members of the Bureau of Applied Social Research of Columbia University in the following years (Coleman, Katz, and Menzel 1957; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and McPhee 1954; Merton 1948). The "two-step flow of communication" hypothesis changed social scientists' atomized view of society in regard to communication and media influence by focusing on the effects that interpersonal and small group interactions have. The general characteristics of opinion leaders include: a higher level of interest for a specific issue; willingness to discuss the

issue often; and a self-perception of being able to convince others to adopt an opinion or behavior. Opinion leaders, according to the two-step model, did not necessarily possess power through their membership in institutions or organizations. Their influence stemmed from their dissemination of information to the members of their community to whom they were connected to about political, social, and other matters (Nisbet and Kotcher 2009). In recent years, debate surrounds whether the two-step flow of communication hypothesis remains useful in analyzing and explaining the effect of media or if other models, such as one-step or multi-step, are more accurate (Bennet and Mannheim 2006). Yet, it does conceptually resonate with recent research showing that “word of mouth” and “electronic word of mouth” are important information sources alongside that of professional reviews in terms of shaping the musical content that audiences seek out and to which they listen (Tepper and Hargittai 2009; Verboord 2021).

If professional critics, then, are sometimes competing with “word of mouth” information offered by friends and family, they are also competing with the expertise that audiences have as well—a point not emphasized by Bourdieu. Research by Wesley Shrum (1991, 1996), for instance, delineates between critics’ positive or negative evaluation of a given creative work versus the mere attention that they extend to that work when reviewing it. Shrum finds that, in fields of popular culture where specialized knowledge is not necessarily required of audiences, it is not the positive or negative evaluation that matters for subsequent financial success; rather, it is the amount of critical coverage alone that matters for financial success. Meanwhile, in fields of “high culture,” where specialized knowledge is frequently required of audiences, critical opinion does matter for financial success. This is in keeping with Liah Greenfield’s (1989) study, which finds that if audiences feel that they can easily judge quality (as is the case with representational art or popular culture more broadly), then they do not need the guidance of critics. Shrum’s

1996 study, emphasizes the importance of the way people consume culture. In the case of popular culture, audiences do not turn to critics for guidance on how to consume and evaluate cultural products. Popular culture products are perceived as comparatively straightforward by audiences; they do not require experts' direction on what kind of opinion to form about them. High art is characterized by the exact opposite condition, according to Shrum (1996). Audiences are forced to surrender the independence of their opinion to the critics in order to engage in a discourse about high art, because of the higher status that can be acquired by talking about it. Shrum describes this process as "an exchange of prestige for opinion rights" (Shrum 1996: 9). Baumann takes Shrum's assertion about the importance of discourse provided by critics on the evaluation and meaning of high art and makes a clear connection between critics and the cultural hierarchy: "as the providers of the discourse, critics play a role in maintaining the cultural hierarchy" (Baumann 2002: 251).

The Uncertainty of Criticism in Web 2.0

In the pre-Internet era, professional critics had few competitive challengers when their evaluations were conveyed by prominent media outlets. Obviously, that no longer holds in the Internet era, in which we have a proliferation of media outlets so that professional critics are witnessing an onslaught of evaluation and ranking offered by amateur critics. Marc Verboord's research suggests that not only has this online era contributed to a broader trend of disintegration of cultural hierarchy, but that the evaluations of professional and amateur critics are converging.

Through the social adaptations of new technological advancements, a more egalitarian or democratic form of cultural evaluation may be emerging (Benkler 2006). This type of argument has been made for other types of cultural fields and critics, such as book critics (Verboord 2009).

Before the rise of the internet, the fact that there were relatively few media outlets and professional critics guaranteed that systems of cultural valorization were more hierarchical (Verboord 2009). Furthermore, the boundaries between high art and lowbrow art used to be more pronounced due to the classification systems that existed in society at the time (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). As Verboord (2009) puts it: “institutional structures guaranteed clear boundaries between a select group of professionals and those aspiring but not managing to become one.” The internet brought with it a series of developments that changed those institutional structures. Some of the most influential changes were the decrease of the exclusivity of cultural evaluation since more critics have ways of disseminating their reviews on the internet; many of the critics on the internet are amateurs who produce user-generated content; also, the validity of information on the internet is harder to estimate compared to traditional media. Furthermore, the social networking opportunities that the internet makes available to people can lead to audiences getting information about cultural products from each other on account of similar tastes, therefore avoiding professional critics (Hargittai and Walejko, 2008; Janssen, 1997; Van Dijck, 2009).

Unlike traditional media, which allowed only few people’s works to have access to the masses, media in the era of the internet show a preference for user-generated content. This development has disturbed the older “cultural hierarchy” (Holbrook 1999) and has given the opportunity to more people to write reviews and share them with others online. The fact that more reviews are available and that data can be easily aggregated has led to the higher emphasis on numerical ratings, such as the one to five star rating system (Jacobs et al. 2015). Although it helps consumers save time, aggregation of ratings leads to the loss of fine distinctions found in the text of the review, which can affect audiences’ opinion on whether to watch a film or not

(Tsang and Prendergast, 2009). The results of the increase in the production of user-generated content and audience reviews seem to have redefined the role that professional critics fill. According to Jacobs et al. (2015), professional critics function as gatekeepers for films that are considered highbrow and aim at specific sections of the market (e.g., arthouse films). At the same time, their evaluations do not seem to affect the reception of more mainstream films by the audience (Desai and Basuroy, 2005; Gemser et al., 2007).

Literary criticism could be an example of how other areas of art criticism will evolve over time as they are gradually changed by the information era. Verboord (2009) argues that literary critics are forced to compete with consumer reviewers to draw the attention of younger audiences who read books that belong to different genres. This development might lead some critics to change their approach from a more elitist, highbrow style of writing critiques to a more mixed, less exclusive one (Kersten and Bielby, 2012). Despite the possibility of an ongoing trend toward more similarity in the style of professional critics' and audience's reviews, research in this area has found that there are still crucial differences. The findings of Dellarocas and Narayan (2006) suggest that there is a mild polarization effect in consumer film ratings, with their distribution being U-shaped (i.e., extremely positive or negative). Professional film critics on the other hand seem to be similar to each other in their evaluation and their critiques are significantly intercorrelated (Boor 1992). We argue that audiences have become more nuanced in their evaluation of cultural products, and specifically films. The fact that the opportunity for consumers of art to publish their judgements online through social media has been around for more than two decades has allowed that type of evaluation to "mature." We expect audience ratings to not follow a U-shape anymore; rather they are more similar to critics' distribution of ratings.

In his 2014 study, Verboord found no significant difference between professional critic's reviews and peer-produced reviews in terms of the extent to which they employ high art language (e.g., words such as "theme" or "master") for critics working for media platforms with fewer institutional ties. These findings are interpreted by Verboord as a sign that professional critics are trying to limit the use of specialist terms and high art criteria to avoid alienating their readers. He asserts that this process will continue as audience-produced reviews become even more popular with the result being that eventually popular aesthetics criteria dominating the art criticism discourse. Based on Verboord's argument, we expect that there will be a significant correlation between critics and the audience in their evaluation of mainstream films, due to the convergence between those two types of reviewers in terms of the criteria they employ.

The most interesting finding in Shrum's 1991 article is that what seems to matter more for the reception by the audience is the visibility that critics' reviews offer to a cultural product than whether the reviews are generally positive or not. The extent to which the same process might apply to the visibility offered by the ratings posted on websites like Rotten Tomatoes is worth examining. In a study that compared the impact of online word-of-mouth to that of reviews by experts through the use of experiments, Chakravarty et al., (2010) reported results that to mostly corroborate the differential effect of critics on audiences. Chakravarty et al. (Chakravarty et al. 2010) found that the effect of online word-of-mouth, measured through reviews posted by the audience, is greater on infrequent moviegoers – especially when word-of-mouth contradicts professional critics' reviews. Frequent moviegoers on the other hand tend to trust professional critics more than word-of-mouth.

Uncertainty and Adaptation in Web 2.0

We adopt a core-periphery perspective of film consecration in this paper. We view the various individuals and groups that engage in film evaluation as parts of a network. Professional critics are at the core of film criticism, due to the higher levels of legitimacy they still enjoy in this era. The semi-periphery of the field is made up of insiders of the film industry (i.e., peers or cultural producers) and the audience is in the periphery. We consider peers to be closer to the core than the audience due to their ability consecrate films via awards. We are inspired in this conceptualization by Cattani and colleagues' (2014) study of consecration in cultural fields. We argue that critics have maintained a higher level of legitimacy to the extent that they are still the more influential judges of cultural worth, but they have had to make "concessions" to popular legitimacy by adopting popular aesthetic criteria. Especially if there is indication that critics evaluate mainstream films in a similar way to the audience that would indicate that the cultural hierarchy has undergone changes and that bourgeois legitimacy, which critics represent, has been affected by popular legitimacy. We include consumers, for whom we use the term "audience" in our study of the state of cultural hierarchy and critics' legitimacy. The decision to add the audience as an integral part in our study is based on our interest in examining how online platforms of cultural evaluation have altered the mechanisms of evaluation and consecration and whether they have contributed to the decline of what sociologists traditionally mean by the term "aesthetic hierarchy."

Data Sources

We use data on films released in the US in 2015. We focus on the US because it is one of the largest film markets globally and it has a large number of professional film critics and

amateur reviewers. We gathered data from the review-aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes (RT). At the time that data collection took place in 2016-7, for a critic to be included in the RT's critics' list they had to meet the criteria regarding the media they work for and the length of time they had been working as critics. The top critics category has stricter criteria for inclusion. According to RT: "To be considered for Top Critics designation, a critic must be published at a print publication in the top 10% of circulation, employed as a film critic at a national broadcast outlet for no less than five years, or employed as a film critic for an editorial-based website with over 1.5 million monthly unique visitors for a minimum of three years." We based our Elite Critics category on the top critics category of RT. The second data source is boxofficemojo.com, which is a website that has data on film earnings and the number of theaters a film was screened at. Additionally, we used the article "Vulture's Most Valuable Stars of 2015" from vulture.com to select the top 50 movie stars of 2015. We used this list to measure movie star participation in the films in our sample.

To measure films' consecration among peers (i.e., industry insiders), we collected data on the nominations and wins for Oscars in 2016 (since they are referring to films released in the previous year). The Oscars are widely considered the most prestigious awards in the film industry and those who vote are in some way related to it (e.g., actors, directors). We also collected data on other awards given by peers, such as the Directors', Writers', Screen Actors', Art Directors', Cinematographers', and Editors' Guild awards. We collected data about award nominations and wins for the Critics' Choice awards, and for the awards given by the National Society of Film Critics, New York Film Critics Circle, and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. We used data from those four different sources to create measures of critics' awards nominations and wins. We selected those four critics' associations because they are either the

most well-known (e.g., Critics' Choice Awards) or they are the most prestigious and exclusive in their membership. The rationale behind critics' awards data was to capture consecration by critics in an additional fashion to that of the RT critics' ratings. Finally, we collected information on six film festivals in 2015 regarding participation, nominations, and wins for every film. The six festivals in our sample are: Sundance Film Festival, Cannes Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival, Venice Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, and Austin Film Festival.

Sample and Measures

After the completion of data collection, we created three different datasets consisting of: a) the 222 new films released in the US in 2015 that earned at least \$1 million in the box office; b) the top 100 earners during 2015; and c) the 108 films released in 2015 that gained exhibition at least one of 6 film festivals. The rationale behind the creation of the latter two datasets was that they would allow us to study two sections of the field that are relevant to the goals of this paper: the subfield of large scale production, as measured by the top 100 films in the box office, and the subfield of restricted production, as measured by those films that aim at gaining recognition in the part of the field where prestige is what matters most. The reason for including only films that earned more than \$1 million in the larger dataset is that we are interested in studying film industry in the US, which includes Hollywood movies and smaller independent films. Studying all of the films that were released in 2015 is beyond the scope of the present paper mainly for two reasons: first, we are interested in examining the ways that the production and promotion of films affects consecration by critics, peers, and the audience. That means that we turned our attention to films that were commercially successful enough to indicate that they

were noticed by the mass audience. Furthermore, with the exception of only four films, all of the films that were nominated for a critics' award or a guild award were above the \$1 million revenue cut-off point. Second, the inclusion of all 690 original films released in 2015 in the analysis would create problems due to lack of variation for some variables and missing data, without necessarily adding useful information to our study.

Our goal is to examine what affects a film's consecration, measured by the awards that different groups of social agents in the film industry give every year and the ratings offered by the audience and critics on Rotten Tomatoes. To tackle the latter part of our goal, we ran several OLS regression models with the Average Rating by Non-Elite Critics, Average Rating by Elite Critics, and Audience Average Rating as dependent variables. We used rare events regression models to study the factors that affect the number of nominations for critics' awards, guild awards, and Oscars. The frequency of nominations for those types of awards is low in the dataset of all films released in 2015: 27 films were nominated for an Oscar in 2015, 41 nominated for a guild award, and 24 films were nominated for a critics' award out of 222 films.

Three variables measure each film's average rating by the three categories of reviewers on Rotten Tomatoes (RT): Average Rating by Elite Critics, Average Rating by Non-Elite Critics, and Audience Average Rating. By the term audience we mean the people who have posted a rating of a film on RT. The Elite Critics category is based on the "top critics" category of RT. We created the Non-Elite Critics category from RT's "all critics" category by deducting the number of the "top critics" ratings for each film. Beyond the average ratings, we included the Total Number of Elite Critics Ratings, the Total Number of Non-Elite Critics Ratings, and the Total Number of Audience Ratings. Those three variables are intended to measure the amount of attention that a film draws from the community of professional critics, as well as from the

audience who post their ratings on RT. Critical consecration for a film was measured by a dummy variable called Nomination for a Critics' Award, which is based on the award nominations by one of the four critics' associations we included in our study. Nomination for Critics' Awards is different to average rating by elite and non-elite critics in the sense that very few films are deemed worthy of an award nomination every year. Furthermore, awards and nominations create a much clearer distinction between "sacred" and "profane" works of art and can be far more consequential for cultural producers (Anand and Watson, 2004, p. 776).

Nomination for a Critics' Award gives us the opportunity to compare between different forms of critical consecration in a more nuanced fashion in terms of its influence on the consecration decisions by other social groups in this field (i.e., peers and the audience). The dummy variable Nomination for an Oscar measures whether a film was nominated for an Oscar in 2016 and it is used as one of the two measures of peer consecration in our study. We also combined the data from the various guilds' awards in a dummy variable called Nomination for a Guild Award. We attempt to capture film consecration by including measures for the Oscars, which is the most prestigious award in the film industry, and guilds' awards. That approach allows us to examine how consecration by peers is influenced by critics' awards and critics' average ratings, considering both types of peer awards come after critics' ratings and awards ceremonies.

Our control variables include the number of theaters that films were screened at during their opening weekend; a measure of marketing resources a studio invested in a film, which has been found to affect the amount of attention a film receives from professional critics (Hsu 2006). Another variable that measures the difference in promotion resources is the dummy variable Major that distinguishes between films that were distributed by one of the five major Hollywood

studios in 2015 (Universal, Columbia, Disney, 20th Century Fox, Paramount)³. We included the dummy variable Franchise to account for the fact that sequels and films that are part of a franchise tend to have a more positive reception by audiences (Sochay 1994). The control variable Multiple Genres identifies whether a film belongs in more than one genre based on its description on RT. We also created dummy variables for each one fifteen genres used by RT. Other control variables are based on past studies that focus on films' commercial success and have to do with characteristics specific to the film industry (Litman and Kohl, 1989; Zuckerman and Kim, 2003). The variable Movie Star Presence measures if one of the top 50 Hollywood stars from "Vulture's Most Valuable Stars of 2015" is mentioned in a film's IMDb page in the first 5 names of the "stars" section. Also, Runtime (measured in minutes) and Season of the year a film is released in. Season is operationalized as a group of dummy variables following industry practice for the selection of the seasons (Christmas – which includes all of December, Winter, Summer, and Fall). Season was included as a control variable due to the fluctuation of film quality over the course of the year with films released just before award season having better chances at being nominated (Einav 2007).

Results

In the histograms in figure 1 and 2, we see the difference between elite critics and the audience in terms of their average rating of all 222 films in our data set. The distribution of the audience's average ratings is not U-shaped in a way that would imply polarization. This finding contradicts Dellarocas and Narayan (2006) and provides support for our claim about the convergence between the audience and critics, as measured by their average rating of films.

³ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/major-studios-streamers-win-early-battle-war-tickbox-1080393>

[Figure 2.1 about here]

[Figure 2.2 about here]

In table 1, we present the results of the OLS regression models with Average Audience Rating as the outcome variable for all of the 222 films in our dataset. The comparison of the three models shows that both Elite and Non-Elite Critics' Average Rating have a strong positive relationship with Audience Average Rating. Both models 2 and 3 have a much higher adjusted R-squared value than model 1 (the baseline model). The inclusion of critics-related predictors, for both elite and non-elite critics, renders the relationship of the majority of other predictors with the outcome variable statistically not significant. We interpret that as an indication of the convergence between professional critics and audiences in the evaluation of mainstream films. In table 2 we present two linear regression models with the Elite Critics Average Rating and Non-Elite Critics Average Rating as the outcome variables. We included the same predictors in model 1 of table 1 and the two models of table 2 to examine possible differences in evaluation criteria between critics and the audience.

[Table 2.1 about here]

The results of table 2 and model 1 from table 1 show several of the same predictors having a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable. In the baseline model in table 1, we see that the Number of Theaters in Opening Weekend, Runtime, Action as a genre, and Festival Participation are statistically significant. All of those predictors are statistically significant in the two models in table 2, with the exception of the Action genre for the model with Elite Critics Average Rating as the outcome variable. Also, somewhat surprisingly, the presence of a movie star in a film seems to positively affect the ratings of critics but not those of the audience. We interpret the results of table 1 and table 2 as evidence that there is a

considerable degree of convergence between professional critics and the audience in the evaluation of mainstream films in terms of the criteria they employ. These findings contradict long-held assumptions about the relationship between professional critics and audiences regarding the evaluation of mainstream cultural products. Comparing between models 2 and 3 we see that the number of ratings for both elite and non-elite critics have negative, albeit relatively small, coefficients. Our measure of the amount of attention that critics as a group pay to a film seems to have the opposite result one would expect for mainstream cultural products.

[Table 2.2 about here]

It is worth mentioning that in the literature about the relationship between critical and audience reception of mainstream cultural products the measure commonly used for reception by the audience is box office revenue. Our data allows us to examine the evaluation of films by the audience instead of simply whether more or fewer people decided to pay a ticket to watch a film. Simply taking box office revenue as a measure of reception is not always informative about the actual evaluation of the worth of a film by the audience. The possibility of selection bias for those audience members who post reviews on Rotten Tomatoes is mediated by the popularity of the platform and the vast number of people who post reviews on it.

It is clear that there is a strong positive association between both elite and non-elite critics' average rating and audience's average rating. We use the term "signaling" to describe the process that takes place between critics and the audience in the context of film evaluation on Rotten Tomatoes (RT). Critics' reviews of films are published a couple of days before a film is released or on the day of its release. The audience members who post reviews on Rotten Tomatoes know what a film's "all critics" and "top critics" score when posting an evaluation on Rotten Tomatoes. Writing a review for a film requires going to that film's page on RT, where the

average rating by all critics is prominently displayed. The average rating by top critics is available after clicking on the specified button on that film's page on RT. We can think of that aspect of evaluation on review-aggregation websites as a "treatment." We argue that the "signaling" that critics perform in terms of film quality when it comes to the evaluations by the audience means that critics maintain a higher level of legitimacy than the popular legitimacy of the audience. That increased level of legitimacy is achieved by the convergence between critics and audience in terms of evaluation criteria. Considering we are examining the results from a data set that focuses on mainstream films, we argue that the convergence is initiated mostly from the side of the critics. In table 3 and 4 we present similar models to the ones in the previous two tables, but in these cases, we use data on the top 100 films in the box office in 2015. Our rationale for the inclusion of these results was to focus on blockbusters and commercially successful films in general to examine whether our findings from the field of mainstream films carries over. Again, we see a strong positive correlation between the average rating of elite and non-elite critics with the average rating of the audience. We maintain that the "signaling" found in the previous tables is present here too, where the focus is on the section of the field that can be called "mass market." We argue that the findings from the first four tables indicate a pattern that is in accordance with Verboord's claim about the adoption of popular aesthetic criteria by professional critics in the context of mainstream cultural production.

[Table 2.3 about here]

Turning our attention to the factors that play a role in film consecration by critics, we see in table 2 how elite and non-elite critics differ. What is striking in this case is the degree of similarity of models 4 and 5 presented in table 2. The only differences appear to be in the size of the coefficients of the predictor variables that are included in the models. The results in table 2

indicate that elite and non-elite critics do not differ in the criteria that inform film consecration. Predictably, the participation in a film festival appears to be an important factor for film critics, since it is a statistically significant predictor with a large positive coefficient in both models. That finding is predictable considering the clear categorization of films in terms of the section of the film industry market (i.e., highbrow versus mainstream) based on the willingness of the producers or the director to compete in a festival that supposedly values artistic achievement above all else⁴. The number of predictors included in the models presented in Table 2 is obviously not exhaustive. Quantitative data analysis cannot match qualitative data analysis in this particular area. We do argue though that the predictors we have included in our analysis are sufficiently representative of the factors that have typically been considered as meaningful in the evaluation of films in the literature (Eliashberg and Shugan, 1997; Litman and Kohl, 1989; Zuckerman and Kim, 2003). The important finding here is that elite critics do not differ from non-elite critics in their use of evaluation criteria overall. One thing to note regarding this finding has to do with the characteristics of our data set. We adopted the definition of “elite” critics that RT uses (i.e., “top critic”). Although we have made the argument that RT’s categorization of critics is based on rigorous criteria, it is possible that a stricter definition of what constitutes an elite critic could produce slightly different results.

[Table 2.4 about here]

In table 5 we present the results of three regression models that have Audience Average Rating as the outcome variable and they use the sample of 108 films that participated in six film

⁴ That notion could be debatable to some extent, considering that some films that are made for the mainstream market participate in film festivals. That choice is a strategic decision on the part of the producers for the sake of designating a film as both commercially successful and worthy of award nominations (especially Oscars nominations).

festivals. These models show the effect of critics on the audience's evaluation of films that are considered highbrow. The results indicate a strong positive relationship between Elite and Non-Elite Critics Average Rating with Audience Average Rating. This finding is corroborating findings from past studies regarding professional critics' influence on audiences when it comes to cultural products that are characterized as highbrow (e.g., Shrum 1991).

[Table 2.5 here]

Moving on from the relationship between critics' and audience's film evaluation, in table 6 we present the results of a rare events regression model with the dummy variable Nomination for a Critics' Award as the dependent variable for all three models. We included Nomination for a Critics' Award as an additional measure of consecration to critics' average ratings. That way we are able to examine the two different types of consecration. Awards and award nominations introduce a more absolute distinction between the sacred and profane works of art compared to quantitative ratings. The higher stakes that nomination of a film has for the critics—or any other social group that gives out awards—could alter the kind of criteria that come into play in the consecration process compared to quantitative evaluation. The results from model 1 in table 6 exhibit the difference in the criteria that are more important in this context, before we consider predictors that account for average and total number of ratings. Compared to the results from model 1 from table 1 and tables 2 and 4, in which the focus was the average rating of various types of reviewers, here we see that the genres of film seem to play an important role. The main finding from table 6 is the apparently equally strong and positive relationship between the Likelihood of Nomination for a Critics' Award and Elite and Non-Elite Average Rating. This result could be driven by the similarity of elite and non-elite critics in their criteria and ratings. The fact that Total Number of Elite Critics' Ratings has a bigger coefficient than the equivalent

variable for non-elite critics can be due to the higher number of elite critics in the four prestigious critics' associations we have in our sample.

[Table 2.6 about here]

In table 7, we present the results of a group of rare event regression models with Nomination for a Guild Award as the outcome variable. We have specified three regression models (beyond model 1) that differ only by one predictor. The different predictor in each one of those models is a different measure of consecration by critics. That gives us the opportunity to examine if and to what extent a film's nomination for an award given by a guild is linked to the consecration offered by critics. We see that all three critics-related predictors—Nomination for a Critics' Award, Elite and Non-Elite Critics' Average Rating—have a statistically significant relationship with the outcome variable. The measure of consecration related to award nomination by critics has a bigger coefficient than the other two. Furthermore, it is interesting that predictors related to a film's box office success (Log of Total Revenue) and highbrow categorization (Festival Participation) that are statistically significant. It is also important to note that guilds' awards are announced after the awards of critics' associations.

[Table 2.7 about here]

Table 8 contains the results of rare events regression models too, but this time the outcome variable is Nomination for an Oscar. The results from table 8 resemble those from table 7 in terms of the relationship between the outcome variable and the predictors that are related to critics. Again, the coefficient of Nomination for a Critics Award is bigger than the coefficients of the critics' average rating predictors in models 3 and 4 of table 8. The inclusion of a predictor about the Nomination for a Guild Award clarifies the extent to which consecration by different types of players in this field affects the likelihood of an Oscar Nomination. From the comparison

of models 2, 3, and 4, we see that Nomination for a Critics' Award has a slightly larger coefficient than Nomination for a Guild Award. The other two predictors measuring critics' average ratings have considerably lower coefficients than Nomination for a Guild Award at an alpha level of 0.05.

Our main takeaway from the results of our study is that critics appear to possess a higher level of legitimacy compared to the other two groups that are involved in the evaluation and consecration of films (i.e., audience and peers). The critics' higher level of legitimacy is evidenced by the influence they appear to have over the evaluation decisions of the other groups, as shown by our results. Due to their higher levels of legitimacy, critics appear to signal to audiences and industry insiders alike which films are worthy of consecration. Critics' effect on audience's evaluation appears to be the result of the adoption of more "simplified" or "popular" criteria on the part of the critics when evaluating popular films. Going back to the schema we referred to earlier in our paper, we argue that critics are positioned in the core of the field of film in the context of evaluation and consecration. It is the acceptance or alignment by the other two groups of critics' evaluation that allows critics to maintain their higher levels of legitimacy. This in turn leads to the survival of the cultural hierarchy, albeit a somewhat altered version of it.

[Table 2.8 about here]

Conclusion

How do critics fare in an online era where "everyone" is potentially a critic? Put more broadly: how does cultural hierarchy fare amidst broad social transformation? Those inter-related questions are at the heart of this paper. Indeed, we have argued that, given the import that various theories attribute to critical evaluation, our consideration of critics as they operate in the field of

cinema provide an important vantage from which to consider the state of aesthetic hierarchy in general. The literature has approached aesthetic hierarchy in at least two ways: treating it as a dichotomous (e.g., high culture vs. popular culture) or as continuous (e.g., the ranking of some works over others by way of numerical scales). Given that, we have likewise approached critics in two ways: on the one hand, we see how critics of various types align with others in both fields of mainstream films and festival films. That allows us to see whether the boundaries between these fields are now blurred in the online era. On the other hand, we see whether the ratings of critics signal relevant distinctions among films.

Our analysis of how various critics align with each other reveals important information. The traditional Bourdieusian argument typically positions the opinions of elite critics as diverging from the opinions of the typical consumer. That is because the former supposedly relies on intellectually informed criteria when evaluating such things as films, and the latter supposedly relies upon more emotional criteria. Yet, more recent work has found that, in some settings, critical and consumer evaluations can converge (see Dowd et al., 2019). When distinguishing between elite critics, non-elite critics, and the audience, the Bourdieusian type of alignment only partially remains. Most notably, elite, and non-elite critics (both who are employed to make aesthetic evaluations) differ slightly from amateur critics (those in the audience who rank films on Rotten Tomatoes) in terms of appraisal criteria when evaluating mainstream films. When we look at the relationship between how positive or negative audiences evaluate mainstream films however, we notice a strong correlation with the ratings of professional critics. Furthermore, there is convergence between professional and amateur critics in the evaluation of festival films. That small-scale field apparently has shared aesthetic codes

across professionals and amateurs alike, something that has been demonstrated in other small-scale fields as well, where audiences are more connoisseurs rather than laymen.

While boundaries between various fields of cinema have not completely disappeared in terms of critical evaluation (even in the online era and the transformations it has wrought), the picture becomes more complicated when considering the signaling role of critical evaluation. One strand of research finds that the rankings of critics matter greatly—not only in shaping the evaluation of others, but also foreshadowing (signaling) the eventual success of those works earning high evaluations (biz school, etc.). Yet, other scholars take a more critical view of critics. Greenfeld, (1988), Shrum, (1991), and others, for instance, have found that, in mainstream type of fields where specialized knowledge is not necessarily required for evaluation, that the ranking of critics has no bearing on reception; rather, it is coverage that matters more than the actual ranking (e.g., whether a critic reviews a film is more impactful than the score that this critics provides). More recent scholarship on the “democratization” of tastes likewise suggests that the rankings of professional critics would matter less and less (Verboord 2013).

We resolve some of those complications by emphasizing the type of field in which critical evaluation is occurring. In the field of mainstream films, for instance, there is indeed some signs of the “democratization” of tastes. Namely, the signaling done by professional critics in terms of their evaluations is associated with the evaluation by the audience through their own evaluations of films. We interpret that finding as an indication of adoption of the audience’s sensibilities about mainstream films by professional critics. In this way, critics maintain their legitimacy in an era where their standing has been questioned. The implications of that development for the cultural hierarchy, to the extent that the cultural hierarchy is upheld by critics, is that it has evolved but it is overall maintained.

Meanwhile, in the field of festival films, the signaling of professional critics (elite and non-elite alike) is also associated with the consecration by the audience of those particular films. Yet, even in the context of highbrow films (those earning critical and peer awards), there is also some convergence occurring between professional critics and cultural producers—with the signaling of professional critics associated with increased likelihood that a given film will be honored. That suggests, not de-hierarchicalization, but rather the acceptance of professional critics' aesthetic sensibilities by cultural producers

That last point also raises issues for future research 1) longitudinal 2) the career implications of such transformations. We have focused mostly on the output of professional critics, but we recommend more work (such as done by Chong) be done on how these creative workers are forced to adapt to the changing world.

Tables and Figures

Figure 2.1: Histogram of Average Rating by Audience for films that earned more than \$1 million in the Box Office in 2015

Figure 2.7 Average Rating by Audience for films that earned more than \$1 million in the box office in 2015

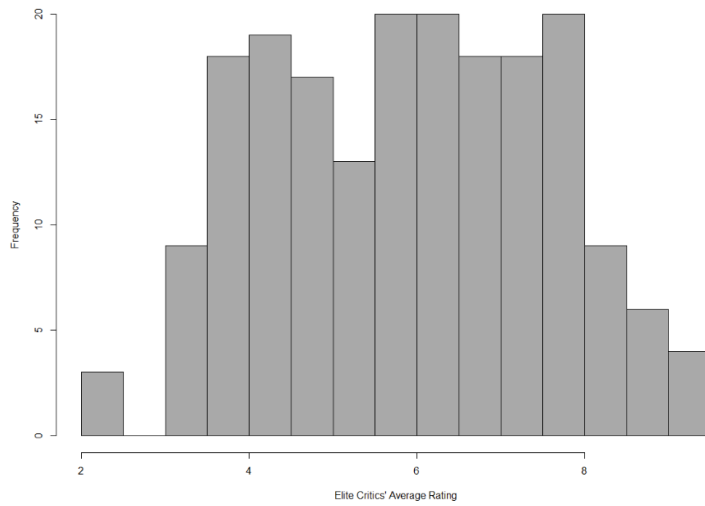


Figure 2.2: Histogram of Elite Critics' Average Rating for Films that Earned more than \$1 Million in the Box Office in 2015

Figure 2.8 Elite Critics' Average Rating for films that earned more than \$1 million in the box office in 2015

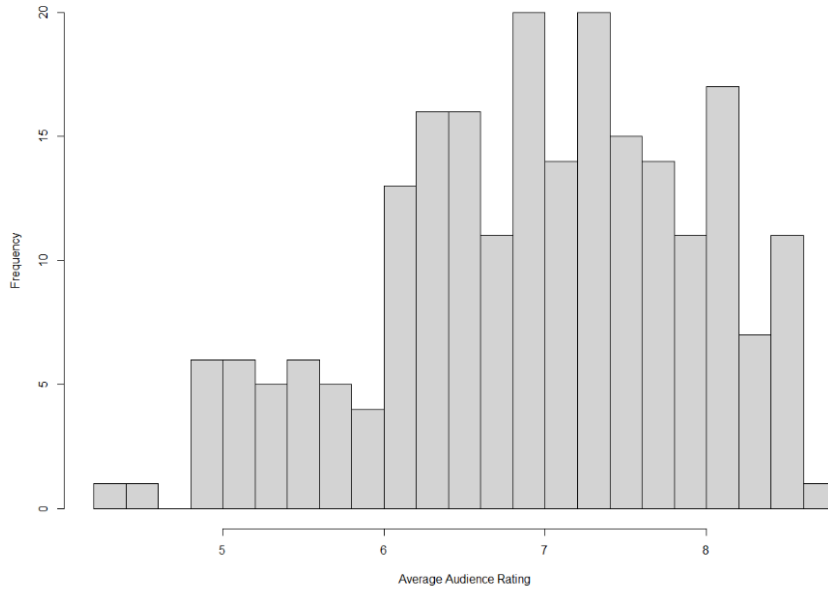


Table 2.1: Linear Regression Models with Audience Average Rating as the Dependent Variable*Table 2.8 Linear Regression Models with Audience Average Rating as the Dependent Variable*

	Dependent variable:		
	Audience (1)	Average Rating (2)	Rating (3)
Elite Critics' Average Rating		0.481***	
Total Number of Elite Critics Ratings		-0.031***	
Non-Elite Critics' Average Rating			0.585***
Total Number of Non-Elite Critics' Ratings			-0.004***
Major Studio	-0.081	-0.197	-0.082
Movie Star Presence	0.187	0.037	0.046
Festival Participation	0.365**	-0.158	-0.149
Franchise	0.307	0.203	0.138
Runtime	0.014***	0.021***	0.006**
Multiple Genres	0.317**	0.026	0.010
Number of Theaters in Opening Weekend	-0.0001**	0.0001	0.0001**
Comedy	-0.201	0.063	-0.142
Drama	0.035	0.096	0.201*
Action	-0.381**	-0.205	0.014
Constant	5.566***	2.748***	3.052***
Observations	219	193	215
R2	0.224	0.542	0.590
Adjusted R2	0.186	0.512	0.566
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Table 2.2: Linear Regression Models with Average Rating by Non-Elite Critics (Model 1) and Elite Critics (Model 2) as the Dependent Variable

	Dependent variable:	
	Non-Elite Critics Rating (4)	Elite Critics Rating (5)
Major Studio	0.181	0.241
Movie Star Presence	0.616***	0.568**
Film Festival Participation	1.313***	1.413***
Franchise	0.406	0.251
Runtime	0.016***	0.026***
Multiple Genres	0.513***	0.511**
Number of Theaters in Opening Weekend	-0.0004***	-0.0005***
Comedy	-0.132	0.047
Drama	-0.171	-0.338
Action	-0.621**	-0.476
Constant	4.325***	3.579***
Observations	215	193
R2	0.340	0.367
Adjusted R2	0.308	0.332

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2.3: Linear Regression Models with Audience Average Rating as the Dependent Variable for the Top 100 Films in the Box Office in 2015

Regression Results			
	Dependent variable:		
	Audience Average Rating (1)	Audience Average Rating (2)	Audience Average Rating (3)
Elite Critics' Average Rating		0.475***	
Total Number of Elite Critics Ratings		-0.018*	
Non-Elite Critics' Average Rating			0.615***
Total Number of Non-Elite Critics' Ratings			-0.006***
Major Studio	-0.003	-0.163	-0.016
Movie Star Presence	0.067	-0.022	0.024
Festival Participation	0.672**	-0.093	0.251
Franchise	0.135	0.137	0.106
Runtime	0.035***	0.021***	0.021***
Multiple Genres	0.277	-0.021	-0.093
Number of Theaters in Opening weekend	-0.00002	0.0001	0.0001
Comedy	-0.014	0.100	0.111
Drama	0.155	0.196	0.185
Action	-0.524**	-0.104	0.113
Constant	2.892***	2.299***	1.519***
Observations	100	100	100
R2	0.434	0.632	0.743
Adjusted R2	0.370	0.581	0.707
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Table 2.4: Linear Regression Models for Dependent Variables: Non-Elite Critics' and Elite Critics'

Average Rating for the Top 100 Films in the Box Office in 2015

Regression Results

	Dependent variable:	
	Non-Elite Critics Rating (1)	Elite Critics Rating (2)
Major Studio	0.203	0.385
Movie Star Presence	0.339	0.405
Film Festival Participation	1.479***	1.910***
Franchise	0.164	0.026
Runtime	0.045***	0.043***
Multiple Genres	0.818***	0.795***
Number of Theaters in Opening Weekend	-0.0002	-0.0002
Comedy	-0.243	-0.158
Drama	-0.224	-0.084
Action	-1.026***	-0.946***
Constant	0.829	0.919
Observations	100	100
R2	0.455	0.513
Adjusted R2	0.394	0.459

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2.5: Linear Regression Models with Audience Rating as the Dependent Variable for the 108 films released in 2015 that participated in six major film festivals

	Dependent variable:		
	Audience (1)	Average (2)	Rating (3)
Elite Critics' Average Rating		0.445***	
Non-Elite Critics' Average Rating			0.652***
Wide Release	0.665***	0.489***	0.480***
Festival Awards	0.516***	0.383***	0.176
Festival Competition Section Participation	0.068	0.062	0.290*
Runtime	6.698***	3.568***	2.002***
Observations	108	103	108
R2	0.182	0.495	0.564
Adjusted R2	0.159	0.475	0.547
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Table 2.6: Rare Events (Firth) Regression Models with Likelihood of Nomination for a Critics' Award
as the Dependent Variable

	Likelihood of Nomination for A Critics' Award		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Elite Critics Avg Rating		1.310***	
Total Number of Elite Critics' Ratings		0.174**	
Non-Elite Critics Avg Rating			1.313**
Total Number of Non-Elite Critics' Ratings			0.018**
Major Studio	1.593**	0.633	0.758
Movie Star Presence	1.242*	0.402	0.438
Festival Participation	2.067***	0.898	0.720
Franchise	1.926*	0.512	0.767
Runtime	0.035**	0.050*	0.045**
Multiple Genres	0.405	-0.089	0.210
Number of Theaters in Opening weekend	-0.001*	-0.0004	-0.001
Comedy	-1.601*	-0.734	-1.544
Drama	1.701**	1.971*	2.413**
Action	-1.426*	-0.920	-1.784
Constant	-7.904***	-25.264***	-20.538***
Observations	220	193	215
Akaike Inf. Crit.	118.713	67.515	75.385
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 2.7: Rare Events (Firth) Regression Models with Likelihood of Nomination for a Guild Award as the Dependent Variable

	Dependent variable:			
	Likelihood of Nomination for a Guild Award (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Nomination for a Critics Award		1.957***		
Elite Critics Avg Rating			1.179***	
Non-Elite Critics Avg Rating				1.510***
Christmas	0.221	-0.190	-0.223	-0.186
winter	-0.561	-0.655	-0.495	-0.517
Log of Total Revenue	1.480***	1.298***	1.209**	1.247**
Movie Star Presence	1.528***	1.596***	1.574**	2.138***
Festival Participation	2.981***	2.641***	1.624**	1.826***
Runtime	0.019	0.013	0.009	0.002
Multiple Genres	0.313	0.257	-0.318	-0.268
Comedy	-1.934***	-1.741**	-1.689**	-1.807**
Drama	-0.061	-0.424	-0.458	-0.382
Action	-1.279*	-1.016	-0.327	-0.464
Constant	-15.025***	-12.987***	-19.064***	-21.070***
Observations	221	221	194	216
Akaike Inf. Crit.	157.499	147.835	121.219	118.839
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 2.8: Rare Events (Firth) Regression Models with Likelihood of Nomination for an Oscar as the Dependent Variable

	Dependent variable:			
	Likelihood (1)	Likelihood (2)	Likelihood (3)	Likelihood (4)
Nomination for a Critics Award		2.199***		
Elite Critics Avg Rating			1.115***	
Non-Elite Critics Avg Rating				1.246***
Christmas	1.890**	1.808**	1.730*	1.713**
Winter	1.391**	1.453**	1.565*	1.426*
Log of Total Revenue	1.881***	1.617***	1.808***	1.837***
Movie Star Presence	-0.413	-0.325	-0.069	0.139
Festival Participation	1.947**	1.482*	1.009	1.162
Runtime	0.040**	0.032*	0.047**	0.040**
Multiple Genres	1.194*	1.281*	0.887	0.619
Nomination for a Guild Award	2.707***	2.172***	1.712**	1.682**
Comedy	0.215	0.508	0.353	0.570
Drama	0.952	0.235	0.859	1.050
Action	-2.528**	-2.056*	-2.521**	-2.472**
Constant	-23.346***	-20.323***	-30.601***	-31.083***
Observations	221	221	194	216
Akaike Inf. Crit.	99.623	92.077	84.382	87.512
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

CHAPTER THREE:

Workplace Sex Segregation in Precarious Times: Evidence from the Field of US

Newspaper Film Criticism, 1998-2018

Introduction

Sex segregation in the workplace has long been a concern in the sociology of work literature—especially as that segregation leads to income and opportunity barriers for women workers that men workers do not face (Gross 1968; Reskin 1993). Amid that ongoing scholarly concern, and across recent decades, women workers have made apparent progress in achieving better pay and better career opportunities compared to what they faced in earlier times (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015; Wharton 2009). Of course, that does not mean that sex segregation in the workplace is no longer a problem. Indeed, sex segregation in the workplace is likely enduring given that it is a complex phenomenon that plays out occurs for workers in different ways, depending on the specific occupation in which they work and the organization or industry in which they are employed; thus, sex segregation will not be solved by simple “one-size-fits-all” solutions. The two main dimensions of workplace sex segregation are labelled the “horizontal” and the “vertical.” According to the literature (Wharton 2009), horizontal sex segregation has to do with the differential concentration of women and men across jobs occupations, while vertical sex segregation is about the inequality that workers face based on their gender in terms of upward career advancement opportunities—including holding positions of authority and engaging in work with high status and remuneration.

The creative industries—those devoted to such aesthetic goods as film, music, and literature—have likewise been marked by workplace sex segregation. Work in the creative industries has long been characterized by the differential value placed on the work performed by men and women, by gender-based differences in pay and income, as well as by the disparity of opportunities for men and women to gain employment in certain types of creative work positions (Dowd and Park 2022). However, this “gendered” aspect of work in creative industries has not been uniform across all times and settings. While women have faced obstacles in terms of breaking into certain creative work (painting and sculpture in the early 1900s; Braden, 2004), or encountered obstacles in terms of remaining in other creative industries that were once small but then suddenly boomed financially (e.g., screenwriting in the mid 1900s; Bielby 2008; Bielby and Bielby 1992, 1996), there are some types of creative work, such as dance and ballet, that have a history of being conducive to women in terms of advancement and pay (Coulangeon et al. 2005). Meanwhile, in other creative settings, such as public relations and coordination of production, there has been a recent influx of women into creative careers (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015), but this positive influx has also occurred while creative work in the 21st century has grown more precarious overall, which has involved a declining number of full-time jobs and the increasing number of freelance workers who must cobble together job after job (Chong 2020). Thus, the recent influx of women into certain types of creative work may be offset or blunted. That is because some recent research finds that, in terms of precarious creative work, men are better supported and positioned relative to women in terms of career opportunities and advancement (e.g., Dowd and Park 2022; Frenette and Dowd 2020). Considering then the variable history of creative industries in terms of the extent to which gendered barriers abound in a given industry, it

remains an open question how sex segregation may occur both horizontally and vertically within particular domains of creative work.

The present paper looks at film critics in the US in order to examine the outcomes of horizontal and vertical sex segregation—particularly in terms of the career trajectories of individual film critics, but also, the impact of sex segregation on film criticism as a whole. The coexistence of vertical and horizontal sex segregation within the same occupation, such as film criticism, can produce “messy” combinations (Browne 2006). These combinations can affect not only the career trajectories of creative workers, but also the content of their work—in other words, the genre(s) to which they orient their work (Alacovska 2015). In the case of film critics working for newspapers in the US, this phenomenon can be manifested in the critique and evaluation of films when working for media organizations, such as newspapers. Depending on the influence of vertical and horizontal sex segregation on the pattern of film review assignment among film critics based on the characteristics of the film and/or the critic, we could expect to see differences in the content of the production of these creative workers. Put another way, the open question about sex segregation in creative industries is complicated, on the one hand, by how creative work overlays genre categories, and on the other hand, by the type of work that results—the media content itself (i.e., film reviews).

Theoretical Background

Sex Segregation in the Workplace

Sociologists of work use the concept of “sex segregation” to describe differences the concentration of men and women within and across occupations. Gross (1968) coined the concept – which was innovative at the time because it made the differential concentration of the

sexes across occupations as something of interest to sociologists, as well as because it was used to describe workplace differentiation (Reskin 1993). In other words, sex segregation in the workplace can be viewed as emanating from a structure of gender inequality. That structure is the result of both restriction of employment opportunities for women and men as well as workers' choices, with restriction playing the most important role (Bielby and Baron 1986; Blackburn, Brooks, and Jarman 2001; Reskin and Hartmann 1986).

Segregation does not mean full segregation in categorical fashion; instead, it is a continuous matter of degree and it depends on the specific occupation or job under consideration (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015). Social scientists commonly measure sex segregation in the workplace by estimating the degree of segregation against a standard of total integration. For example, some scholars use an index of segregation (i.e., dissimilarity index) that “measures the degree to which the distributions of the groups being studied (women and men here) across a set of categories (occupations or jobs here) differ from each other” (Reskin and Hartmann 1986:5). For these scholars, the term “occupation” describes different sectors of employment (e.g., service work), while the term “job” refers to specific employment positions within an occupation. “Total segregation” would be the exclusion of members of some groups from certain outcomes while limiting them to others, and “total integration” would allocate group members proportionally across outcomes (Reskin 1993). The different dimensions of segregation in the workplace found in the literature show the multitude of ways through which inequality in the workplace is manifested depending on the circumstances and specific fields of activity.

The careful measurement of sex segregation, however, has not led to theoretical consensus regarding why it happens. In fact, the social sciences have several theories that attempt to explain sex segregation in the workplace. Anker (1997) classifies those theories into

three categories: neo-classical and human capital theories, institutional and labor market segmentation theories, and non-economic and feminist or gender theories. Anker criticizes the first two categories of theories (a) for approaching occupational sex segregation as if it is the same thing as female-male pay differentials and (b) for not being able to provide an explanation for how sex segregation itself arises. Anker argues that feminist or gender theories provides a more convincing explanation.

A feminist-gender theoretical approach to what causes sex segregation in the workplace privileges a correlation between the characteristics of “female” occupations with common stereotypes of women’s abilities. Those stereotypes are divided into three categories: positive, negative, and “other.” Some of the positive and negative stereotypes affect women’s chances of being accepted in particular occupations (e.g., women are more qualified to become nurses based on stereotypes). The “other” category of stereotypes (e.g., greater willingness to take orders, lesser inclination to complain about work, greater tolerance of monotonous/repetitive work) tends to influence the general characteristics of “female” occupations (i.e., low pay, low status jobs, less decision-making authority; Anker 1997). And the gender/feminist theory states that such stereotypes have the effect of steering women into particular types of work that help explain observed patterns of segregation in the workplace⁵ [footnote about Wharton here acknowledging the preference perspective]. Specifically, sex segregation has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. Horizontal sex segregation refers to men and women being congregated in distinct jobs, within the occupational structure, that overlap with common gendered stereotypes

⁵ Wharton (2009) describes two other factors found by researchers to be causes of sex segregation: “workers’ own preferences, shaped by their own histories; and effects of workplace processes such as recruitment and assignment of roles.” Wharton argues that the effects of early socialization are frequently overstated, while the significance of employers’ decisions minimized.

(Wharton 2009). For example, women are mostly in occupations where the focus is on care, communication, and personal relationships, while men tend to be overrepresented in instrumental and technical occupations (Berkers, Verboord, and Weij 2016; Charles and Grusky 2004; Hakim 1996)⁶. Vertical sex segregation occurs when one sex (usually men) holds the highest-paid and more prestigious jobs within an occupation, whereas women are located in the lower paid and lowest prestige positions. The important difference between these two dimensions is that horizontal sex segregation represents difference in the distribution of men and women across occupations, while vertical sex segregation represents inequality (Blackburn et al. 2001; Browne 2006). That being said, these two dimensions of sex segregation often co-exist in a “messy combination” across occupations (Browne 2006).

This paper deals specifically with horizontal and vertical segregation in a creative industry – an industry devoted to the production and distribution of aesthetic products like film, music, and literature (Frenette and Dowd 2020). The creative industry setting provides a number of advantages. First, work in creative industries has long been “gendered” in terms of what is seen as appropriate for men versus women (Dowd and Park 2022). Second, scholars of work in creative industries have focused much less on gendered pay-gaps than on gendered differences in terms of opportunities and prestige (cites). In short, women often accrue less prestige within a given genre. The importance of the study of prestige in the context of sex segregation lies in the fact that it is an alternative currency in creative fields – it affects workers’ career trajectories which can in turn be converted to higher pay. Thus, the study of how prestige is interrelated with sex segregation adds to the literature of gender inequality in the workplace by investigating a

⁶ Research of the “feminization” of occupations offers much evidence regarding that horizontal dimension (##).

dimension of the issue that has not received adequate attention in the past. Finally, horizontal and vertical segregation within creative industries translates into the type of content creative workers are afforded to make (Alacovska 2015, 2017). It is the last point that I interrogate in the study below – showing the extent to which sex segregation itself is associated with distinctive, if not less, valued content – and how female workers in different stages of their career respond to that phenomenon.

The Structure of Creative Industries and the Effect of Sex Segregation

The participation of women in the labor force employed in cultural industries has been increasing for several decades in the US and across other Western countries (Berkers et al. 2016). The trend of increasing women's participation in the cultural industries resembles the trend for increased labor force participation of women overall. The reasons for that phenomenon are “a relative increase in service employment, the increase in opportunities for education attainment for women, and the broader acceptance of gender equality beliefs” (Wharton 2009). Some areas where women are overrepresented are public relations and marketing jobs in television, journalism, and music (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015). That was not always the case, since PR and marketing were dominated by men until the 1970s. But in the past few decades those jobs have become feminized, since an increasing number of new workers and trainees are women (Aldoory 2005; Negus 1992). Another area of work in the cultural industries where women form the majority of workers are those types of work that have to do with the coordination and assistance of production (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015).

Despite the increase in the numbers of women working in the cultural industries though, there are still clear differences between men and women in terms of pay, opportunities to find

employment, and the kind of jobs assigned to them once they are hired. In terms of pay, women working in the creative industries are paid less compared to men across most occupations (Henry 2009; Gill 2002; Eikhof and Warhurst 2013; O'Brien et al. 2016; Lindemann, Rush, and Tepper 2016). Furthermore, women have limited access to work in most occupations in the creative industries (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Eikhof and Warhurst 2013) and they are less likely to be represented in positions of power (Bielby 2009; Bielby and Bielby 1996).

Beyond pay differences and lower levels of access to jobs in general, and positions of power in particular, women working in the creative industries face a type of sex segregation that is unique to this field. One of the things that differentiates the creative industries from other areas of activity has to do with the differential prestige of various jobs. In the creative industries, jobs that are considered “creative” are more prestigious and more coveted. Those creative jobs are an area of work that is dominated by men in the creative industries. In his study of the advertising field, Nixon (2003) finds that despite the fact that women have increased their numbers in various roles associated with advertising – to the point where they form the majority of workers in some areas – the creative roles are still heavily dominated by men. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2015) find a similar pattern in television production companies and Coulangeon et al. (2005) in the music industry in France, while Bielby and Bielby (1999) find that women were severely underrepresented among writers for television and film in the early 1990s. In the film industry in 2017, only 18% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 250 grossing films in the US were women (Lauzen 2016). The percentage of women working in the creative roles mentioned in the film industry has not changed significantly since 1998. Thus, although women have made progress in the past half century in achieving increased participation in creative industries, they are still facing obstacles

in their attempts to gain access to creative jobs. The importance of that fact is linked to the increased levels of autonomy, prestige, and higher position in the hierarchy of organizations operating within the creative industries that creative jobs have.

Nixon (2003) explains the overrepresentation of men in creative roles in advertising by arguing that there is a legacy of associations between masculinity and creativity, which has served to largely exclude women from creative jobs. The particular form of masculinity that Nixon refers to as linked to creativity is different than conventional versions of masculinity – considering childishness is one of its main characteristics. Nevertheless, those types of masculinity were seen as valid because they were compared against representations of femininity that linked women to a lack of “true” creativity (Nixon 2003: 100).

Beyond the structural factors that have to do with sex segregation in creative industries, there is one more aspect of work in those fields that is important to examine. The nature of creative work is intertwined with the concept of genre since it is through and within genre that creative workers produce content. The study of how genre is related to sex segregation in the workplace can provide insights into how this form of inequality is manifested not only in pay and career advancement, but also in the kind of content creative workers produce. The following section provides an overview of what genre means for creative workers and how it has been linked to sex segregation in creative industries.

Genre and Women’s Work

Media work takes place within and through genres and that is what differentiates gender inequality in this field (Alacovska 2015). Media industries produce and distribute cultural products that are classified in genres for more efficient organization of production and marketing

(Jensen 1984; Negus 1999). Workers in the media follow the practices and norms of the genre they are working in because genres differ in terms of goals and values, as well as the kind of audience they appeal to (Tunstall 2003). Thus, media and creative work is genre-related, which is why Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2013) argue that it can only be observed by going “within particular genre cultures.”

The connection between gender and genre in creative occupations is well documented, with women creative workers usually having higher concentrations in genres that traditionally have had a predominantly female audience. Women TV producers in Hollywood are mostly concentrated in genres that are more attractive to female audiences, such as sitcoms with female leading actors (Cantor 2011). In the case of contemporary novel in Nigeria, male authors are overrepresented in the field overall but particularly in the sub-genres that are popular among men (Griswold 2000). Women who worked in creative roles in the 250 top-grossing films in the US in 2012 and 2017 were less likely to work in the traditionally male sci-fi, animated, horror, and action genres (Lauzen 2011, 2016).

Several studies show how men and women workers have to deal with different obstacles when working in the same genres. Tunstall found that women workers at the BBC had different experiences working in different genres (Tunstall 2003); they faced mockery and entry barriers in “male” genres such as light entertainment and sports. That was not the case in children’s programming and documentary. Women musicians are a minority in terms of their numbers and are perceived as a “symbolic anomaly” in the genre of rock (Clawson 1999). “As Coulangeon et al. (2005) show, female musicians in France encounter obstacles in the form of both pay discrimination and segregation. Sex segregation in the male-dominated French musical field occurs vertically, with women kept out of the highest ranks and decision-making roles, as well as

horizontally, as women specialize in certain roles such as singers rather than instrumentalists.” In a study of the genre of women’s magazines where there is high concentration of women journalists, Gough-Yates (2003) found that editors and journalists self-promoted by professing that they are “in touch” with their target audience because they themselves were part of that young middle class working women audience they appealed to.

The segregation of women creative workers to specific genres is often linked to the predominance of women in the audience for those genres. Furthermore, genres that have traditionally appealed to women have generally been considered as of lower value or prestige, partially due to perceptions about the limited capabilities of women creative workers to produce works of artistic value that are on par with male creative workers (Schmutz and Faupel 2010). As Alacovska argues (2015:30):

Gender segregation appears to parallel genre stratification. Typically, such parallelism is explained away with Bourdieusian-type “homologies,” a structural correspondence between consumption and production (Bourdieu, 1996). Genres with predominantly female audience are populated with women producers, and vice versa – genres popular with men are male-dominated. Thus, gender affiliation implies gendered occupational and genre association. Beyond such “mirroring” homologies, which ultimately posit an essentializing, natural and commercially profitable homogeneity of female and male producing/consuming cultures, how and why such a gender-genre junction occurs or what types of occupational gendered subject positions genres could plausibly be expected to afford is largely left unexamined.

The implications of the link between sex segregation and genre go beyond the simple horizontal segregation of women who are concentrated mostly in “women’s” genres. Genres are usually ranked based on their perceived value or legitimacy thus forming a hierarchy within a given field. Different fields follow different patterns and use field-specific terms to describe genres, but the ranking exists in most fields. For example, classical music has traditionally been considered a highbrow genre – a genre that occupies a higher position among musical genres – since the 19th century (DeNora 1991). Similarly, certain film genres have been considered more

highbrow or “serious” than others; comedy films being among the less frequently lauded types of films by the critics and industry insiders as evidenced by awards given for best film in the Oscars or film festivals. Despite arguments about the disintegration of cultural hierarchies and the change of the ranking of particular genres over time, it is reasonable to claim that not all genres within every artistic or creative field are considered identical in terms of their symbolic value.

The connection of gender to perceptions about creativity and the prestige associated with it has been a topic of study for researchers who look at the change of prestige for genres over time. The study of the change of a prestige of a genre in relation to gender has been explained in the literature by two main theories. The “empty field” theory posits that when an artistic genre dominated by women becomes more prestigious it attracts men that view that field as empty because they do not consider the competition by women as significant (Tuchman and Fortin 1984). The empty field theory was developed by Tuchman and Fortin by examining the field of authorship in the 19th century, but examples of similar patterns of masculinization have been observed in screenwriting in the early 20th century (Bielby and Bielby 1996) and in film criticism in Britain in the second half of the 20th century (Bell 2011)—see also Baumann’s (2001) study regarding the process of legitimation of film as an art form beginning in the 1950s. The alternative explanation is auteur theory which has reshaped the role of director in collaborative genres as the most important/central creative position compared to the role of performing artists (Baumann 2001). The result is that genres affected by auteur theory have increased their prestige, but women might have been negatively affected by this development, because women are underrepresented in the profession of director (Berkers et al. 2016).

What is of interest to the present paper is the extent to which the differential symbolic value of genres maps onto the levels of representation or involvement of women within those

genres. As mentioned above, there are two different theories that connect the change of prestige of genre to gender. For the purpose of this study, it is more important that there often is an association between gender and genre and less so how that association changes when the prestige of a certain genre changes. The fact that creative jobs are associated with more prestige and autonomy in the cultural industries compared to other kinds of positions does not mean that workers who occupy those jobs are all the same. There is a hierarchy among them that affects their rewards and degree of autonomy. Creatives operate in ultra-competitive, “winner take all” markets where the successful few are disproportionately rewarded (Hesmondhalgh 2007). The present study contributes to the investigation of inequality among workers who occupy creative roles and how gender informs those inequalities in the literature of work and gender in sociology. This study aims to contribute to that literature by looking at one type of creative workers: film critics.

Film Critics

In this paper I investigate connections between film criticism with other forms of journalism and work in the creative industries in terms of how sex segregation has shaped the allocation of work between men and women who work in this field. Additionally, I look at how differential patterns of work allocation have affected the work-related practices and decisions of film critics. The history of film criticism is characterized by alternating periods where women represented in large numbers among film critics, such as the two decades after the second world war, and periods where the ratio of women film critics decreased dramatically (e.g., after the mid-1970s; Bell 2011). The periods of increased numbers of female critics often correspond with periods of film audiences primarily comprising of women and widely held beliefs about film

being a lowbrow form of entertainment (Thibault 2016). As in other genres of journalism that are dominated by men, women had to face various obstacles trying to enter the field and to establish themselves as film critics.

Film critics' role is comprised of two dimensions: they are connoisseurs sought out for their expertise, yet, at the same time they function as servants of average citizens. Film critics, like other types of art critics, are active in the field of journalism. They write reviews that aim not only at utilizing their expert knowledge for the evaluation of films, but also to guide readers to make decisions about what movies they might want to watch or not – given limited time and resources. Thus, film critics operate as mediators who connect consumers with films and, also, as gatekeepers who rank films by comparing them to each other. Film critics' gatekeeping role allows them to be involved in the consecration of certain films and film genres (Baumann 2001; Janssen 1997). Regarding the process that professional critics follow when forming their opinion about a piece of art, the literature indicates that there are no specific skills or procedures that allow them to recognize certain properties unambiguously (Janssen 1997). The lack of an objective procedure that can verify the correctness of critics' evaluations does not stop them from coming to a consensus about which products are worthy. Writing about the literary field, Janssen (1997) notes that the critical consensus is not the result of an explicit attempt to reach an agreement among critics; it is rather a gradual process of adjustment of a critic's evaluation to that of their colleagues. The uncertainty that characterizes professional critics' work and the fear that one might be too far off in their judgement compared to others leads them to constantly try to achieve a balance between conformity and distinctiveness (Chong 2015, 2020). Among literary critics that Chong (2015) studied, their main concern was to not appear too flattering of a book that was undeserving of praise. The importance of maintaining that optimal level of

distinctiveness for critics is crucial due to the competition among them to increase their symbolic capital in their field (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). A higher level of symbolic capital is of great importance in the creative industries, where reputation and acclaim can lead to better employment opportunities (Bourdieu 1993).

The importance of taking genre into perspective when studying work in creative industries points to the inclusion of another dimension of the study of film criticism beyond horizontal sex segregation. As is the case with other cultural fields, the film industry—especially Hollywood—has developed several relatively clearly defined categories to describe films that share certain characteristics (e.g., drama, comedy, horror). Genre as a term can be rather vague and can be used to describe highbrow versus popular film or queer film. The meaning of what a genre is can change over time and many films are described as a combination of two or more genres (Neale 2000). Nevertheless, genres are generally accepted by the audience and industry insiders as a valid way of describing the basic characteristics of films. Some film genres are described as gender-specific, meaning that they are made with the goal of appealing mainly to audiences of a certain gender (Kuhn 1984). Examples of gender-specific genres include “women’s film” and domestic melodramas from the mid-20th century (Kuhn 1984; Neale 2000; Turim 2008) and “chick flicks” and romantic comedies more generally in recent times (Ferriss and Young 2008). Beyond the connection of certain genres with gender—or in addition to it—genres are also characterized by differential levels of prestige or critical recognition. It is a fact that certain film genres—drama in particular—are far more likely to receive award nominations (e.g., Oscars or Golden Globes) for best film (Bettinger 2011). At the same time, films that are consecrated by winning an award for best film are far more likely to be led by a male actor (Nicolaou 2018). The evolution of film from being considered mere entertainment to it being

perceived as a legitimate art form, as Baumann (2001) shows, involved the attempt by critics and scholars to interpret films that were more complex and multidimensional. It is reasonable to assume that certain genres are generally less demanding in terms of effort to interpret them as they are intended to evoke a straightforward reaction from the audience. For example, most action films aim at making the audience feel excitement at specific scenes or most comedies aim at making the audience laugh. Genres that are usually simpler at their aims are less likely to be considered “serious” art by critics. Overall, it is reasonable to expect that films that are categorized as belonging in certain genres (namely drama, history, or biography) are much closer to what is traditionally considered “serious” or highbrow art.

Sex Segregation in Journalistic Fields

As with other types of journalists, film critics’ work is characterized by decisions as to what stories to cover or where to invest their limited time. For film critics the stories they have to write about are the films they choose to watch every week. When a media organization employs multiple film critics, either full-time (which is increasingly rare) or freelance, there is a review allocation process that takes place. That review allocation process usually involves a person occupying a position that has power over the critics, such as a film or culture section editor or a chief film critic, who get to pick what films get reviewed (Scott 2018).

Although the literature on sex segregation in cultural industries mainly focuses on the pay gap, in the literature on journalism there is more of a focus on the kind of work that men and women are allocated and the differential amount of attention they receive as subjects in news stories. Thus, the literature on journalism that studies gender inequality and sex segregation in the workplace does so in a more multidimensional manner. The connection of horizontal sex

segregation as evidenced by the lower numbers of female journalists and the lower levels of coverage offered to women in the news media has been an important topic of research in journalism for a long time. There is evidence that journalism overall is becoming feminized measured by the increasing number of women working as journalists, which would indicate a decrease in horizontal sex segregation in the journalistic field (Byerly 2011). It is not clear though whether there is a connection between feminization expressed in larger numbers of women working as journalists and a decrease in gender inequality in terms of news coverage. The studies that have looked at how journalists' work practices and decision-making process regarding the newsworthiness of stories and whether those are affected by the gender of newsroom editors have found mixed results. Some studies suggest that likelihood of covering female subjects is affected by the sex of journalists (Armstrong 2004), while other studies have found weak evidence of such a relation because of the perseverance of masculine journalistic practices (Shor et al. 2015). In the case of differences in elite newspaper coverage of men and women in arts and culture in particular, Berkers and colleagues (2016) find that the feminization of art journalism has not necessarily led to any real change. The feminization of journalism in positions of authority in news organizations appears to follow a similar pattern. Studies looking at differences between men and women editors and newsroom managers in terms of decisions concerning the newsworthiness of stories have produced somewhat contradicting findings. For example, Bissell (2000) argues that the sex and race of photo editors in news reporting affects their decisions in terms of which photographs get to be printed. Also, Splichal and Garrison (1995, 2000) looking at newsroom managers' decisions on coverage of politicians' private lives find that male and female managers differ significantly on issues related to extramarital affairs and sexual harassment. Splichal's and Garrison's overall results, however, do not support the

claim that gender affects news judgment on privacy-related matters. Craft and Wanta (2004) compared issue agendas at newspapers with varying percentages of women in editorial positions and found few differences in issues covered—although there was a minor difference in the tone of news selected with female editors preferring a more positive focus.

What appears to be a consistent finding in the literature is the effect that a higher representation of women in positions of authority has for the allocation of news beats between male and female reporters. Horizontal sex segregation leads women to remain pigeon-holed in news areas that are traditionally considered female (North 2016). Newsrooms that had mostly men in managerial positions tended to assign male reporters with what was traditionally considered a “prestigious beat” (e.g., political beat; Craft and Wanta 2004). Only when a newspaper had a high percentage of female editors did reporters of both sexes tend to cover a similar agenda of issues. Male editors tend to think of “soft” news or stories about women as less important than other news items, so that “soft” stories tend to be neglected or marginalized (Smith and Wright 1998). Hard news has been defined as stories based on facts about events regarding “important” or “newsworthy” topics (Bender et al. 2009; Tuchman 1978). Such topics include politics, economics, and crime (Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky 2010; Van Zoonen 1998), and they call for “immediate publication” (North 2016). On the other hand, “soft news” does not call for immediate publication since it is considered of lower value and it focuses on human-interest stories (Van Zoonen 1998), lifestyle, celebrities, and trends (Brooks et al. 2007). Soft news have as their goal to entertain and to elicit emotions (Bender et al. 2009). North (2016) argues that potentially it is the link of soft news with emotions that causes them to be perceived as of lower prestige and to be assigned more often to female reporters – considering that emotions are commonly viewed as female attributes.

Hypotheses

Based on the review of the literature on sex segregation in the workplace and how it relates to film criticism that followed, I state these hypotheses regarding the results of the analysis of the data I have collected.

H1: Female film critics are going to be less likely to belong in the category of high frequency reviewing.

Since film criticism has been a male-dominated field at least since the 1970s (Bell 2011), it is reasonable to assume that fewer women compared to men will have attained the status of a well-established or famous critic. I associate the total number of reviews published by a critic in my sample with the level of recognition and status that a critic has attained. The reason for that assertion is that in order for someone to have published a large number of reviews they would have had to be a full-time critic for a newspaper or to publish multiple reviews regularly for several newspapers. Both of those conditions would indicate that a critic has reached a higher level of seniority or status. This point is linked to the notion that in the field of film criticism (as in other creative jobs) steady employment is equated to a considerable extent with success.

H2: The ratio of female film critics to male film critics working in newspapers will increase over time.

This hypothesis is based on the notion that participation of women in the labor force employed in film criticism will increase over time following the trend of other professions across society (Wharton 2009). The feminization of the several occupations, and especially in the creative industries, is a well-documented phenomenon (Aldoory 2005; Negus 1992).

H3: Female film critics will be more likely than male critics to get assigned to review films that belong to less prestigious genres, especially comedies.

H4: Female film critics, compared to male critics, will be assigned a) to review films led by female actors more often than male critics, and b) to review films with a female leading and female supporting actor more often than male critics.

An implication of H3 being true is that women are assigned to review those films that in the aggregate are less likely to get a favorable rating by most critics.

H5: Female film critics will be more likely to get assigned to review films of lower quality, as measured by film critics' own ratings of those films.

Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 are based on the connections between genre and gender in creative work. As mentioned in section 2.3, women are often segregated in genres that are considered to be more appealing to female audiences (Cantor 2011; Tunstall 2003). One case of a film that is made with female audiences in mind could be a film that is led by a female actor or a film that has both a female lead and supporting actor. It could be that editors choose to assign those kinds of films more often to female critics because they consider them a good “fit” (Bielby and Bielby 1996) or that female critics themselves choose to review them because they see themselves as advocates of female-led films. (Bielby and Bielby 1996). In terms of hypothesis 5, more prestigious genres are often dominated by men (Bielby and Bielby 1996; Berkers et al. 2016).

In addition to these hypotheses, I control for the length of reviews based on word count. The inclusion of the word count control variable is based on the notion that lengthier reviews signify a more highbrow or intellectual approach to film criticism (Baumann 2001). I am agnostic about the effect that the review word count control variable will have in the case of the review assignment based on critics' gender, but nevertheless, it is important to control for this important element. Another set of implications ties to the work of Baumann (2001, 2007), where according to him the “intellectualization” of film includes reviews that draw on high culture terms and reviews that are lengthy; given that women critics might have less opportunity to write

such extensive reviews while also reviewing less prestigious genres I also control for those variables.

H6: Female film critics who belong in the mid-level frequency reviewing category are more likely to review a) films led by female actors b) films that belong in the “comedy” genre.

Hypothesis 6 is based on the notion of middle-status conformity as it has been introduced by (Phillips and Zuckerman 2001). Although Phillips and Zuckerman in their study had used different types of environments, I argue that the middle-status conformity phenomenon can be a good candidate for a theoretical device that can help explain part of the picture of how female film critics navigate the challenges of working in a male-dominated creative industry. Middle-level conformity could be a potential strategy, especially when field goes through crisis and employment becomes more precarious or scarce. Conformity in the case of film critics and sex segregation would be conforming with the stereotypes that link women film critics with specific genres (comedies, chick-flicks) as well as work of lower value.

Data and Methods

I analyze film review assignments and film evaluations from 7 US newspapers. The film reviews were published in 1998, 2008, and 2018. The newspapers included in the data collection are *the New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Newark Star-Ledger*, *Houston Chronicle*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Miami Herald*. I included the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* in the data collection because they are two of the most prestigious newspapers in the US, in order to represent an “elite” category of newspapers. The collection of film reviews from newspapers that can be considered “regional” (e.g., *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Miami Herald*) is a way to make comparisons between the “elite” and “non-elite” newspapers in

terms of the differences between gender matching practices of film review assignments.

Additionally, I conducted 15 pilot interviews with professional (full-time and part-time) film critics to better understand the topic of film review assignment and film evaluation from the perspective of individuals who have first-hand experience in that field.

Data Structure and Measures

Every newspaper in my sample has published film reviews by more than one film critics in the years I have collected data for. But not all newspapers in my sample have employed more than one full-time film critic for every year under study. It is common nowadays, but more so in the past, for newspapers to employ one or more staff film critics and occasionally to publish film reviews by either freelance film critics or journalists employed by the newspaper in another role (e.g., book critics). This is more so the case for regional or local newspapers than for national ones. That practice sometimes creates a condition of imbalance within the sample of a given newspaper where for a given year the large majority of reviews is written by only one critic.

The unit of analysis is the individual film review published in one of the seven newspapers included in my sample. The reviews were collected following a random sampling procedure from the total number of available reviews for the newspapers in my sample for the 3 years under study, with the exception of the *New York Times*. In the case of the *New York Times*, I decided to collect all of the film reviews published for all 3 years under study. The reason is that I wanted to base the “elite” newspaper category on the *New York Times* and I wanted to have a more balanced sample in terms of the number of cases between elite and non-elite newspapers. My sample consists of 3,160 film reviews of 1,457 films by 171 critics. 2,235 of those film reviews were written by male critics and 916 by female critics. For every review in

the sample, I collected data about the gender of the critic who wrote it and the rating of the review (dichotomized as favorable or not). Of the 3,160 observations of my data set, 51.7% or 1,632 of them did not have a rating on a continuous or categorical scale.

An additional measure about film critics is the frequency of their reviewing measured by the total number of reviews they have in the sample. Furthermore, I collected data regarding the films being reviewed from imdb.com, which includes the gender and age of the principals of each film (leading and supporting actors, director, writers) and the genres a film belongs in. I collected information on actors' gender from imdb.com's publicly available datasets. For other categories of film principals' and critics' gender I used the R package "gender," which predicts a person's gender based on their first name using historical data. I used the sequence of how actors' names appear on imdb.com in order to categorize them in the "leading actor" and "supporting actor" categories, depending on whose name appears first.

Methods

My theoretical interest is in investigating whether film review assignments in newspapers differ by critic's sex, controlling for observed and unobserved critic and film characteristics. Furthermore, I am interested in examining whether sex segregation in assignments, if it exists, affects the way critics evaluate films or whether film evaluation by critics can be used as a measure of the differential value of work assigned to male and female film critics. My analysis proceeds in two steps.

First, I examine whether there are differences in the likelihood of a film review being assigned to a female critic. I employ a generalized linear mixed model with random intercepts for that purpose, given that my dependent variable in this case is the critic's gender (0 = male, 1 =

female) and that my data has a nested structure. Since I am interested in examining workplace sex segregation at the level of a newspaper, I use the newspaper title (which contains seven different categories) as the grouping variable to model the error structure of the data generating process. Additionally, I use the year a review was published as a second grouping variable, because my data set contains reviews from three different years. I use cross-nested random effects in my models because my data are simultaneously nested both within newspapers and within years. The cross-nested structure allows me to increase the number of groups that the multilevel models are using, since when using cross-nested random effects the levels of each grouping variable are multiplied with each other. That is something that I consider to be useful in my case, since the number of categories I have for the “newspaper” and “year” variables are limited (7 categories for “newspaper” and 3 for “year”).

Second, I examine the factors that affect the likelihood that a film review is favorable. Again, here I use a generalized linear mixed model with random intercepts, but in this case my dependent variable is the likelihood that a film review is favorable (0 = unfavorable, 1 = favorable). In this case too, the grouping variable of the model is the newspaper title and the year that the film review was published. By examining differences in evaluation within newspapers and newspaper-level variables, I examine sex segregation and evaluation within organizations, instead of within critics or films, to study the work allocation mechanisms in place at the organizational level. The use of the year of publication as a second grouping variable absorbs the unmeasured error associated with the specific year that a review was published in. Because this dataset includes multiple film reviews of the same film by multiple critics and newspapers, multilevel models can be used to isolate the newspaper-specific factors from all other fixed film review factors, observed and unobserved. Because multiple reviews are nested within a particular

newspaper, the hierarchical data structure allows me to analyze the effects of varying critics' sex and frequency of reviewing (or experience) scores as factors driving the review assignments given to female critics, holding constant all time-invariant observed and unobserved critic characteristics.

I use random-intercepts models, with newspapers as the random intercepts, to control for factors that are difficult to observe which could affect film review assignment between male and female critics. The fixed-effects parts of the models produce within-newspaper and within-year, across-review and across-critic estimates of the effects of gender on film review assignment and film evaluation rating. Resulting model estimates isolate the effects of critic's and film's characteristics on film review assignment, as well as the effects of being matched with a male versus a female critic for the same film in terms of evaluation. In all my models, I treated my two dependent variables—likelihood of the film review author being female and likelihood of a favorable film review rating—as dichotomous. I estimated generalized linear mixed models for both dependent variables. I conducted the analysis for this article using the linear and generalized linear mixed-effects models package “lme4” in R. The reported covariates represent the average relationships between critics' and films' characteristics and film review assignment as well as film evaluation rating, controlling for all fixed observed and unobserved newspaper characteristics.

Results

Interview Results

In order to gain a greater insight into how the process of film review assignment among critics working for a newspaper takes place I conducted pilot interviews with fifteen film critics.

The interviews were conducted in the Spring of 2020 and the critics I interviewed spanned the gamut of career success and involvement with professional film criticism, from full-time critics who have been working for national newspapers and other media to part-time critics who occasionally wrote reviews for local publications and websites. Most interviews were approximately 50 minutes in length and followed the same structured format.

The description of the film review assignment process in newspapers that emerged from those interviews revealed the presence of negotiation that takes place between the individual film critic and their editor, as well as among film critics, for the assignment of the film that is the “right” fit for a critic to write about. Since the interviews were conducted in 2020, many of the interviewees had experience working for both newspapers and online media and several of them had worked as full-time critics for a certain period of time as well as freelance. The fact that the newspaper industry has undergone major changes in terms of revenue and available employment positions for all kinds of journalists and writers, and especially for those who write about culture in general, made it more likely that especially younger film critics will have had experience holding different kinds of positions for various media. That fact allowed them to describe the differences that appear in the review assignment process based on the kind of role a critic has (full-time or freelance) and how that affects the amount of autonomy and negotiating power they have.

The importance of the difference between working for a newspaper as a staffer or securing gigs through pitches to newspapers or websites lies in the range of possible films a critic potentially can write about. As a staffer a film critic can potentially negotiate with their editor about the films they will write about or not, depending on the kind of relationship that particular organization has embraced, and also dependent on the level of seniority or status a critic has.

Describing the difference between working as a freelancer and a staffer Gil Robertson, who in the past has contributed as a film critic to *the Los Angeles Times* and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* among other newspapers, said,

If you're on staff, very often you're just assigned a film. Film critics are constantly pitched by movie studios and distributors, and marketers... obviously, you lean towards films that align with your personality or your worldview or your interests. But still, if you're working as a freelancer, you would have to pitch that. So, it would be the editor, at a particular media outlet that would make the determination whether or not that particular film would attract or would be of interest to their readership, or to the population segment that that outlet serves.

Other critics noted the difference between freelance work and working as a staffer and the change in the kind of work that is allocated to them based on that distinction. Roxana Hadaddi said:

Honestly, what looks interesting to me is a lot of it and then other parts of it are what I get assigned. So, for Chesapeake Family, I can pretty much pick what I want to review. For Pajiba, I'm part of the movie reviewing staff, and there's a film editor, and she assigns what she wants us to write about. But then other places... And the same way with A.V. Club. The A.V. Club will reach out to me and ask, "Is this something you want to write about?" But other places a lot of the time it is dependent on your pitches. So, you see a movie, you invest the time in seeing a movie, and then you think of an essay idea or a review idea or something else and then you go out and you pitch it to various publications to see if anybody would be interested.

One film critic who had experience working as both an editor and a staffer said

There was one place that I worked at where I became the film editor, so I became the one assigning reviews. I sort of got the pick of the litter. But in other cases, like at Movieline, I really kind of had to take whatever I was getting because I was quote, unquote "staff." I wasn't really. I didn't have benefits or anything but I kind of had agreed to x-number of reviews a week and I just kind of had to do whatever came down the pike for me. Whereas at The Village Voice, I had a bit more flexibility and my editor knew what my interests were and would, not pitch me, but would say, "How do you feel? Would you be up for this?" And I kind of felt like I had more room to say, "I don't think so," or yeah, that it would be great...

Deirdre Crimmins who works freelance for various media corroborated the view of how the review assignment process works answering how she decides which films to review: "It really

varies if it's a regular gig. Often, they're assigned by my editor. When I was on the website where I was writing a lot of that up until last October, before it folded, we had a spreadsheet going with me and the other freelancers. And we would kind of like either lay claim to certain films ... And then if there were things left over that no one wanted, those would get assigned out.”

Although the previous quote is about websites and not newspapers, it shows the situation film critics find themselves in in more recent years. Regarding newspapers, the situation differed between bigger newspapers who could employ more than one full-time film critics and smaller ones that usually employed one critic full-time, and they only occasionally got extra reviews from freelancers or syndicated critics. In the case of smaller newspapers, the full-time critic usually had to cover every movie that came out each week. As Mike Clark, who has worked for several local Georgia newspapers over the past twenty years, describes “I don't have really a choice. I have to see pretty much everything I can because that's how the paper... They pay me a salary and whether it's two movies a week or six movies a week, I get paid the same salary.” The situation is different when there is more than one staffer where the negotiation between them and the editor comes into play. Ty Burr, who has worked for the Boston Globe for eighteen years said: “So we have a document called movie openings that I keep with my editor, and ... his publicist send us information ahead of time... once a month, I'll sit down with my editor and when Wesley [Morris] was here, he and I would sort of haggle with each other about who wanted to write what. Now that it's me primarily, I get to pick the ones that I want to do. And my editor is fine by that.”

It is important to note how the employment situation of film critics (freelance or staffer) affects the kind of decisions they make about which films to cover. There appears to be a scale of autonomy based on whether a critic works as a freelancer or a staffer that is further differentiated

by the amount of clout or the status that a film critic has—based on their experience or tenure. Of course, the whole process is centered around the assignment decisions that the film section or culture section editor makes. The editors are the ones who ultimately decide how democratic or not they are going to be in their approach. Especially in earlier times, before the internet and the advanced metrics it offers for companies to monitor the level of popularity of writers and journalists, editors decided who was a better fit for their newspaper and more popular with their audience based on their instinct. The one thing that cannot be overstated in the field under study is the great changes to the number of available positions and the level of job security that the advent of the internet and new media has brought about. With far less revenue for newspapers through advertising, the first kind of jobs that went away were art journalism jobs, especially after the 2008 depression⁷. Thus, the pressure of maintaining a staffer position would mean that most film critics are willing to make compromises that perhaps would not be very common during the good years of newspaper film criticism.

In organizations where there used to be more than one full-time film critics, the hierarchy among them based on their seniority was a factor affecting review assignments. Sara Stewart, who used to work as a full-time film critic for the New York Post for eighteen years, said about the hierarchy among critics: “For a long time, there were three [film critics]. It was Lou Lumenick, Kyle Smith, and me. They were senior to me in terms of how long they had been doing it. So, the assignments would follow along the totem pole with Lou reviewing a lot of the big tent pole movies and then me and Kyle dividing up the rest of them, which was usually a pretty organic process in terms of what we were interested in and knew the other person would be interested in.”

⁷ <https://www.pewresearch.org/?p=304666>.)

The level of autonomy that a film critic has in their work and the decisions they make in terms of which films to cover can be related to the issue of sex segregation. The answers of some of the female film critics reveal that they tend to prefer to cover films by female filmmakers. There seems to be a difference in terms of that coverage based on the career stage of those female critics though. Felicia Feaster, who used to be a full-time film critic for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, when asked about her favorite types of films to review included films by female filmmakers as one of her top picks, adding “I am more inclined to see and consider more deeply a film that has a female protagonist.” Talking about the beginning of her career as a film critic for the New York Post, Sara Stewart said:

Part of the reason I pitched myself to them as a film critic initially was because I felt that movies that were targeted at women or focused on female characters weren't necessarily being... I don't want to say they weren't being given a fair chance, but I just felt like it was important to have a female voice talking about those movies in a way that there wasn't when there was just two male critics. That said, it did over the years become a thing that if a movie was considered a quote-unquote chick flick, then it would probably be assigned to me, which is sort of an oversimplification of how movies should be reviewed obviously. Though I continued to be interested in those types of movies and I always felt strongly that female-driven movies, whether they're female directed or female focused, should be given more of a voice and taken more seriously than maybe they were.

What comes across from those two quotes is the inclination on the part of some female film critics to act as an advocate for female-led films or films that are targeting women as an audience. Connecting that notion to the previous paragraph one can see that as a female film critic gets to have more autonomy due to having a full-time job as a film critic, it is likely that she will be more willing to review more films about women and to be more vocal in her support of those films. The assignment of reviews of female led films or films targeting female audiences to women film critics can become a type of “typecasting” or specialization that those critics may find difficult to discard when they work in newspapers with multiple film critics. At the same time though, it can be a viable strategy for maintaining employment. Alacovska (2015) mentions

a similar finding about female travel writers: “For economic reasons, some writers were forced to cede to the gendering power of genres and grudgingly accept predetermined genre choices such as writing about fashion, cuisine or spa travel” (Alacovska 2015:139).

Additionally, the account of how a female film critic would present herself to potential employers in order to break into the film criticism field is reminiscent of what (Bielby and Bielby 1996) write about female film writers: “The typical woman writer is likely to break into the industry writing material that is either currently fashionable or viewed by producers as appropriate for a woman writer.” It seems possible though that the sort of link between gender and type of assignment in the case of film critics goes beyond the stage of initialization to the field. Women might find it difficult to transition to a more generalist role after they have made it into the field of criticism.

4.2 Quantitative Data Results

I begin the presentation of the results with the descriptive statistics. The following three tables show the distribution of the data across each one of the seven newspapers I have included in my sample and three independent variables: number of reviews, author’s sex, and year of publication. For the most part, all of the newspapers are represented across the categories of the independent variables I am presenting here. The data set is not perfectly balanced though, with the *New York Times* having twice as many observations as the next newspapers with the most film reviews in the data set. Furthermore, the *Los Angeles Times* does not have any observations for the year 1998 and some of the newspapers have a lower number of observations for some years (e.g., *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* in 2008) or for female authors (e.g., *Newark Star-Ledger* has 9 film reviews by female authors). I overcome that issue of underrepresentation of some

categories of the Newspaper Name variable across categories of predictor variables by making sure I do not include interaction terms in my regression models that would create combinations of categories that have no or very few observations. Thus, the potential problem of having an unbalanced data set is overcome by using predictor variables that pool together observations from various categories so that there are no problems with the regression models converging.

[Table 3.1 about here]

[Table 3.2 about here]

[Table 3.3 about here]

In the next table I present the regression results of the two models with the likelihood of the review author being female as the dependent variable. I use a random intercept model for that purpose with the newspaper titles as the random intercepts. One of the limitations of the current version of this study is that the number of observations included in the two types of models (depending on the dependent variable used) is quite different. In the models presented in Table 4 there are 2,914 observations, while in the model in Table 5 there are 1,522 observations. The reason for that difference is that not all of the collected film reviews included a quantitative or qualitative rating. However, the ratio of ratings included in the model in Table 5 in terms of reviews per newspaper title is comparable to that of the models in Table 4. The first model shows that the author's level of frequency of reviewing plays a significant role in determining whether the review author is female or not. For the middle and low frequency of reviewing categories we get a p-value lower than 0.001 that the odds ratio is over 3.00 that the review author is female compared to the high frequency of reviewing category. At the same time, the sex of the leading actor of the film does not have a statistically significant relationship with the sex of the review author. Beyond frequency of reviewing, the two other predictors that have statistically significant

relationship with the dependent variable based on p-values lower than 0.05 are “Comedy,” which indicates whether a film is categorized as belonging in the “Comedy” genre, and the age of the film’s leading actor. A female author is 1.22 times more likely to review a Comedy than a male author. In model 2, I have included as predictors the Year a film review was published in and the interaction term between Female Leading Actor and Reviewing Frequency. What we learn from this second model compared to model 1 is that more recent review—published in 2018—are less likely to be authored by a female film critic compared to older reviews—published in 1998 or 2008. Additionally, the fact that the interaction term between Female Leading Actor and the middle category of the Reviewing Frequency variable is statistically significant indicates that female film critics who belong in the middle category of reviewing frequency tend to review films led by female actors more often than their colleagues who belong in one of the other two categories of reviewing frequency.

[Table 3.4 about here]

[Table 3.5 about here]

The main takeaways of the first part of the data analysis are that there is not a significant difference between male and female film critics in terms of the likelihood of reviewing female-led films when we look at the relationship between simply the gender of the film review author and the gender of the leading actor of a film. Female film critics (film review authors) are more likely to be assigned to review Comedies, and they are more likely to review film with younger leading actors. Furthermore, female critics are far less likely to belong in the category of film critics who review films frequently.

In the second part of the data analysis, which is presented in the Table 5, we see the results of a random intercepts model with the Likelihood of a Favorable Rating as the dependent

variable. The results show that films that are led by a female actor are less likely to get a favorable rating compared to films led by a male actor. Also, films led by older actors are more likely to get favorable reviews, as well as films categorized as belonging in the Drama genre. Comedies and Action films are barely not statistically significant, but they show that there is a negative correlation between being defined as a Comedy or an Action film and getting a favorable rating for a film. Finally, film critics who belong in the middle category in terms of reviewing frequency are less likely to give a favorable rating to a film compared to film critics who belong in the low and high reviewing frequency categories.

Conclusion

By combining the results from the various regression models, one starts to get a more complete picture of the field of film criticism in US newspapers in the last two decades in terms of sex segregation. Women film critics appear to have found it difficult to break into the upper levels of the field as evidenced by the lower likelihood that a female film critic had to belong in the category of critics who review more frequently. Reviewing more frequently can indicate that a film critic is hired as a full-time critic by a newspaper, which is a coveted position within this occupation. Of course, as newspaper revenue has dramatically decreased in recent years, full-time positions in newspapers have steadily disappeared. Thus, newspapers had been keeping on their payroll, to the extent that they had done so, their more senior film critics or they reproduced film reviews by national newspapers. That meant fewer opportunities in newspapers for younger film critics in recent years – which in turn means fewer opportunities for women critics as indicated by the findings of model 2. The findings that provide evidence for the claim that women have had to face the negative consequences of vertical sex segregation in the

workplace are mainly those that show that the kind of films that women tended to review were less likely to get favorable reviews.

Films led by younger leading actors, female leading actors, comedies, and films that get reviewed by critics who belong in the mid-level reviewing frequency category. The results of the data analysis show how vertical sex segregation in the workplace can operate in a creative field such as film criticism. When the focus is on the value or the prestige of the work being assigned, as well as the amount of work, we can get a glimpse of another dimension of this form of gender inequality that is distinct from inequality in terms of pay. The importance of genre in creative fields makes the study of inequality among workers more complex and difficult to uncover. The present paper contributes the study of vertical sex segregation in the workplace in creative industries in general, and in journalism and the field of film criticism in particular. The connection between the sex segregation in the workplace and the ongoing importance of the aesthetic hierarchy as evidenced by the differential ranking of film genres by film critics also reveals the importance critics place on that aesthetic hierarchy. Despite assertions regarding the decreased importance of aesthetic hierarchies in a time when everyone can be a critic, the influence of such a hierarchy in film criticism is upheld by critics and that is why it affects (or it had affected in the past) the work allocation among critics of different gender.

Tables

Table 3.1: Number of Film Reviews by Newspaper and by Year

Newspaper Name	1998	2008	2018	Total
Houston Chronicle	181	256	94	531
Miami Herald	181	49	14	244
San Francisco Chronicle	13	61	52	126
Newark Star-Ledger	234	156	13	403
Minneapolis Star Tribune	169	5	17	191
Los Angeles Times	0	227	308	535
New York Times	350	370	410	1130
Total	1128	1124	908	3160

Table 3.2: Number of Film Reviews by Author's Sex and by Genre

Film Review Author Sex	Genre							
	Action	Comedy	Drama	Biography	Crime	Animation	Adventure	Horror
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
Male	465	675	761	199	204	31	219	67
Female	159	292	304	62	91	19	74	35
Total	624	967	1065	261	295	50	293	102

Table 3.3: Number of Reviews by Author's Sex and by Year

Film Review Author Sex	Year		
	1998	2008	2018
	n	n	n
Male	944	856	840
Female	243	419	392

Table 3.4: Multilevel Regression Results for Models 1 and 2 with Likelihood that Review Author is Female as the Dependent Variable

<i>Predictors</i>	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.04	0.02	< 0.001	0.05	0.03	< 0.001
Female Leading Actor	1.27	0.13	0.02	0.68	0.17	0.116
Leading Actor's Age (Older)	0.99	0.00	0.12	0.99	0.00	0.107
Comedy	1.23	0.12	0.034	1.25	0.12	0.025
Elite Newspaper	4.48	3.87	0.082	4.57	3.97	0.080
Sum of High Art & Critical	0.96	0.03	0.206	0.96	0.03	0.236
Word Count: Low	1.10	0.14	0.447	1.10	0.14	0.477
Word Count: Middle	0.79	0.10	0.061	0.78	0.10	0.056
Reviewing Frequency: Low	4.15	0.72	< 0.001	3.31	0.63	< 0.001
Reviewing Frequency: Middle	5.43	1.06	< 0.001	4.24	0.92	< 0.001
Female Leading Actor x Reviewing Frequency: Low				2.09	0.62	0.012
Female Leading Actor x Reviewing Frequency: Middle				2.15	0.61	0.008
Random Effects						
σ^2	3.29			3.29		
τ_{00} Newspaper Name:Year	2.56			2.58		
ICC	0.44			0.44		
$N_{\text{Newspaper Name}}$	7			7		
N_{Year}	3			3		
Observations	2893			2893		
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.217 / 0.559			0.217 / 0.561		

Table 3.5: Regression Results for Model 3 with Dependent Variable the Likelihood of a Favorable Rating for Film

Model 3			
<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.58	0.17	0.066
Female Leading Actor	0.73	0.11	0.047
Leading Actor's Age (Older)	0.85	0.11	0.217
Comedy	1.01	0	0.066
Elite Newspaper	1.97	0.26	<0.001
Sum of High Art & Critical	0.8	0.1	0.065
Word Count: Low	0.74	0.12	0.068
Word Count: Middle	0.98	0.18	0.924
Reviewing Frequency: Low	0.64	0.13	0.028
Reviewing Frequency: Middle	1.44	0.36	0.144
Random Effects			
σ^2	3.29		
τ_{00} Newspaper Name:Year	0.14		
ICC	0.04		
$N_{\text{Newspaper Name}}$	7		
N_{Year}	3		
Observations	1522		
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.061 / 0.100		

Dissertation Conclusion

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In this dissertation, I explored the consequences of the reduced importance of traditional aesthetic hierarchies in cultural fields—doing so for groups of individuals who work as critics, as well as for audience members who engage in criticism. This era of universal access to media that allows everyone to be a critic has been a topic of study for various scholars who are interested in the evaluation and legitimacy of culture, mostly for the purpose of better understanding the mechanisms involved in how legitimacy is acquired by a certain group. The overall sentiment around the dissolution of old aesthetic hierarchies in cultural fields and the decreased relevance of cultural capital as it was traditionally understood has been rather negative or at least uneasy. Looking at the film industry in the US as a case study, one can see that the new condition of mass access to evaluation and aggregated ratings of films has received negative comments by industry insiders and scholars (Scorcese 2017). Despite the rapid changes brought about by technological and social transformations over the past twenty or so years, the findings of this dissertation indicate that the results of that process are not as unidimensional or clear-cut as perhaps many would anticipate.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I compared the text of professional and amateur film critics' reviews through the use of computational text analysis. I found evidence that there is a convergence between professional and amateur critics in terms of their writing style. But that convergence appears to be initiated from the side of amateur film critics who adopt, to some extent, the vocabulary of professional critics without necessarily abandoning some of the traits of the “popular” aesthetic. The findings of the first chapter provide a different image of how

amateur and professional film criticism could evolve, compared to what the process of “de-legitimation” of professional critics as presented in Verboord’s work in literary criticism would indicate. The findings from Chapter One are important because they could provide a richer image of how different fields of cultural criticism could evolve as we enter a stage where the Web as a whole and online amateur cultural evaluation reach a stage of maturity.

The second chapter shows that there are slight differences in the correlation between amateur, elite, and non-elite critics’ evaluation of films—depending on the part of the field to which a film belongs: the restricted or popular field. This finding diverges from what classical Bourdieusian theory would have us expect: instead of very clear differences between the various types of reviewers, we only see slight ones. I take that finding to be an indication that the aesthetic hierarchy has potentially lost some of its power in the context of filmic evaluation. But it is important to note that the nuances of the analysis from the second chapter are crucial when attempting to come up with an understanding of (a) what the condition of the aesthetic hierarchy is currently and (b) what it can tell us about the strategic decisions of actors in this field. In the case of “highbrow” films in particular and their consecration, I interpret the higher correlation between professional and amateur critics as an indication of acceptance of the aesthetic criteria of critics by the amateur reviewers. This is a continuation of sorts of the old aesthetic hierarchy that is still being adopted by amateur reviewers, as this is the area where expert opinion is more likely to be sought after by non-experts. The opposite seems to be true in the mainstream part of the field, where the higher correlation between professional and amateur critics (compared to what classical Bourdieusian theory would have us expect) can be a sign of a more “relaxed” evaluation of blockbuster films by professional critics.

The third chapter is an examination of the impact of the differential ranking of film genres and its intersection with gender inequality among professional film critics. The use of data on the film critics themselves (e.g., their gender, the newspaper they published in, the frequency of their reviewing, etc.), as well as the films they reviewed (their genre, the gender of the leading actor, etc.) gave me the ability to produce findings on the importance that gender played in the value of the work assigned to women compared to men over the past thirty years. Those findings indicate that not only sex segregation was and is present in film criticism, but it manifests itself in ways that go beyond pay or career advancement as measured by the percentage of men versus women in positions of power. The findings from the third chapter show that, first: the aesthetic hierarchy in film criticism is still present in largely the same way it was several decades ago and it is upheld by critics themselves, despite the talk about the democratization of evaluation criteria and the potential influence of cultural omnivorism. Second, female film critics have been negatively affected by the ongoing existence of the ranking of films based on the traditional aesthetic hierarchy, for they were the ones who more often were assigned to review films that are considered of lower quality.

The main takeaways from this dissertation are that the increased participation of the public in evaluation of films seems to have created a new type of film criticism. Amateur film criticism appears to be distinct from professional film criticism in many ways but there is convergence or similarity between amateur and professional critics when it comes to the evaluation of relatively more highbrow films. It appears that amateur film critics are adopting the criteria traditionally associated with “serious” professional film criticism when writing about films that require a higher degree of engagement and historical knowledge for their comprehensive appreciation and evaluation. Thus, in that part of the amateur film criticism field

one can see the survival of the old aesthetic hierarchy—albeit slightly altered—as expressed through evaluation criteria or even writing style. Amateur film critics who engage in writing reviews online seem to be more likely to refer to themes or use terms that professional film critics might consider simplistic or limiting in their writings. Moving beyond the question of whether the once revered aesthetic hierarchies are forever destroyed or not—which they are not, for the most part—and looking at the issue of how the phenomenon of de-legitimation has been affecting professional film critics, we see the decrease in their influence has had negative consequences for them not only in terms of prestige but also in terms of professional opportunities. Those negative consequences have forced professional film critics apparently to become more receptive of what is appealing to the larger audience without necessarily abandoning their own perceptions of what constitutes high culture and highbrow films.

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