

The Emergence of Status Orders in Hollywood Filmmaking. Evolution of a Cultural Field, 1920 to 2000

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Extended Abstract

How do status orders emerge in cultural fields? Our study sheds new light on this question by investigating the interplay of networks, status, and culture among Hollywood filmmakers from 1920 to 2000. Various fields of cultural production, such as literature, music, and academia are marked by an unequal distribution of recognition, esteem, and material resources (Bourdieu 1993). In addition, cultural fields are often characterized by closed circles of status similar actors who interact and collaborate (Ma et al. 2020). Previous studies have shown how actors' field position and networks shape their individual trajectories, and illustrated that access to collaboration partners or advantageous network positions is crucial for individuals' economic and cultural success (Lutter 2015; de Vaan, Vedres, und Stark 2015). Yet, less systematic attention has been devoted to the question of how the network structure of cultural fields comes about in the first place and changes over time.

Using information from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), we analyze collaboration and citation networks among more than 13,000 U.S. American filmmakers over 80 years of Hollywood filmmaking. Collaboration networks stem from shared film projects between writers and directors. Citation networks stem from references that filmmakers implement into their films (Spitz and Horvát 2014). Cinematic references appear in the form of adopted camera shots, dialogue snippets, or copied stills. As an illustration, figure 1 shows how George Lucas' *Star Wars: Episode VI* (1983) referenced a scene from Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972). Filmmakers use these references to pay homage to their peers' and predecessors' works and to signal cinematic literacy and taste. By examining long-term changes of filmmakers' collaboration and citation networks, we build on sociological work that stresses the importance of social networks for cultural production (Uzzi and Spiro 2005) and highlights that social recognition structures cultural fields (Lena 2004).

Our analysis maps the temporal shift in the interplay of social networks and artistic status in Hollywood filmmaking between 1920 and 2000. We trace during which periods Hollywood was characterized by a stratified order and socially closed filmmaker elites. To capture the temporal change in Hollywood's social organization, in a first step, we measure the skewness in the degree distribution of collaboration networks, and indegree distribution of directed citation networks over time. Subsequently, we obtain 1,000 random networks—based on parameters from a baseline exponential random graph model (ERGM) specification—which had the same size, and density as the corresponding observed network. We expect that as Hollywood grows in size the skewness in acquired collaboration and citation ties increases because a growing field increases uncertainty, which in turn amplifies the effect of status recognition on the structure of networks.

In a second step, we measure the tendency of filmmakers to collaborate based on similar artistic status. We derive artistic status from each filmmakers' number of acquired citations. We expect that filmmakers are more likely to collaborate based on similar artistic status in periods that are marked by artistic notions of filmmaking, especially during the so-called New Hollywood Movement (1960-1985). In contrast, we expect that during more commercially oriented periods, such as the Blockbuster Era (1986-2000), filmmakers tend less towards status similar collaborations. By applying ERGMs, we measure the extent to which artistic status

homogeneity drives the formation of collaborative ties, including homophily and popularity terms, and controlling, among others, for economic factors.

Our results indicate that the distribution of social recognition changed as the field of Hollywood filmmaking matured. More filmmakers entered the industry, and an elite of writers and directors formed, attracting disproportional shares of collaborative ties and artistic references. In addition, our findings suggest that similar levels of artistic status influenced collaborations more strongly during the New Hollywood Movement (see figure 2). This period saw the downfall of the studio system and a shift in the perception of Hollywood films from entertainment to artworks in their own right. We find that during this period, filmmakers of similar artistic status tended to form collaborative ties more often than status dissimilar filmmakers, while this tendency was less pronounced or absent in the subsequent Blockbuster Era.

Methodologically, our article shows the fruitfulness of applying computational tools to answer longstanding sociological questions (Edelmann et al. 2020) as we guide our analysis of a large, digital dataset by hypotheses derived from sociological theory and detailed consideration of Hollywood's historical development. In addition, our results are important for the field of social network analysis and relational theories of social status. Finally, our research highlights that the interplay between status and networks requires time to evolve and can change depending on the institutional environment in which a network is embedded.

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Figure 1. Example of artistic referencing in film.



The Godfather (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972)



Star Wars: Episode VI (George Lucas, 1983)

Figure 2. Homogeneity according to filmmakers' artistic status over time. Results from Exponential Random Graph Models. Coefficients display average marginal effects percentage change of the baseline probability to form a tie. A negative coefficient means that filmmakers are more likely to form a tie if their difference in artistic status is smaller.

