**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

**ANCHORING**

Anchoring is a cognitive bias that has been studied in psychology and behavioral sciences for over 40 years.[[1]](#footnote-1) The seminal work on anchoring was first authored by Tversky & Kahneman (1974), who conducted the experiment described in the introduction to this paper[[2]](#footnote-2). The anchoring effect is extremely complex, and many studies have attempted to understand its nature and implications. For instance, some research shows people formulate estimates more quickly when provided with numbers to anchor on[[3]](#footnote-3). Some studies show that anchoring decreases, but does not altogether vanish, with increased cognitive ability[[4]](#footnote-4). Other work demonstrates that anchoring is extremely difficult to avoid, even if the anchors are obviously incorrect.[[5]](#footnote-5) For a comprehensive survey of the vast anchoring literature, see Furnham & Boo (2011)[[6]](#footnote-6).

Within economics, much of the anchoring work focuses on historical market data. Some studies test for anchoring by examining changing prices and demand for unchanging goods[[7]](#footnote-7) [[8]](#footnote-8). Much of the anchoring research in economics uses experiments, surveys, or multiple-choice tests to find out how individuals form estimates and judgments in the presence of an anchor[[9]](#footnote-9) [[10]](#footnote-10) [[11]](#footnote-11). Anchoring has been studied in many socioeconomic contexts such as accounting[[12]](#footnote-12), real estate[[13]](#footnote-13), the courtroom[[14]](#footnote-14), public goods[[15]](#footnote-15), and international finance[[16]](#footnote-16).

In addition, anchoring has been researched in the context of auctions[[17]](#footnote-17) [[18]](#footnote-18). For example, one bizarre experiment was conducted by Prelec and Ariely (2006). Students were first asked to write down the last two digits of their Social Security number, then bid for various items such as chocolate, computer equipment, or a textbook[[19]](#footnote-19). The students who had higher digits submitted significantly higher bids, even when explicitly reminded that Social Security numbers are random quantities that carry no inherent meaning. Wolk and Spann (2008) study bidding for online auctions in the presence of an anchor[[20]](#footnote-20). They found that bidders respond strongly to internalized anchors such as knowledge of past prices for a good, while they respond to external anchors (such as advertiser-suggested bids) just moderately, and only when those numbers are not implausibly high.

**ANCHORING AND ART AUCTIONS**

Anchoring is also present in the art market. The literature shows that first numerical impressions do impact prices, auctioneer estimates, and sale volume. Here, we provide an overview of research that studies anchoring in the art market, which is still a highly nascent topic.

To our knowledge, a discussion paper by Beggs & Graddy (2005) is the first to examine anchoring effects (i.e. “reference dependence”)[[21]](#footnote-21) in the art auction market. This paper is described as a working paper for Beggs & Graddy (2009). To identify anchoring, they examine resales within two datasets of Impressionist and Contemporary paintings, which contain not only hammer price but also hedonic characteristics such as artist and medium. Both the Impressionist and Contemporary art datasets are used in our research, and are described in detail in Section <>. As described earlier, the regression model of Beggs & Graddy (2005) detects anchoring by first controlling for hedonic value and non-hedonic biases on price, then testing for the impact of past price on current price. This model is formalized in Beggs & Graddy (2009), except that this model tests separately for positive (gains) and negative impacts (losses) of anchoring on current price. The authors find strongly significant evidence for anchoring in both Impressionist and Contemporary genres. They find no evidence that positive impacts of anchoring are significantly different from negative ones. [[22]](#footnote-22)

Beggs & Graddy (2009), using the same resale approach and data, dive deeper into the impact of anchoring effects on price, presale estimates, and the probability of a sale[[23]](#footnote-23). Their model, which we apply and expand, does not test asymmetrically for gains and losses. For price, they find that anchoring effects are stronger for Impressionist art pieces than for Contemporary ones, particularly for items that are resold quickly after a first sale. They also find significant anchoring effects for the presale low estimates, noting that low estimates tend to gravitate toward past price as the anchor. Beggs & Graddy do not find anchoring significantly affects the probability of sale (estimated with a probit transformation). The anchoring models developed by Beggs & Graddy (2009) have been used in later anchoring research such as Leung et. al (2013)[[24]](#footnote-24), and forms the basis of our own approach. We attempt to replicate selected results from Beggs & Graddy (2009) in a later section. Beggs & Graddy believe anchoring effects on the sale price may primarily be attributed to the buyers, since buyers primarily determine price, but beyond that treat anchoring as a black box. Graddy et al. (2014) use more data and mostly corroborate the anchoring results of Beggs & Graddy (2009). However, they express more uncertainty about whether anchoring effects should be attributed to buyers, sellers, or auctioneers.

Bruno & Nocera (2008) study how anchoring affects presale estimates using a unique dataset of nearly 1,000 Italian paintings that have been sold at least twice (1985-2006)[[25]](#footnote-25). They regress the range of presale estimates on a multi-level dummy variable for anchoring to account for multiple past prices (anchors). The authors find significant evidence of anchoring. First, the existence of past prices makes the presale estimate range narrower, presumably because auction houses become more confident in their estimates of the item’s value[[26]](#footnote-26). Second, Bruno & Nocera find that if a past price exists for an item, the presale estimate range will be more closely centered on actual sale price. Hence, both the bias and variance of the presale estimate range, an estimator of the actual sale price, seem to decrease in the presence of anchors. These findings are consistent with what we heard through interviews, namely, that specialists at auction houses research past sales before formulating estimates.

Even the order in which art pieces are auctioned can beget anchoring effects, as shown in Hong et al. (2015)[[27]](#footnote-27). For the semiannual Auction Week, a two-week auction series held every spring and fall across New York City[[28]](#footnote-28), Sotheby’s and Christie’s have a handshake arrangement to alternate who holds their auction first. Using 26 years of Auction Week data and an adapted version of the resale model in Beggs & Graddy (2009), Hong et al. find that average opening sale revenues significantly anchor later sales during the rest of an Auction Week. Specifically, they discover that if more expensive paintings are sold first, then Sotheby’s and Christie’s will pull in higher total revenue (+21% higher), and more works will sell overall (+11% more sales). They state that their anchoring coefficients are quantitatively comparable to those from Beggs & Graddy (2009). This is the only work we found that does not examine anchoring across resales of the same art piece. However, since they only analyze mean revenues of auction houses and do not consider individual art pieces, their approach cannot be applied in our context.

Other behavioral research on art auctions exists, though much of it is more tangential to anchoring. In the art trade, there is the belief that if an art piece goes unsold at auction, it becomes “burned” and will sell for less in the future. To test this quantitatively, Beggs & Graddy (2008)[[29]](#footnote-29) use an even smaller sample of repeat sales from the Impressionist and Contemporary datasets in Beggs & Graddy (2005). The authors find that on average, burned paintings do seem to sell for significantly less (-30%), particularly if they are resold at the same auction house within 2 years (-37%). Whether this is directly due to buyer perceptions of failure, however, is ambiguous. Sentiment, emotion, and mood are also growing areas of research. For instance, Canals-Cerda (2012) analyze art auctions and seller reputations on eBay, and discover that negative feedback significantly lowers sale price and the probability of sale[[30]](#footnote-30). Penasse et al. (2014) collect survey data on sentiment toward selected artists in the art community, and find that strong confidence on the part of auction houses and art collectors can predict art returns in the short run[[31]](#footnote-31). Furthermore, De Silva et al. (2012) examine if weather, a proxy for mood, significantly impacted art auctions at Sotheby’s and Christie’s during the period 1990-2007[[32]](#footnote-32). They find a weakly significant effect, suggesting that external emotional shocks do affect art auction activity.

In the aforementioned literature, the exact process by which past quantities anchor future ones is treated as a black box: only the impact is noted. This is what we described earlier, and the view of anchoring we adopt in this research.

**CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH**

It is clear that anchoring is pervasive in the art auction market, especially since psychological and behavioral factors seem to be significant drivers of auction activity. However, the research to date (except Hong et al. 2015; see above) has studied anchoring only in the context of resale. This is problematic because as Beggs & Graddy (2009) acknowledge, it is extremely uncommon to encounter multiple sales of the same artwork. This is further limited by large time gaps between sales, which weaken anchoring effects[[33]](#footnote-33). Additionally, it is difficult to show resale observations refer to the same art piece, since an artist may create multiple pieces with the same medium, dimensions, and so forth. Beggs & Graddy (2009) manually cross-checked their resale data against presale catalogs.

More importantly, a shared but flawed assumption across much of the aforementioned literature on anchoring is that hedonic quality does not change across auction sales. In talking with Mark Best at Sotheby’s, we were surprised to hear how much artwork can deteriorate over time. Prints may tear accidentally, fade under glass, or become punctured, if tacked to the wall for decoration. The canvas of a painting can weaken over time, and must be “relined” with a new canvas attached to the back for extra support. Restoration (often by an unwitting owner) can also harm the value of an art piece: protective glaze must be scraped off, retouched paintings must be scrutinized under ultraviolet light, and so forth. We suspect these factors explain why Beggs & Graddy (2009) find stronger anchoring effects for Impressionist artworks than for Contemporary ones. Paintings in the former category mostly belong to renowned Impressionists artists such as Renoir and Monet, and are an order of magnitude more valuable in both presale estimates and prices[[34]](#footnote-34). Thus, they are probably far better maintained, which better preserves their hedonic quality, allowing past sales to better anchor future ones.

If the hedonic quality of a painting changes across sales, then we can still identify anchoring, given we control for those intertemporal differences.[[35]](#footnote-35) Yet, if we have to control for hedonic differences anyway, why not look at different art pieces altogether? This observation allows us to generalize the anchoring work of Beggs & Graddy (2009) beyond resales of the same good to sales of related (substitute) goods. In all previous literature we are aware of, the anchor is always a previous sale of the same good. However, if we control adequately for quality changes between the anchor and the current art piece, then we may use sales of a related piece as the anchor instead of a past sale. We introduce this formally in the next section.

1. Furnham, Adrian, and Hua Chu Boo. "A literature review of the anchoring effect." *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 40.1 (2011): 35-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. "Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases." *science* 185.4157 (1974): 1124-1131. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://soco.uni-koeln.de/files/jpsp73.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bergman, Oscar, et al. "Anchoring and cognitive ability." *Economics Letters*107.1 (2010): 66-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Strack, Fritz; Mussweiler, Thomas (1997). "Explaining the enigmatic anchoring effect: Mechanisms of selective accessibility.". Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 73 (3): 437–446. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.73.3.437. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Furnham, Adrian, and Hua Chu Boo. "A literature review of the anchoring effect." *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 40.1 (2011): 35-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rajendran & Tellis (1994); Greenleaf (1995); Geltner (2011); Dougal et al. (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Furnham, Adrian, and Hua Chu Boo. "A literature review of the anchoring effect." *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 40.1 (2011): 35-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Frykblom, Peter, and Jason F. Shogren. "An experimental testing of anchoring effects in discrete choice questions." *Environmental and resource economics* 16.3 (2000): 329-341. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Winter, Joachim. "Bracketing effects in categorized survey questions and the measurement of economic quantities." (2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Flachaire, Emmanuel, and Guillaume Hollard. "Starting point bias and respondent uncertainty in dichotomous choice contingent valuation surveys."*Resource and energy economics* 29.3 (2007): 183-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kinney Jr, William R., and Wilfred C. Uecker. "Mitigating the consequences of anchoring in auditor judgments." *Accounting Review* (1982): 55-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Bucchianeri, Grace W., and Julia A. Minson. "A homeowner's dilemma: Anchoring in residential real estate transactions." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 89 (2013): 76-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Mussweiler, Thomas. "Sentencing Under Uncertainty: Anchoring Effects in the Courtroom1." *Journal of applied social psychology* 31.7 (2001): 1535-1551. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Green, Donald, et al. "Referendum contingent valuation, anchoring, and willingness to pay for public goods." *Resource and Energy Economics* 20.2 (1998): 85-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Nianhang, Xu, and Wu Shinong. "A Study on Anchoring Effect for Non-tradable Share Reform of Listed Companies in China [J]." *Economic Research Journal* 1 (2007): 009. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Lucking‐Reiley, David, et al. "Pennies from ebay: The determinants of price in online auctions\*." *The Journal of Industrial Economics* 55.2 (2007): 223-233. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ku, Gillian, Adam D. Galinsky, and J. Keith Murnighan. "Starting low but ending high: A reversal of the anchoring effect in auctions." *Journal of Personality and social Psychology* 90.6 (2006): 975. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ariely, Dan, George Loewenstein, and Drazen Prelec. "Tom Sawyer and the construction of value." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 60.1 (2006): 1-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Wolk, Agnieszka, and Martin Spann. "The effects of reference prices on bidding behavior in interactive pricing mechanisms." *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 22.4 (2008): 2-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Beggs, Alan, and Kathryn Graddy. "Testing for reference dependence: An application to the art market." (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Loss aversion is another behavioral bias that says losses are felt more strongly than equivalent gains. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Beggs, Alan, and Kathryn Graddy. "Anchoring effects: Evidence from art auctions." *The American Economic Review* 99.3 (2009): 1027-1039. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Leung, Tin Cheuk, and Kwok Ping Tsang. "Anchoring and loss aversion in the housing market: implications on price dynamics." *China Economic Review* 24 (2013): 42-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Bruno, Brunella, and Giacomo Nocera. "Investing in art: The informational content of Italian painting pre-sale estimates." *Available at SSRN 1179183*(2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Specifically, both the relative and absolute range between low and high estimates. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Hong, Harrison, et al. "Ordering, revenue and anchoring in art auctions." *The RAND Journal of Economics* 46.1 (2015): 186-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. http://www.artspace.com/magazine/news\_events/the\_heat\_index/how\_to\_understand\_new\_york\_record\_auction\_week-52310 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Beggs, Alan, and Kathryn Graddy. "Failure to meet the reserve price: The impact on returns to art." *Journal of Cultural Economics* 32.4 (2008): 301-320. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Canals-Cerdá, José J. "The value of a good reputation online: an application to art auctions." *Journal of Cultural Economics* 36.1 (2012): 67-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Pénasse, Julien, Luc Renneboog, and Christophe Spaenjers. "Sentiment and art prices." *Economics Letters* 122.3 (2014): 432-434. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. De Silva, Dakshina G., Rachel AJ Pownall, and Leonard Wolk. "Does the sun ‘shine’on art prices?." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*82.1 (2012): 167-178. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Graddy et al. (2014); Hong et al. (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Table 1 and 2 – sample means – in Beggs & Graddy (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Observation from MB 00 about how even the same work can change over time? [↑](#footnote-ref-35)