

Books rate more negatively after winning award, study finds

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Looking for a good book? Stay away from the award-winning section of the bookstore or library.

New research from Amanda Sharkey of the University of Chicago Booth School of Business finds that a book read after winning a [prestigious award](#) will likely be judged more negatively than if it's read in its pre-[award](#) days.

In "The Paradox of Publicity: How Awards Can Negatively Affect the Evaluation of Quality," to be published in the March issue of *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Sharkey and colleague Balázs Kovács of the University of Lugano analyze thousands of reader reviews of 32 pairs of [books](#). One book in each pair had won an award – like the Booker Prize, National Book Award or PEN/Faulkner Award – while the other book had been nominated but hadn't won.

"We found that winning a prestigious prize in the literary world seems to go hand-in-hand with a particularly sharp reduction in ratings of perceived quality," Sharkey says.

The researchers theorize that a book's audience increases considerably after an award is announced, as do the diversity and personal tastes of readers. Therefore, a larger sampling of readers is drawn to a prize-winning book, not because of any intrinsic personal interest in the book, but because it has an award attached to it.

To test this theory, Sharkey and Kovács created "predicted" ratings for each book based on the readers' past ratings of books in the same genre. They then studied the how a book's predicted ratings change after an award is announced by comparing earlier predicted ratings to post-announcement predicted ratings.

They found that before an award is announced, the predicted ratings of a book about to win are equivalent to the ratings of a book about to lose. But after an award is announced, that shifts and award-winning books have lower predicted ratings than books that don't win.

"This is direct evidence that prizewinning books tend to attract new readers who wouldn't normally read and like this particular type of book," Sharkey says.

These results are likely applicable to other media, including film, according to the researchers. "The types of movies that win Oscars may be very different from the types of movies we watch and like during the nine months of the year when it's not awards season," says Sharkey.

More information: [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm ...
?abstract_id=2350768](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2350768)

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