

The interplay between status and social proximity in peer evaluations

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Credit: Luis Quintero from Pexels

A new study suggests that the status of award nominees combined with the level of social connection that they have with members of a judging panel can work both ways towards determining how successful they

are—depending on whether or not they are judged publicly or privately.

Professor Simone Ferriani, Professor at the Business School (formerly Cass) and University of Bologna, Professor Gino Cattani from NYU Stern, Professor Erik Aadland from BI Norwegian Business School and Denise Falchetti, Postdoctoral Associate at Boston University evaluated results from eight years of The Silver Tag Awards—Norway's most prestigious monthly digital advertising industry awards—as well as interviews with members of awarding panels to determine factors that ultimately influence success in different settings.

The researchers uncovered three key variables that have significant effects on success:

- Status—the extent to which award candidates are held in high regard in the industry
- Social connection—the extent to which jury members or decision-makers and award candidates have worked together in the past
- Publicity of criteria—the extent to which single jurors' choices are public and open to scrutiny from others in the industry or private and invisible to others

The study indicated that high status and close social proximity to members of a judging panel only significantly impact an individual's chances of winning if deliberations are held in private, and can even have a negative effect in publicly-scrutinized panels for fear of accusations of favoritism. In other words, bias towards certain award entries and nominees is only truly prevalent in settings where judges are not required to explain their decisions.

The authors explained how the study's findings have further-reaching consequences for equality and transparency in public life. Professor

Ferriani said:

"Understanding how award allocations may change with the degree of scrutiny to which they are subjected should encourage accountability and transparency in a wider spectrum of decision-making.

"Existing evidence would therefore suggest that they are granted more recognition than their lower-status counterparts, but our findings show that this status can work against these individuals as well as for them."

Professor Cattani said: "The results of our study have implications for many peer-based evaluative settings, including the distribution of prizes, awarding of contracts, approving competitive research and development projects, allocating scientific funding and appointing senior roles—to name a few.

"To avoid favoritism and preferential treatment from creeping into the evaluative process, companies and [decision-makers](#) need to design more transparent and fair procedures, such as the creation of an evaluative committee, to mitigate such biases."

"Reflecting Glory or Deflecting Stigma? The Interplay Between Status and Social Proximity in Peer Evaluations" is published in *PLOS One*.

More information: Erik Aadland et al. Reflecting glory or deflecting stigma? The interplay between status and social proximity in peer evaluations, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0238651](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238651)

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