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The Impact of Artist Fame and Viewer Socioeconomic Status on Art Likeability

By

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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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Table of Contents

Abstract..... 3

Introduction 4

Method 7

Results 9

Discussion 10

References 13

Figure 116

Appendix A..... 17

Appendix B..... 18

Abstract

Previous research on fame and likeability has been focused primarily in the field of advertising with some related research in the music industry, but little has been done in regard to visual art. Socioeconomic status (SES) has been explored in terms of art participation but has not been explored in relation to the reception of art. The purpose of the current study was to explore the effects that artist fame and viewer SES have on the rating given to a piece of visual art. It was predicted that high SES participants would give higher ratings to high fame artists than low fame artists or with no artist information. For low SES participants, it was predicted they would give lower overall scores than those with high SES, and that their highest scores would be for low fame artists. Participants ($N = 90$) were randomly assigned to one of the three artist fame conditions and rated the same painting on multiple scales. Results did not show any main effects but a trend for an interaction was found between viewer SES and artist fame, such that high SES participants gave their highest ratings to high fame artists while low SES participants gave higher ratings when given no information and to low fame artists than to high fame artists. This trend supports the conclusion that individual differences impact the way in which creative mediums are perceived.

Keywords: Socioeconomic Status, Fame, Visual Art

The Impact of Artist Fame and Viewer Socioeconomic Status on Art Likeability

Previous research on factors affecting art likeability tends to focus only on either the artist or the viewer's characteristics that impact the creation or reception of the art being examined (Chamorro-Premuzic, Reimers, Hsu, & Ahmetoglu 2009; Luring, Pelowski, Forster, Gondan, Ptito, & Kupers, 2016; Papiés & van Heerde, 2017). With art education being implemented at all levels of schooling, it is important to develop a greater understanding of the psychological influences affecting art assessment (Lafrenière & Cox, 2013; Leong & Qiu, 2013). The purpose of the present study was to observe the interaction of both the viewer's SES and the artist's fame in regard to the likeability of an art piece.

The likeability of visual art as a product of the artist and viewer's characteristics is a topic that has not yet been thoroughly explored within psychology; however, this phenomenon has been studied within the related field of advertising. Reinhard and Messner (2009) studied the likeability of product endorsers and the way in which this impacted the viewer's attitude toward the product being advertised, finding that products were viewed more positively when the endorser was seen as likeable instead of dislikeable. An earlier study by Till and Shimp (1998) focused on the impact that negative information about a celebrity endorser would have on the evaluation of the brand being advertised. It

was found that after receiving negative information about the celebrity, participants had more negative feelings toward the brand being endorsed. The effectiveness of a celebrity endorser, someone recognizable by the general public, has been compared to that of an expert endorser, someone whose assertions are empirically supported or who is well versed on the issue (Wu, Linn, Fu, & Sukoco, 2012). The finding that advertisements with a celebrity endorser are rated as more likeable than those with an expert endorser indicates that artistic endeavors, in this case print adverts, are more likeable when involving a famous person while holding all other things constant.

Research has attempted to describe the effect that a musical artist's fame has on the sale of their music records as well as their ability to create well-liked music (Papies & van Heerde, 2017). Papies and van Heerde (2017) defined fame as having successful billboard songs. There was a weak correlation found between the artist's music quality, indicating its likeability, and their fame which suggests that an artist's fame does not have a strong impact on their ability to create well liked music indicating that high fame artists are not inherently better at creating music. In the scope of visual art, Gartus and Leder (2014) found that a viewer's mood and previous affinity for a particular artistic style, specifically for graffiti or modern art, affected their ratings for likeability and interest of art pieces such that participants with more positive moods had more favorable

ratings and that those with an affinity for graffiti or for modern art responded more favorably when presented with those respective pieces. These findings are examples of how viewer differences can account for differences in the likeability of art pieces.

Lauring, Pelowski, Forster, Gondan, Ptito, and Kupers (2016) examined the influence of a participant's social group's ratings, which is how their peers rated the piece, as well as the price of an art piece on the participant's own rating of the art piece. Results indicated that when the participant's peer group highly rated the painting and when paintings were assigned a higher price, that participant's ratings significantly increased. This implies that ratings for art likeability can be significantly changed based on factors external to the art piece, which could lead to a difference based on the artist's fame and viewer's SES. When looking at the impact of the Big Five personality inventory (Goldberg, 1999) it was individual differences in openness that most strongly correlated with artistic preferences (e.g. Impressionist, Cubist, Renaissance; Chamorro-Premuzic et. al, 2009). This also supports the idea that individual differences can have a strong influence on viewer ratings of art.

The primary purpose of the present study was to develop a greater understanding of the ways in which an artist's and viewer's characteristics affect the way in which art is evaluated, specifically the fame of the artist and the SES of

the viewer. For the purpose of the study, fame was defined as an artist having had previously successful works, operationalized by positive acclaim from art critics, and the artist being able to support themselves using the income from the sale of their art. Participants were asked to rate how much they like a piece of art. I predicted that art attributed to a famous artist would be rated as more likeable than the same piece of art attributed to an unsuccessful artist. I predicted that participants with higher SES would rate the art as more likeable than low SES participants. Finally, I predicted that high SES participants would give higher ratings to high fame artists than to low fame artists or when given no information about the artist, while low SES participants would give higher ratings to low fame artists than to high fame artists or when given no information about the artist.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 90 students of Western Oregon University consisting of 17 men and 73 women. The age range of participants was 18-51 ($M = 22.50$, $SD = 7.73$). Participants were undergraduate psychology students recruited through the SONA research participation program and were compensated for taking part in the study with course credit.

Materials and Procedure

After providing consent, participants were asked to provide demographic information (e.g. age, gender, major). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: high fame, low fame, or no information. Their SES classification was determined after all data was collected through a median split, where participants whose SES scores fell in the lower half of the distribution were considered "low SES" and those whose SES scores fell in the upper half of the distribution were considered "high SES." Each participant was shown a printed version of Marcel Duchamp's *Portrait of Chess Players* (Appendix A). Groups with an artist high in fame were told, "This painting was created by a well-known artist whose previous work has been well received by art critics and has sold enough to support himself solely with his art." Groups with an artist low in fame were told, "This painting was created by a relatively unknown artist who has not been well received by critics and is not able to support himself solely with his art." Groups without information about the artist's level of fame did not receive any extra information after being shown the painting.

After being shown the painting, participants were asked to respond to questions about the painting, such as how well the painting demonstrates the artist's creativity, and how much they like the painting on a 7-point Likert scale (see Appendix B). After completing the survey, participants were asked how many college level art courses they have taken and if they recognize the painting

they were shown. Following this, the participants were debriefed on the purpose of the study. Participants were awarded credit through SONA. Experimentation lasted approximately 5 minutes.

Results

To determine if viewer SES led to different responses across artist fame, a 2 (participant SES: high, low) X 3 (artist fame: high fame, low fame, no information) Analysis of Variance was conducted with all variables as between-subjects factors. There was no main effect for artist fame, showing that high fame artists ($M = 5.66$; $SE = .14$), low fame artists ($M = 5.60$; $SE = .14$), and those with no information ($M = 5.80$; $SE = .14$) were not significantly different, $F(2, 84) = .58$, $p = .56$. There was also no main effect for participant SES showing that high SES participants ($M = 5.56$; $SE = .11$) were not significantly different from low SES participants ($M = 5.81$; $SE = .11$), $F(1, 84) = 2.56$, $p = .11$. There was a trend for an interaction found between artist fame and participant SES (see Figure 1), such that high SES participants gave higher ratings to high fame artists ($M = 5.80$, $SE = .20$) than to low fame artists ($M = 5.38$, $SE = .20$) or when given no information about the artist ($M = 5.50$, $SE = .20$) and that low SES participants gave slightly higher ratings when given no information about the artist ($M = 6.11$, $SE = .20$) and to low fame artists ($M = 5.82$, $SE = .20$) than to high fame artists ($M = 5.52$, $SE = .20$), $F(2, 84) = 3.00$, $p = .06$.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effect that artist fame and viewer SES has on the likeability of art. Results did not confirm either of the main effect predictions, showing no difference across levels of artist fame or viewer SES, but a trend for an interaction was found between artist fame and viewer SES in which high SES participants gave higher scores to high fame artists than the other fame conditions, and that low SES participants gave lower scores to high fame artists and higher scores when given no information about the artist.

Not finding a main effect for viewer SES is consistent with the findings from Reeves (2015) who found no difference in arts participation across SES levels. This would indicate that SES does not affect who takes part in the creation of art or the consumption of art. The lack of main effect for artist fame could in part be due to the painting that was used in the experiment having been created by a famous artist. Augustin, Leder, Hutzler and Carbon (2007) found that non-experts in art, those without formal education in the arts or art history, are able to accurately distinguish stylistic differences in art pieces, meaning that the participants for the present study may have been able to judge the quality of the painting without any formal training in art appreciation and without relying on the given information about the artist's fame.

The trend found between artist fame and viewer SES was related to the findings from Heinrichs and Cupchik (1985), in which participants preferred art that they identified with, in their case when the art piece expressed similar emotions to those most experienced during their childhood. This was consistent with the current findings that high SES participants tended to prefer high fame artists while low SES participants typically gave higher ratings to low fame artists, in both cases the higher ratings corresponded with the artist most similar to themselves.

There are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting these results. One limitation, as previously mentioned, was that the painting used for this study was created by a famous artist and in a style that he is well-known for, Cubist, the possible familiarity of which could influence how participants rated the painting if recognized as being created by a famous artist. Another limitation was that multiple participants expressed uncertainty when asked to report household yearly income which was used as an indicator of their SES. This uncertainty could have changed the outcome of the research, specifically for the main effect of SES, as there is the possibility of incorrect data having been reported by participants. Future related research could examine other participant differences, such as age, and the influence it has on the ratings given to art pieces. Younger participants, particularly those below seven years old, should

have more consistent ratings for the piece than older participants who have more experience to compare with the piece (Zenatti, 1991). Another area of future research related to the artist and the piece itself would be to include price information along with the artist's implied level of fame to study if one has a greater impact than the other (Lauring et. al, 2016).

Despite the lack of significant main effects, the trend found between artist fame and participant SES suggests the impact that individual differences of both the viewer and artist can have on the ratings given to a piece of art. Previous research has focused on individual differences in terms of advertising (Reinhard & Messner, 2009; Till & Shimp 1998; Wu et. al, 2012) as well as music (Papies & van Heerde, 2017; Zenatti, 1991). The present study contributes to research on individual differences' impact in creative fields while looking specifically at that of visual art.

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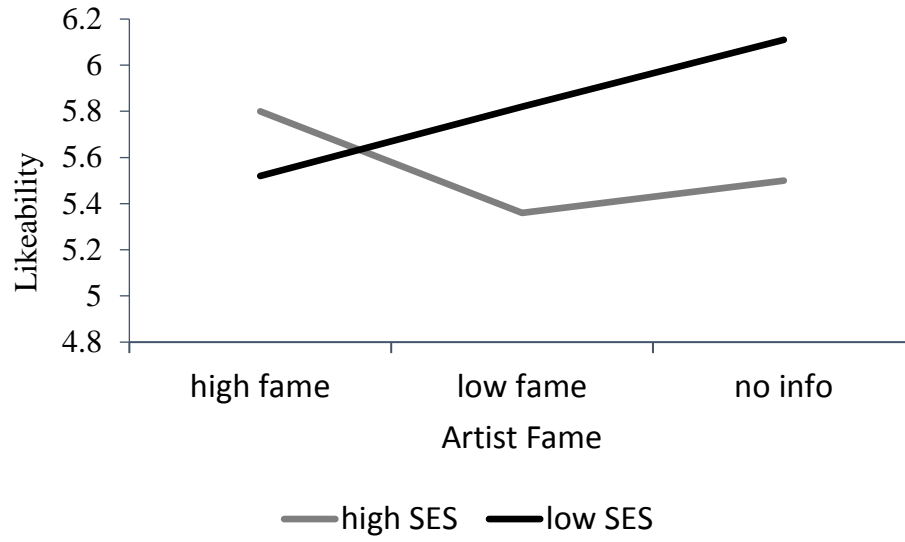


Figure 1. Mean likeability scores after viewing *Portrait of Chess Players*, revealing an artist fame and viewer SES trend for an interaction.

Appendix A

Portrait of Chess Players



Appendix B

Questionnaire

How well does the painting demonstrate the artist's creativity? (1-7)

1= very low creativity 4=moderate creativity 7= very creative

How well does the painting represent the artist's technical skill? (1-7)

1= very low skill 4= moderate skill 7= very skillful

How well does the painting show artistic effort exerted by the artist? (1-7)

1= very low effort 4- moderate effort 7= very effortful

Overall, how much do you like this painting? (1-7) _____

1=strongly dislike 4=neither like nor dislike 7= strongly like

How many college level art courses have you taken?

Do you recognize the painting? (Circle one)

Yes No