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The sincerest form of flattery: Innovation, repetition, and status in an art movement

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Abstract

How does art influence the status of the artists that make it? Sociologists argue that the shared use of artistic conventions produces status arrays, but we have not subjected this claim to empirical investigation. Some common metrics of status are popularity with the public and esteem from peers or critics, but these measurements have not been connected with artistic conventions. We expect that convention-derived artistic status achieves independence from other status orders (e.g., that built from sales) only after the field establishes its autonomy, or becomes "artistically legitimate." Using rap music as a case study, and a novel operationalization of artistic status (the innovation and repetition of artistic content), we explore the association between artistic status and public popularity before and after rap music acquires the attributes of an "art" genre. We find support for our expectations of status order decoupling and find suggestive evidence that organizational and aesthetic category-spanning pays dividends in artistic status. Our study provides an empirical demonstration of the micro-processes that produce the status orders that theorists have argued characterize art worlds.

Keywords: Status; Conventions; Art worlds; Music

1. Introduction

It isn't hard to find speculation about the intrinsic rewards of artistic labour. Charles Horton Cooley is said to have written that, "An artist cannot fail; it is a success to be one;" and William Blake to have said, "Where any view of money exists, art cannot be carried on" (Banks, 2010, p. 254; Tolliver, 2005, p. 32). Sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu have argued that this view of art and money as "hostile worlds" (Zelizer, 2000) is the product of a historically contingent process of

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artistic valorization in which artistic status and sales are decoupled. This paper marks our attempt to contribute to this continuing exploration, to understand better how or if changes in art works accompany this decoupling. We believe that rap music makes a fascinating context for such a study because it has only recently started to acquire the hallmarks of ''legitimate'' art and because ardent fans have documented changes in artistic content.

In this paper, we engage three distinct traditions in the sociology of culture. We leverage Pierre Bourdieu's bipartite model of status orders to explore a genre of contemporary American popular music. We examine status orders of participants while this genre undergoes aesthetic valorization—from popular music to art—and join those scholars interested in the legitimation of artistic fields. Finally, we explore patterns of aesthetic conventions, and in so doing, advance sociological knowledge of how well the popularity of artists reflect their artistic similarities—a question that derives from ideas associated with Howard Becker, and the American production of culture tradition. The main objectives of this study are to reveal the status order built from aesthetic conformity, and to see how well it corresponds to status orders built primarily from sales, and secondarily, from peer esteem and critical acclaim.

2. Background

Status is a description of an actor's position within a particular realm (Linton, 1965 [1936]), and studies of status orders can be found in each of sociology's sub-specialties. Status orders rank actants vis-à-vis their peers, using assessments of the personal and/or professional characteristics. Status orders, and individuals' locations within them, are contested both because the domain's boundaries are at issue, and because the attributes used to rank order participants are under debate. Status orders of artists are no exception.

2.1. Status orders in the arts: Bourdieu

Vincent van Gogh's paintings earned the esteem of his peers, but he sold only one during his lifetime (*The Red Vineyard*); he is the archetypal ''unappreciated genius'' (Heinich, 1996). This honorific reflects Pierre Bourdieu's observation that there exist two primary status orders that rank artists: one based on peer esteem and the other on sales. Despite the public's expectation that artistic geniuses like van Gogh should earn high sales for their work, some argue that a systematic breach exists between intra-professional status and public approval and sales (Allen and Lincoln, 2004; Lang and Lang, 1988).

Bourdieu (1984), Bourdieu & Johnson (1993) argued that there are two ideal-typical status orders within artistic fields—one produced by the predominant value of cultural capital (such as familiarity with high culture) and the other by economic capital (financial resources) (Anheier et al., 1995; Janssen, 1998; Pinheiro and Dowd, 2009).[1] In the domain of ''restricted production,'' cultural capital reigns and professionals make art-for-art's sake, not only de-emphasizing the value of

[1] Bourdieu (1993, pp. 50–51) divides cultural legitimacy into three categories: that conferred by peers (''specific''), that given by institutions and agents of the dominant class (''bourgeois'') and ''popular'' legitimacy, that driven by public acclaim. Embedded within a cultural field of restricted production, specific legitimacy reigns supreme; within the fields of large-scale cultural production, popular legitimacy is the most sought after. Allen and Lincoln (2004) apply these three forms of reception (which they call critical, professional, and popular) to identify the causes of the retrospective consecration of films and directors. As Bourdieu's theory would predict, they find that critical discourse about the film and its director has the most substantial, positive effects on the likelihood of subsequent consecration. Popular recognition is significant only when twinned with critical discourse, and only within one of the two consecrating bodies (the National Film Registry or the American Film Institute).

economic rewards, but often viewing them as a sign of lower quality work (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993). The greatest levels of peer esteem are reserved for esoteric works that appeal primarily to the tastes and sensibilities of other artists. Such artists seek "recognition by those whom they recognize" (Anheier et al., 1995, p. 863; also, see Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993, p. 38), elsewhere referred to simply as "recognition" (Lang and Lang, 1988). In "large-scale cultural production," a heteronomous principle of hierarchization reigns that prizes the accumulation of economic capital beyond all else. Here, artists produce works designed to resonate with audience tastes, or public renown (Lang and Lang, 1988).[2]

Bourdieu's social topography might lead one to imagine that art worlds can be neatly segmented into tournament rituals for two forms of status: peer esteem and financial rewards. However, the distinction is meant to be ideal-typical, and researchers have found some artists acquire both forms of capital (Faulkner, 1983; Uzzi and Spiro, 2005). For example, several studies of the literary arts reveal that artists benefit from generating social capital, and these artists can then leverage it into commercial opportunities (Anheier et al., 1995; Craig, 2007; Craig and Dubois, 2010; Janssen, 1998).

Not only is it possible to achieve high levels of *both* peer esteem and sales, research suggests that these forms of capital must be generated in lockstep, with reputational capital preceding financial remuneration. Peer evaluations are acquired early in a career as artists offer promotional copies of their work (e.g., chapbooks, demo tapes), or work as interns or assistants, before entering the paid artistic labour force (Scott, 2012). Especially in this phase, peer evaluations help employers evaluate market entrants with no sales history. From then on, the accumulation of work acts as a reputational signal and the process is self-reinforcing: hiring calls for more hiring (Menger, 1999). Careers advance iteratively through projects, and status positions are allocated based on the evaluation of "track records" based on both peer evaluation and sales (Dowd and Blyler, 2002; Pinheiro and Dowd, 2009, p. 491; Zuckerman et al., 2003). Artists must maintain reputational currency to complement a growing work history (and sales) in order to enter the highest ranks of the field (Bielby and Bielby, 1994; Craig and Dubois, 2010). This reputational currency is often not explicitly defined in art worlds, and implicit reputational hierarchies can be challenging to enumerate (Pachucki, 2012).

The reliance of employers (e.g., patrons) on evaluations of both the sales success of past projects and peer evaluations is a strong influence on art worlds' characteristic highly skewed distribution of rewards, where few artists are highly successful and the great majority meet with little or no success. From the start, successful artists tend to attract more expert collaborators and have access to advanced technologies; they are therefore more likely to create (or be credited for) advances within their field. Preferential attachment processes, resource wealth and network influence thus combine to position "stars" to make qualitatively better work, to act as "'pumps' for ideas that are then quickly circulated" (Moody, 2004, p. 236) among their peers (see also Owen-Smith, 2001), and subsequently "generate consensus, at least with respect to problems and methods" (Moody, 2004, p. 214). For example, successful photographers have access to specialized information and use their brokerage positions to achieve success (Giuffre, 1999), as do successful Hollywood music composers (Faulkner, 1983). The existence of a "star system" in culture fields and industries joins the mutual reinforcement of early reputational and economic

[2] DiMaggio (1987) examines artistic classification systems, and he argues that peer esteem is determined using what he calls "professional classification systems," whereas market actors seeking to sell art for profit use "commercial classification systems."

capital as a second explanation for why some artists maintain both high levels of peer esteem and high levels of financial success.

If the organization of careers and the star system are two mechanisms that produce an alignment between popular success and peer esteem, what then explains the mis-alignment of status orders? One view is that in artistic fields, a major force divorcing sales from peer esteem is processes of artistic legitimation, or the "aesthetic mobility" of the field. Artistic legitimation takes place when members of a field seek the prestige of art by securing the "power to define [their] own criteria for the production and evaluation of . . . products" (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993, p. 5).[3] Members seize this power from the marketplace, and establish what Bourdieu calls "autonomy."

2.2. *Aesthetic legitimation and "autonomous" principles*

A vibrant and growing body of research is devoted to the study of field autonomy, directly or indirectly influenced by Bourdieu's research on the topic (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). In the arts, scholars have documented the artistic legitimation, or "aestheticization," of musical styles including jazz (Lopes, 2002; Peterson, 2005), in addition to the legitimation of film (Baumann, 2001) and cuisine (Ferguson, 1998, 2004; Johnston and Baumann, 2007). Each are forms of popular culture now viewed as art. Aesthetically mobile fields have seen a surge of social scientific interest of late, in part, because it appears they are increasing in number, an externality of the rise of elite "omnivorousness" (Peterson, 2005; Peterson and Kern, 1996).

A common interpretation of Bourdieu's work is that the condition of field autonomy requires the establishment of autonomous principles of evaluation in a restricted subfield, and the creation of a belief in these principles. But there is a reasonable debate to be had over the functional form of autonomy, and—perhaps influenced by the production of culture tradition in American cultural sociology (see Peterson and Anand, 2004)—contemporary scholars have offered a model that defines the process as one of the "legitimacy" and not strictly "autonomy." Artistic legitimacy involves: (1) the institutionalization of standards, practices and authority structures; (2) the solidification of a core discourse, justification, or legitimating ideology; (3) a set of spaces dedicated to the production and consumption of work; (4) the emergence of sub-fields and conflict and accord among them; and (5) the mobilization of material and institutional resources, including those from other arts, like university courses and literary anthologies (Allen and Lincoln, 2004; Baumann, 2001, 2007; Ferguson, 1998). But most importantly for our purposes, the signature quality of field legitimacy is the emergence and relative independence of a status order built from peer esteem from one built purely upon popularity or sales. During this process, economic success is increasingly seen by some as being antithetical to artistic legitimacy.[4]

[3] It is a specific case of the more general process of legitimation, which (following Weber as interpreted by Johnson et al. (2006, p. 55) is action that "is approximately or on the average oriented to certain determinate 'maxims' or rules," particularly in cases where "the new and unaccepted is rendered valid and accepted" especially when styles, artists and works are repositioned "from merely entertainment, commerce, fad . . . to culture that is legitimately artistic" (Baumann, 2007, pp. 48–49).

[4] To be entirely clear: the concept of legitimacy offered in most studies of American art worlds reveals similar mechanisms are, broadly speaking, in play in American and French artistic status orders, but also that they differ in their details. For example, while DiMaggio's (1982) influential work on the emergence of high art in the United States demonstrates processes of artistic legitimation, his work stops short of demonstrating *field* autonomy because the results do not chart the genesis of avant-garde art. Since our data reflect production and consumption practices located in the U.S., we argue they help us to evaluate field *legitimacy*, not autonomy. That said, the primary measure that we and most contemporary U.S. sociologists use to measure legitimacy—"peer esteem"—is very similar to the principle that motivates the avant-garde described by Bourdieu: "art for art's sake."

While examining the decoupling of status orders that takes place during artistic legitimation, sociologists rarely make rigorous observation of whether aesthetic changes accompany this transition. Instead, they rely upon critics to report the emergence of, or transitions in what works look like, taste like, or sound like (e.g., Allen and Lincoln, 2004; Schmutz, 2005). It thus becomes difficult for us to disentangle discursive and observational data on aesthetic changes. We might ask: are any innovations in form and substance ignored by critics? Are there some innovations that are initially ignored, while their imitators are celebrated? Answering these questions requires that we measure an alternative status order: the aesthetic ''attractiveness'' of each artist's work relative to others' work. To do so, we must invent a way to capture repeated uses of artistic ''conventions,'' a concept made famous by sociologist Howard Becker.

2.3. The repetition of artistic content

One key assumption among sociologists of culture is that artistic groups cohere through the shared use of what Howard Becker referred to as ''conventions:'' institutionalized beliefs that govern ''all the decisions that must be made with respect to the works produced.'' including artistic materials and abstractions, the dimensions of works, and the ''relations between artists and audience, specifying the rights and obligations of both'' (Becker, 1982, p. 29). Sociologists have examined patterns in several types of conventions—including those of critical discourse (Allen and Lincoln, 2004; Johnston and Baumann, 2007), collaboration (Moody, 2004; Newman, 2001), and casting and employment (Bielby and Bielby, 1994). Sociologists have also explored a very special type of convention: the choice of artistic *content*; that is, what note, which brushstroke, or what dance-step artists choose to use.

Just focusing strictly on the sub-set of sociological research on musical content, these include studies of musical lyrics, themes, and even notes. Some studies focus on how patterns in musical content reflect social and organizational structures (inter alia Lena, 2006; Phillips, 2011; Phillips and Owens, 2004). There are studies that focus on the learning and enactment of musical notes and scores, including Khodyakov (2007) and McCormick (2009), and those that focus on debates over the authenticity of these enactments (Grazian, 2005; Peterson, 1997). Others examine the relations among musical elements in order to observe how meaning coheres through their patterning (Cerulo, 1995; Liao et al., 2012) or how shared meanings (reflected in taste preferences) allow relations between people to cohere (Lizardo, 2006; Schnable, 2012; Schultz and Breiger, 2010).

As Becker (1982) and others have demonstrated, artists can signal their membership within a circle or group by using the same conventions as members of that group. When musicians conform to a palette of artistic content offered in others' works, they do so in order to seek a position, or status, within that group. Using the right content, in the right way, is a means by which artists can find a place among like-minded artists (as well as attract the ''right'' audiences, critics, etc.).[5] In other words, using the same artistic content as their peers—repeating it—is a means by which artists can acquire what we will call ''artistic'' status positions.

In a complementary manner, when artists innovate new artistic content—material that has never been used by their peers—this can also generate artistic status for them. Status aspirants

[5] Conventions are ''legitimate'' or ''right'' or ''innovative'' to some members of the artistic movement, but never to all artists (see Johnson et al., 2006 for a compatible definition of legitimacy). These descriptors are by definition not universally applied. However, we think it is cumbersome for the reader if we follow each mention of these concepts with a reminder that they are subjective assessments.

introduce new content they use as replacements for existing practices or choices. Knowing this, Bourdieu (1996, p. 231) described innovative art works as acts of ''position-taking;'' in this sense, artworks are avatars for the artist. But not all new artistic content is seen as legitimate: innovation is institutionally regulated by ''[knowledge of] the finite universe of *freedom under constraints* and *objective potentialities*'' available in the field (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 235). Bourdieu argues that that innovation is not boundless, but directed at filling ''structural lacunae:'' ''potential directions of development, possible avenues of research'' that have to be ''accepted and recognized as 'reasonable,' at least by a small number of people.'' These ''potentialities'' are revealed in the ways in which artists describe the boundaries or frontier of innovation: as ''problems to resolve, stylistic or thematic possibilities to exploit'' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 235). (And so, for example, Rembrandt ''solved'' the problem of light [Schama, 1999] and Picasso ''solved'' the problem of perspective [Baxandall, 1985].[6]) These lacuna—opportunities for legitimate innovation—reflect both the freedom we conventionally associate with innovation *and* the constraints of conventions—the *ars obligatoria* that ''acts like a grammar in defining the space of what is possible or conceivable within the limits of a certain field, constituting each of the 'choices' taken'' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 236). One obvious indication that a grammar exists can be found in the fact that not all aesthetically novel items are viewed as innovations—some are ignored or are rejected by members of the group. Innovations are thus minimally defined as new artistic content that meets with discursive approval, or that are imitated in future works by peers. In short, the repetition of new conventions by one's peers is a way artists aspire to higher status positions within art worlds.

In these accounts of innovation, the artist may sound like a rational and strategic actor with extraordinarily complete information about the field. This is neither objectively true, nor is it consistent with accounts artists provide of their subjective experiences at work (see Mears, 2011). Instead, sociological accounts of innovation like those cited above describe a system of allocating status positions that is sociologically coherent, but is decidedly disordered, contingent, and anxiety-producing for most actors within it. This is, by our reading, entirely consistent with Bourdieu's argument that ''the subject's inability to state [the] rules of the game is not necessarily a measure of the nonexistence or lack of importance of such rules for the game being played'' (Venkatesh, 2013, p. 6).

Despite the importance of aesthetic content to status orders in the arts, and the frequent reliance on patterns in other conventions to construct artistic status orders, we know of no study that has compared the status orders that result from the repetition of artistic content with other status orders. Advances in digital media and especially the propensity for fans to document artistic content online open the possibility of measuring these status arrays. Such a study permits us to interrogate the similarities and differences between status orders produced from patterns of artistic content and those produced by popularity, peer evaluation, and critical discourse.

3. Exploring status orders

The main objectives of this study are to reveal the status orders built from the repetition of artistic content, and to observe how well they correspond to status orders built from sales and, to a

[6] Aesthetic innovations are treated as the *sine qua non* of achievement among artistic peers. Innovation, or ''the nonroutine dimension of artistic creative work is the most demanding, the most rewarding, and the most acclaimed one, and that which gives it such a great social value'' (Menger, 1999, p. 559).

lesser extent, from peer esteem and critical acclaim. The first step in this process was case selection and data preparation. Our aim was to select an artistic movement for study that had a clearly identified locus for content repetition, that catalogued these actions, and that had undergone artistic legitimation. In addition, we sought a case in which some data on critical acclaim and peer esteem were available for a preliminary comparison. In this section, we detail the reasons we selected rap music and provide a description of the data on which our analysis relies.

3.1. Rap music: stylistic innovation and legitimation

As with other creative fields, rap music's origins are contested. What is beyond dispute is that a group called the *Sugarhill Gang* released the first commercial rap single in October 1979: ''Rapper's Delight.'' The song's music included recognizable segments of existing popular music, including the opening bass riff from *Chic's* disco hit, ''Good Times.'' The hundreds of rap songs recorded and released in the two decades that followed would similarly include musical citations of older works, referred to as ''samples.''[7] While the *Sugarhill Gang* was essentially a novelty act—gathered for the purpose of recording this song—their success provided the existing artistic circle with ''the incentive and example to get out of the underground and onto disc and radio'' (Schusterman, 1991, p. 616).

By 1999, rap music would become the preeminent popular music style in America and across much of the globe. The style grew to include 13 distinct sub-genres (e.g., booty rap, jazz rap, west coast gangsta rap), each characterized by a specific palette of conventions (Krims, 2000; Lena, 2006, 2012). Fans later grouped these sub-genre styles into ''eras'' they felt marked the history of the style. The early dominance of *crossover* rap, like ''Rapper's Delight,'' was replaced by several sub-genres representing *hardcore* rap in 1988, which soon contested for chart space and fan loyalty with *conscious* rap styles. *Hardcore* rap marked a significant aesthetic departure from *crossover* rap's ''pop'' sounds, with its dense rhyme patterns, a high volume of samples, and a lyrical focus on gangstas, hustlers, pimps, and sexually explicit and violent content (Lena, 2006). While *hardcore* rappers and labels were located in rap's traditional home-base in New York, they also emerged from the periphery—like Miami group *2 Live Crew*, whose 1989 single ''Me So Horny'' is one example of the sexually explicit style. *Conscious* rap arose in the early 1990s as music with politically and socially conscious lyrics, but without the explicit or violent content that alienated some listeners from *hardcore* rap. *Public Enemy*'s 1989 single ''Fight the Power'' illustrates the conventions of *conscious* rap: the lyrics critique the abuse of power and the song's samples include audio segments from a civil right's activist and James Brown.

While Chuck D, rapper and spokesman for *Public Enemy*, emphasized the importance of sampling to the group and his music (''Our music is all about samples . . . Simply put, 'Fight the Power,' and likely Public Enemy itself, could not exist without it'' [Katz, 2004, p. 161]), a Supreme Court decision just five years later brought the practice almost to a halt. The March 1994

[7] The samples that we address are excerpts from existing recorded music that are modified or adapted and then integrated in a new song (see also footnote 12). Rap samples should not be confused with sampling procedures employed in scientific studies, when researchers select a portion of a population for analysis. Musical samples can be vocal or instrumental, and from any genre of music or sound, including television jingles. They can be short in length or long; ''looped'' to repeat, or played only once; and modified or played as originally recorded. Sometimes, samples are identified by interested and informed listeners, but rarely they are impossible to hear because of how they have been blended into the other tracks on the song (Lena, 2004).

Supreme Court ruling in *Luther R. Campbell, aka Luke Skyywalker, et al. v. Acuff-Rose Music, Inc.*, meant that (extensive) sampling was no longer an economically feasible choice for most rappers—as royalty payments for the use of samples was now expected and required.[8] As a result of the increasingly litigious response to samples use, stylistic distinctions between songs produced after 1994 rested largely on other attributes.

The rise of two rap supra-genres (*hardcore* and *conscious* rap) in the late 1980s is only one of the several reasons rap fans refer to the period between 1988 and 1990 as ''the Golden Era.'' Rap music dominated the popular music charts, and rap's first platinum selling white artist, Vanilla Ice, was one of the most recognizable names in America. New centres of production and consumption opened up in Houston, Miami and Boston as creativity flowered in New York and Los Angeles. The music video emerged as a primary format and rap music and aesthetics infiltrated mainstream cinema (e.g., *Do The Right Thing*, *New Jack City*, *Boyz n the Hood*), and extended to other artistic fields—including fashion, photography, literature, television, Broadway, and opera. Universities provided coursework in which rap was a focal concern, offered working groups and centres for scholars (e.g., UC Berkeley, UCLA) and archives (e.g., Harvard University, Stanford University), and each of these encouraged fans, critics and artists to promote the primacy of aesthetic criteria of evaluation (Baumann, 2001, p. 56; see also Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993). Rap's Golden Era is a period marked by the flowering of distinctive modes of production and appreciation, and a sense that rap had become ''artistic:'' creative, vital, and diverse (Chang, 2005; George, 1998; Perkins, 1996; Rose, 1994).

This history lays bare the potential of rap music as a site for our investigation. The possibility of financial success for members of the rap scene opened only after the *Sugarhill Gang*'s hit song, and later stars held high levels of peer esteem and popularity, as artistic status theories would suggest. Stylistic approaches to production evolved substantially over 20 years, sponsored by record labels that specialized in nurturing cliques of fans and artists, as Bourdieu's field theory would predict. Over time, competition between these cliques promoted the differentiation of ''artistic'' works, and credentializing and legitimating institutions filtered these from the musical corpus. The identification of a two-year long ''Golden Era'' indicates a specific timeframe in which this artistic legitimation took place. The evaluation of style and the attribution of artistic status rested heavily on the strategic innovation and repetition of particular (groups of) samples, and related artistic content, supporting Becker's (1982) claims about the role of artistic conventions in boundary-setting and status position-taking. In sum, rap music offered an ideal context within which to examine our core research questions.

In the remainder of this section, we introduce the data we employed to explore status orders before, during, and after rap's artistic legitimation, and the measures we invented to evaluate these data. We end with a description of the analysis procedures we followed.

3.2. Popularity: sales and airplay

Given our interest in comparing status built from sales and airplay (i.e., ''popularity'') with other indicators of success, it was necessary to identify data that documented the largest possible

[8] A discussion of this case, and its consequences for sampling in rap and related electronic styles, can be found in Krims (2000) and McLeod and DiCola (2011).

group of rap songs and their sales performance. Since experts agree that the *Billboard* charts are the most fair and least subjective of the several published music charts in the U.S. (Dowd, 2004; Lena, 2006; Lopes, 1992; Peterson and Berger, 1975), and music charts provide an ordinal ranking of songs based (in this case) on both sales and radio airplay, we use these to construct our popularity measure.[9]

We identified all rap songs that charted on the *Billboard* Weekly *Top 100 R&B Singles* list, starting with the first commercially released single: ''Rapper's Delight'' (October, 1979). We included all songs that charted before December 31, 1999, capturing a full 20-year period. (Since the end boundary of our data window reflected a natural break in sampling practices, we discuss that decision in the following section.) Designations of these songs as rap (as distinct from other forms of R&B) were taken from Whitburn (1996), shelving classifications (i.e., the shelving recommendations listed on CD jackets), and from several rap music experts, who were asked to determine the genre of ambiguous songs. In total, 1333 rap songs met these inclusion criteria. Each track listing includes the song title and artist or group, the date of chart entry, peak chart position, chart duration measured in weeks, and record label imprint. Using *Billboard* data selects songs that have already achieved some degree of sales and airplay success, however, there is no systematic sampling design that will allow us to identify a more diverse population. Of the rap songs that entered the *Billboard* charts, 51% (those with complete chart and sampling data) were included in the analytic dataset, which includes 372 rap artists or groups, and 754 of their songs.

In order to rank artists within a status order based on sales, we began by calculating a ''sales ratio'' for each single by all 372 artists that charted between 1979 and 1999. Sales success is maximized by a lower peak position (between 1 and 100, with #1 hits being the most successful) and longer duration (how long a single remained on the charts), with subscript *track* indexing track-specific attributes (Eq. (1.1)).

$$artistsales_{track} = \frac{duration_{track}}{peak_{track}} \tag{1.1}$$

The examination of yearly variation in track duration and peak position (see Table 1) reveals significant yearly variation in both attributes. The number of rap songs on the charts peaks during 1993 and 1994 ($n = 90$ each year), while the number of unique artists on the charts was greatest in 1998 ($n = 86$).

Most artists (58%, $n = 226$) appeared only once on the charts during the term of our study, though a significant number charted multiple times during their career (Fig. 1 illustrates this long-tailed distribution). The artist with the greatest number of charting singles in our data is *L.L. Cool J* ($n = 19$) followed by *Heavy D* and *Public Enemy* ($n = 13$ each). This distribution provides strong evidence that the ''star system'' associated with art worlds is also present in rap music. Because a number of artists charted multiple times within a year, we transformed

[9] Ours is not a direct measure of sales, but instead captures a stratified sample of points of sale in combination with a sample of radio station playlists. Also, the *Billboard* charts from which we drew our data transform what is known to be an exponential distribution of sales into a rank-ordered, linear distribution. Given that we were not able to access sales data directly, we know that reliance on rank order has depressed differences between individual performers in our measure of sales. Since there is no complete list of recordings made in the U.S., and therefore, no systematic way to gather data on omitted songs, we systematically excluded the least successful songs, and are left to conclude that our study underestimates effects for those performers. However, scholars working on the Dutch music market have discovered and exploited such a complete list (Christianen, 1995).

Table 1
Billboard rap single sales statistics.

Year	Song	Artist	Songs/Artist	Duration		Peak position		Sales status[a]	
	n=	*n*=		μ (weeks)	σ	μ (pos)	σ	μ	*SD*
1979	1	1	1.00	19.0	–	4	–	4750.00	–
1980	2	2	1.00	14.5	5.0	17	3	88.95	43.92
1981	3	3	1.00	10.3	6.1	47	31	2.76	3.71
1982	6	6	1.00	11.3	3.6	35	22	2.48	4.15
1983	1	1	1.00	13.0	–	47	–	276.60	–
1984	3	3	1.00	10.7	5.0	46	34	2.84	3.73
1985	4	4	1.00	14.3	4.1	33	24	4.08	3.65
1986	13	11	1.18	9.7	3.8	46	26	0.50	0.52
1987	9	7	1.29	13.0	3.3	37	24	1.95	2.09
1988	35	26	1.35	12.5	5.1	40	24	0.38	0.52
1989	47	37	1.27	11.3	5.9	43	29	0.36	0.89
1990	36	29	1.24	11.6	5.0	36	28	0.49	1.21
1991	58	43	1.35	12.5	5.5	38	26	0.26	0.53
1992	74	55	1.35	12.6	6.3	40	27	0.26	0.59
1993	90	68	1.32	13.7	7.1	49	31	0.35	0.85
1994	90	78	1.15	13.4	6.9	52	29	0.14	0.41
1995	85	77	1.10	14.8	6.1	45	26	0.25	0.69
1996	59	69	0.86	15.5	8.2	45	31	0.44	1.38
1997	55	57	0.96	18.0	9.9	33	31	0.89	2.17
1998	65	86	0.76	16.0	6.0	37	24	0.12	0.18
1999	18	25	0.72	10.7	6.4	59	25	0.19	0.34

Note: *Duration* ranges 1–42, *Peak position* ranges 1–100.
[a] Scaled 1000× to enable easier interpretation of later years.

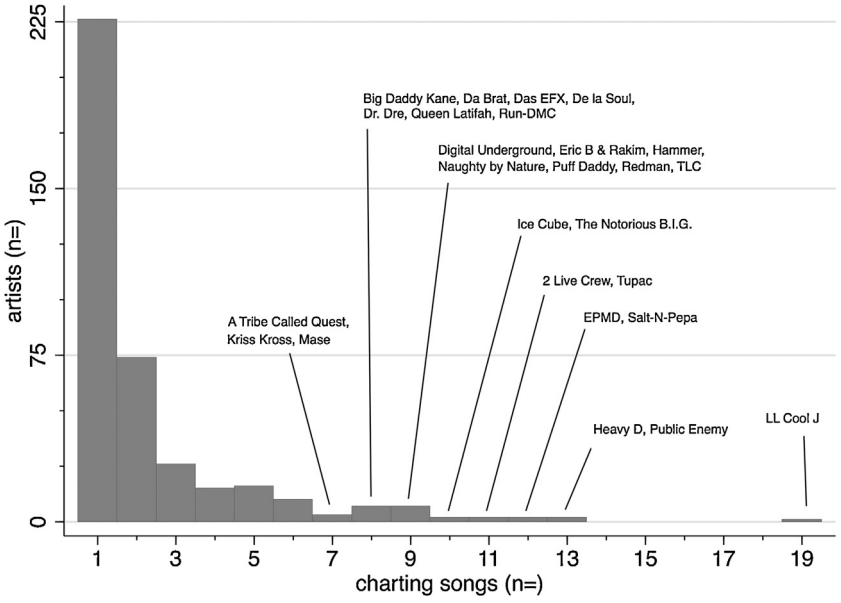

Fig. 1. Career distribution of artist singles.

track-level sales to yearly sales, so as to account for the possibility of multiple singles by an artist within a given year (Eq. (1.2)).

$$artistsales_{year} = \left(\sum_{i=1}^{N} artistsales_{track} \right) \tag{1.2}$$

To make artists' chart performance comparable across years, we weighted yearly cumulative sales by the sum of charting singles by all rap artists (''all hits''), as well as chart range (''range''). These weights function to exaggerate the accomplishment of rappers who chart singles when most popular songs are in other genres (e.g., disco, or rock), and the weights function to depress the penalty of low chart position during periods when all charting rap songs are located at the bottom of the rankings. The observed disparities in prevalence of charting singles before and after 1986, and before and after 1995 confirm this was a worthwhile adjustment. The weighting produces a yearly artist-level measure of sales that is sensitive to yearly fluctuations within the field (Eq. (1.3)).

$$artistsales'_{year} = \frac{artistsales_{year}}{range_{year} allhits_{year}} \tag{1.3}$$

In examining our sales measure, we see the average scores are greatest between 1979 and 1985, but then decline over time, with the exception of several peaks in 1985, 1987, and 1997. The outlying sales score in 1979 is ''Rapper's Delight'' by *Sugarhill Gang*, which was the first (and only) song to chart in that year, and remained on the chart for 19 weeks, hitting a peak position of #4. Its low peak position, long chart duration, and its success against other pop styles in the absence of rap peers, all contribute to its exceptional performance on our measure. In 1985, hits by four artists (*UTFO*, *Full Force*, *Salt-N-Pepa*, *Symbolic Three*) contributed to this exceptional year for sales, as did hits by six artists in 1987 (*LL Cool J, Dana Dane, Salt-N-Pepa, Kool Moe Dee, Eric B & Rakim, True Love*, and *DJ Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince*). While the 1997 charts hosted a relatively high number of rappers (56), their chart performance was dwarfed by the success of six charting singles by a single artist (*Puff Daddy*), two of which hit #1 and remained there for approximately 30 weeks each.

3.3. Artistic status: sample repetition

In order to construct a status order based on artistic content, we sought data on samples use within those songs included in the sales data. We were able to gather data from two sources: a minority from the Whitburn (1996) entries for each song, and the remainder from a website documenting samples in rap, and previously employed by rap scholars (Lena, 2004; Smith, 2006).[10] We gathered information on all musical samples included in the *Billboard* charting rap songs starting in 1979 with the first commercially released single. As stated above, we ended data collection with songs that charted in the last week of December 1999. Two factors determined the end boundary of our data: (1) we wanted to capture almost a decade of data after 1992—the consensus date for the end of rap's ''Golden Era,'' and (2) we wanted to capture several years of data after the legal prosecution of unauthorized sampling began in earnest with the March 1994

[10] http://www.the-breaks.com/, accessed November 1, 2003. The first author secured the owner's permission to use this data. Regular visitors contribute to the website and this information is vetted by the site's owner.

Supreme Court decision in *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose*. Allowing four years for this transition away from artists' reliance on samples, we expect our data frame (1979–1999) captures the whole history of the practice as a major mechanism of distinction. Although we had good reason to set the end-date in 1999, we were concerned that later-charting artists would have fewer subsequent years in which to generate artistic status, so we weighted our measure such that this (potential) penalty was reduced.

Recall that of the 1333 songs for which we gathered sales data, we have samples data for 754; we thus excluded the 579 songs we could not rank on both indices. We have a good deal of confidence that the omitted songs (charting rap songs without sample information) do not differ substantially from the included songs. A separate analysis not presented here, but available from authors, reveals no statistically significant difference in the peak position of charting rap songs that were included in the fan database and those that were not included (and only a weakly significant difference in their duration on the charts).[11] Popular sample sources in the 754 songs included music from R&B, funk, or soul artists—such as *James Brown*, *Parliament Funkadelic*, *Sly & the Family Stone* and artists of that era.[12]

The first several columns of Table 2 report on descriptive statistics of the analytic dataset. The number of samples used in each year rose steadily before peaking in 1993. A consequential year for sampling in rap music's early days occurred in 1981, when three songs charted: ''The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel'' (*Grandmaster Flash*), ''Another One Bites the Dust'' (*Sugar Daddy*), and ''Apache Rap'' (*Sugarhill Gang*). We observe traces of this in the mean level of artistic status in 1981 ($\mu = 0.10$, SD = 0.08). However, the modal year for artistic status was in 1988. During this year, 26 different artists, including *Public Enemy*, generated a mean status value of 0.27 (SD = 0.33). While we do not see an immediate or dramatic cessation of sampling in the wake of the 1994 decision on *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose*, we do note a substantial reduction of the practice in these years, despite the field's concurrent overall growth. However, the number of samples used per artist peaked several years prior, in 1987 ($\mu = 3.29$). That same year, artists used the most unique source artists ($\mu = 3.0$) than any other year in the analytic period.

Once we identified the samples used in rap songs, our next goal was to construct sampling lineages wherein we could identify successive uses of the same material. Of the 754 songs that met the inclusion criteria, 270 songs used samples that were never observably used by another rap artist. While these songs were still included in analyses of artistic status, the sampling lineages in which they reside were accorded a length of zero. While some of these samples were almost certainly used in rap songs that were released but failed to chart, our comparison of the two sets (songs with repeated samples, songs with no repeated samples) revealed no statistically

[11] We are unable to distinguish the multiple motivations for the repeated use of the same sample, although rap scholars have offered evidence of an array of such motivations (Krims, 2000; Lena, 2004; Schloss, 2004). Also, some of the samples data were generated by fans, and some rap artists had a disproportionately large number of samples documented, so it is likely that there is selection bias. However, this should only impact the magnitude of importance of particular samples, but there is no indication that key relationships have remained undocumented. The likelihood of this harm is diminished because rap artists often utilized samples where the source is easy to detect as a platform for distinction (see Lena, 2004). Finally, we do not have information on the duration or prominence of any sample within a rap song, although the logical assumption is that sample duration only matters for our key relationships insofar as a sample is long enough for fans to recognize its source.

[12] While some artists also used non-human sounds (a door closing, a gunshot, a dog barking, etc.), we do not investigate the use of non-musical samples.

Table 2
Billboard rap single (musical) sample statistics.

Year	Artist	Sample	Samples/ Artist	Sources	Sources/ Artist	Path	Path length		Novel sampler	Aesthetic status	
	n=	*n*=		*n*=		*n*=	μ	*SD*	*n*=	μ	*SD*
1979	1	1	1.00	1	1.00	1	9.0	–	1	0.05	–
1980	2	3	1.50	3	1.50	3	5.0	3.5	2	0.07	0.03
1981	3	7	2.33	7	2.33	8	3.5	2.5	5	0.10	0.08
1982	6	7	1.17	6	1.00	8	3.6	5.9	3	0.03	0.07
1983	1	1	1.00	1	1.00	1	2.0	–	1	0.06	–
1984	3	3	1.00	3	1.00	3	2.3	0.6	3	0.06	0.00
1985	4	3	0.75	3	0.75	4	6.0	2.5	4	0.07	0.00
1986	11	22	2.00	19	1.73	24	17.2	27.7	16	0.12	0.12
1987	7	23	3.29	21	3.00	24	13.3	23.1	14	0.21	0.22
1988	26	76	2.92	53	2.04	97	21.1	28.6	38	0.27	0.33
1989	37	92	2.49	78	2.11	103	15.4	25.4	40	0.19	0.20
1990	29	71	2.45	57	1.97	76	17.7	26.8	17	0.18	0.24
1991	43	98	2.28	72	1.67	115	21.1	28.8	21	0.19	0.16
1992	55	137	2.49	100	1.82	170	17.5	24.0	25	0.22	0.20
1993	68	152	2.24	114	1.68	188	13.8	20.9	15	0.18	0.17
1994	78	140	1.79	119	1.53	173	10.6	18.5	10	0.13	0.12
1995	77	110	1.43	91	1.18	146	8.7	14.0	12	0.13	0.13
1996	69	74	1.07	70	1.01	108	5.2	10.0	15	0.13	0.11
1997	57	69	1.21	60	1.05	97	6.7	10.3	7	0.16	0.19
1998	86	73	0.85	70	0.81	123	7.6	18.6	0	0.15	0.15
1999	25	23	0.92	22	0.88	35	5.1	6.3	0	0.15	0.21

Note: *Song* refers to charting single; *artist* refers to rap artist who authors single; *sample* refers to distinct musical snippet used in song by a charting rapper; *source* refers to earlier-generation musician from whom rappers sample; *path* refers to a lineage of repeated uses of a given source; *path length* refers to number of artists in lineage; *novel sampler* refers to rapper who begins a trend of sampling a particular source which was subsequently followed by others. For more detail on how sampling lineages were constructed, see Appendix.

significant differences in either peak position or duration on the *Billboard* charts (analysis available upon request).

To build the measure, we treated all rappers who sample the same ''source'' artist as elements in a chronological sampling path of length *n*. The variable ''path length'' captures the number of successive uses of the same source by multiple rappers. The ''path position'' reflects the number of rappers within a path, and assigns those in earlier positions a greater value (Eq. (2.1)).

$$artist\ repetition_{year} = \frac{position_{path}}{length_{path}} \tag{2.1}$$

While some cases were relatively unambiguous to code, as each rapper can be clearly ordered in temporal succession, other samples paths were not as clear-cut; in Appendix we describe three rules we employed to code boundary cases. Briefly, we decided a valid path must contain two distinct artists and span two years, at minimum; that multiple artists charting the same sample in the same year are given the same path position value; and that collaborating artists are given the same path position value. The middle columns in Table 2 reveal that the number of distinct paths peaked in 1993, which can be expected given the large number of samples used in that same year. However, variation in path length suggests that the most active time of sample repetition was between roughly 1988 and 1991, coinciding with rap's Golden Era.

At this point, we have not yet addressed that the data are right censored to 1999. To do so, we weight the measure by the difference between the year of sample use and the right boundary. This aids in accounting for the fact that an artist who is temporally later in a sampling path has fewer years to attract imitators than does an earlier artist (Eq. (2.2)).

$$artist\ repetition'_{year} = \frac{artist\ repetition_{year}}{year_{sample} - 1999} \tag{2.2}$$

Last, because the repetition ratio is calculated at the song level, and some artists chart multiple times during a year, we summed all of an artist's weighted repetition path(s) within each year of the study (Eq. (2.3)).

$$artist\ repetition''_{year} = \sum_{i=1}^{N} artist\ repetition'_{year} \tag{2.3}$$

While the sales status measure was relatively straightforward in its functions, we needed to draft multiple versions of the aesthetic status measure in order to optimize its reliability, parsimony in its operations, and to limit the amount of required data transformation.[13] After each version, we evaluated artist rankings to see whether they comported with external evaluations by music historians. The current solution is the most flexible, reliable, and simple of those tested, although the other equations and analyses are available from the authors upon request. The last columns of Table 2 reveal that average artistic status was at its peak between 1988 and 1992. During 1988 and 1989—the beginning of rap's Golden Era, we observe the greatest number of "novel samplers"—that is, rappers whose samples were later utilized by other rappers in different rap songs.

Readers should be aware of an important coding decision we faced while building this measure of artistic status. The *Billboard* entries include solo artists who later joined groups (and the reverse), raising the question of equivalence between them. Solo performers undoubtedly draw new sales from their existing fans once they join a new performance group, and this means some amount of sales acclaim is transferred across the boundary. Also, it often happens that old fans become disenchanted because performers change their style when they change performance groups (Lena and Peterson, 2008). Though status built from repetition or innovation is likely not transferred equally between performers' identities, there is likely some transfer of popularity. While research using similar data (see Smith, 2006) treats all artists—even those within groups—as individuals, we made the decision in longitudinal model specifications to cluster artists across individual and group identities, thus linking solo performers and their prior or subsequent group projects.[14] A sensitivity analysis that treated artists as distinct showed no significant difference in our results.

In sum, our artistic status measure, based solely on aesthetic repetition, accounts for an artist's position in a sampling lineage including *relative innovation* (i.e., was a rapper the first or fourth to sample a given source?), how many others sampled the source or *repetition* (i.e., one rapper or

[13] For instance, one abandoned iteration gave first-time samplers an additional "innovation bonus" using a numeric constant, but was discarded because it was judged redundant with giving higher incremental valuation to earlier samplers. Another abandoned version weighted an artist's repetition score for the duration (in years) of a sampling path, in order to adjust for "sticky" (more culturally resonant) samples. It was eventually discarded because the expectation of cultural resonance implied a causal relationship between sampling acts for which we have no evidence.

[14] We performed this analysis by including a cluster variable in the regression for linked units. There were 89 distinct artists that could be linked into 30 clusters. For example, the group *Junior Mafia* is linked with distinct artists *Lil Cease*, *Lil' Kim*, and *Notorious B.I.G.* in one cluster unit.

five others?), and the timing of when the sampling occurred (i.e., 1983 or 1996?). Based purely upon repetition of earlier artists' samples, this measure of artistic status suggests that sampling was established by 1988 as a position-generating mechanism, a point on which we elaborate in discussion of the analysis results.

3.4. Supra-genre style and industry resources

Rap communities are strongly organized by sub-genres, which are characterized by shared conventions and pressure towards mutual acknowledgement via imitation (Krims, 2000; Lena, 2006, 2012). These shared conventions include samples, and so we wish to determine if sub-genre and artistic status are independent measures. Post hoc classifications of songs and artists into mutually exclusive and exhaustive sub-, and then supra-genre, categories was one indicator we could use to detect the effect of community membership on status order position.

To sort songs into sub-genres, we adapted the coding procedure used by Krims (2000) and Lena (2006), in which singles are sorted into thirteen sub-genre groupings according to four criteria: flow (verbal style), musical style (how instrumentation is used), the degree of rhythmic regularity/consistency, and semantic content. After songs were sorted into sub-genres, names were assigned that matched the content and style of each group and reflected those commonly used by fans to refer to those songs. Out of concern that the assignment of songs to thirteen stylistic categories would provide a murky picture of rap status structures, we chose instead to apply three "supra-genre" labels that are also used in histories of the style (as detailed above): *crossover* ($n = 440$), *hardcore* ($n = 161$) and *conscious* ($n = 51$) rap, and any combination of two supra-genres ($n = 36$). Each of these offers distinctive principles and orders of valuation. If the repetition of samples is a mechanism used to create new artistic communities, supra-genre groupings should have variation in sample repetition.

In addition to supra-genre style, a second factor that could affect the relationship between sales and artistic status is the impact of record label resources on rappers' choice of samples. Previous research suggests that the size and resources of the label on which a rapper records a song has a major influence on their success (Negus, 1999). When considering the influence of record label size and resources on artists, experts rely on a simple distinction between major labels with international promotion and distribution networks (e.g., Sony, Universal, BMG, Warner), and independent labels with relatively limited reach and that cultivate avant-garde or local musical styles (Dowd, 2003, 2004; Lopes, 1992).[15] Given the resources major labels can offer to their artists, we might expect their artists would have access to "better" selections of samples, and would therefore be more likely to introduce novel samples. On the other hand, we might predict the (presumed) creative freedom of "indie" artists will attract imitators of their choice of samples, and would result in higher status positions for independent label artists. However, if major labels provide larger budgets to fund the purchase of samples and/or provide artists with access to songs in their catalogue, major label artists may produce songs with more (or novel) samples, and these artists would earn higher positions as a result. If independent artists are as innovative as their reputation suggests, then ascendant (supra-genre) styles of rap should

[15] Rappers do not have unbridled access to all recorded music from which they can choose any sample they wish. There are historical and organizational conditions that condition the availability of samples to rappers, and thus influence status patterns. These include resource scarcity and fashions in the field, among others. We have also already noted the possible impact that increased legal enforcement of unlicensed sample use in the late 1990s may have had on the reduced frequency of sampling.

emerge from artists on independent labels, providing them with higher status scores. Thus, we cannot hypothesize a simple effect of record label type on status, leading us to predict the undirected effect of label affiliation on artistic status.

To evaluate the effect of record label affiliation on status position we transformed the record label imprint data for each song into aggregate label types. We did so through a series of iterative decisions having to do with the changing structure of the record industry. We extracted the imprint from the *Billboard* charts, and one of the 170 labels was assigned. These were next refined into 27 corporate categories, and then reduced to 12 corporate families. Each of the corporate families was designated ''independent'' or ''major label.'' Each song was sorted into the two categories, and assigned a label dummy variable.

3.5. Control variables

We use the distribution of samples to derive three important control variables. The first is a dummy variable that indicates whether an artist was the first to begin a sampling practice (i.e., ''novelty''). The second variable is the frequency of samples used by each artist per track in a given year. Preliminary inspection of the data indicated that certain artists, such as *Public Enemy*, employed a large number of unique samples, and without the application of weights, this would provide them an artificially high position in our artistic status measure. The third variable is the number of unique artists sampled per track in a given year; this helps control for sampling diversity (i.e., rappers who sample repeatedly from the same sources may have different reputational signatures than those artists who have more catholic tastes).

3.6. Description of analyses

In the first part of our analysis, we examine how artists' positions in the artistic status (repetition) order and the popularity status order (sales) correspond during each year of the study using a correlation analysis. Doing so allows us to determine if an artist's sales are decoupled from her aesthetic choices. All other things being equal, the degree of correlation between the sales status order and the artistic status order indicates the degree to which the evaluation of consumers meaningfully overlaps with the artistic choices embodied by particular samples. A discovery of alignment between these two suggests that peers repeat conventions from the same songs that are popular among audiences. This simple bivariate correlation leads us towards a multivariate examination of the impact of our mediating variables (industry and style) on artistic status. We then use a longitudinal regression framework to treat artistic and sales rank as discrete outcomes, and to evaluate the relative contribution of record label and subgenre affiliation on artists' position within each status order. Last, we examine how sales and usage of aesthetic conventions predict supra-genre affiliation.

4. Results

4.1. Artistic legitimation and stylistic diversity

Earlier scholars have argued that the process of accumulating legitimacy for some works within an artistic field involves the emergence of sub-fields and the establishment of autonomous principles of evaluation in a restricted subfield (e.g., Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993; Ferguson, 2004). In keeping with this, we evaluate the emergence of artistic legitimacy within rap music, by

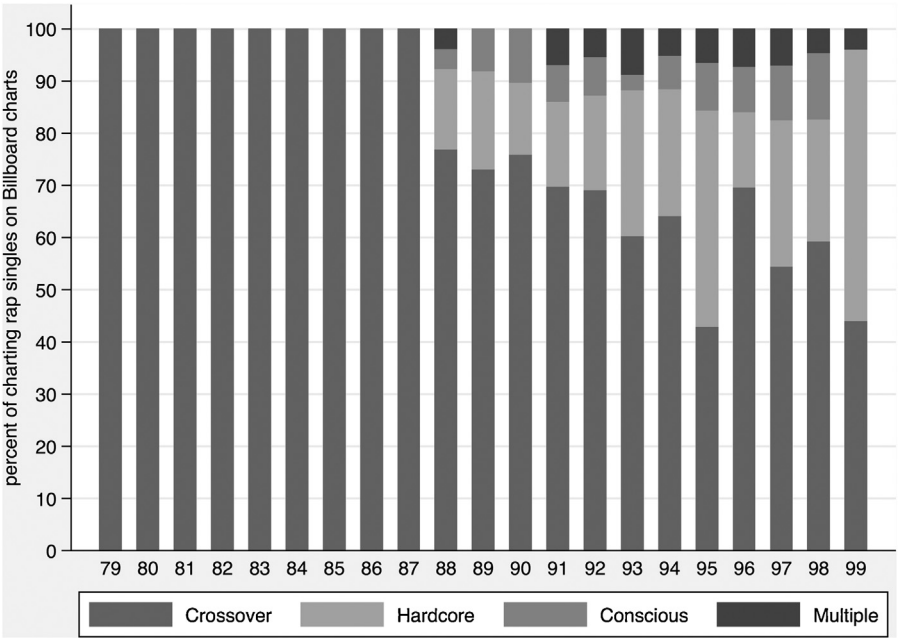

Fig. 2. Percentage of charting rap songs by supra-genres, 1979–1999.

examining whether supra-genres emerge within rap's Golden Era and whether status from popularity and artistic repetition are decoupled in this period.

Fig. 2 illustrates that *crossover* rap songs occupied the entire genre space until 1988, when songs using the two other supra-genres began their ascent. While *hardcore* rap seized 10% of the chart space for rap within a year, and continued to expand its share throughout the early 1990s, *conscious* rap's ascent was slower, and gained significant proportional representation on the *Billboard* chart only in 1999, the year our data end. Artists who release singles in multiple genres are the smallest minority of charting artists after 1988.

Having established that works in new supra-genre styles chart in 1988, at the start of what narrative accounts hold is rap's Golden Era, we next investigate if artists acquired equivalent levels of sales and artistic status in this period, or if decoupling took place. We examined continuous correlations between artist's positions according to each status measure. Though *hardcore* rap did not enter the charts until 1988, we began the correlation analysis in 1986 on the intuition that we might observe some evidence of the emergence of these transformations.

Fig. 3 gives unique insights into the emergence of *hardcore* and *conscious* rap. We present two trends—on the left-hand axis, the varying number of artists who charted in a given year, and on the right-hand axis, the correlation between an artist's sales and their artistic status. We observe a negative correlation in 1986 and 1987 between the two status measures. This suggests that on average during these years, rappers with high public popularity are not writing songs that attract imitators, nor are these artists imitating particularly recent, or particularly popular, artistic innovations of others. We see the fruits of this shift shortly after 1988, when *hardcore* and *conscious* rap begin to make a dent on the charts (also see Fig. 2). Between 1988 and 1999, there are three distinct peaks where alignment between sales and artistic status is relatively strong ($r = 0.5$). Each peak was followed by a decline (sharp in the case of the 1989 and 1997 peaks, and

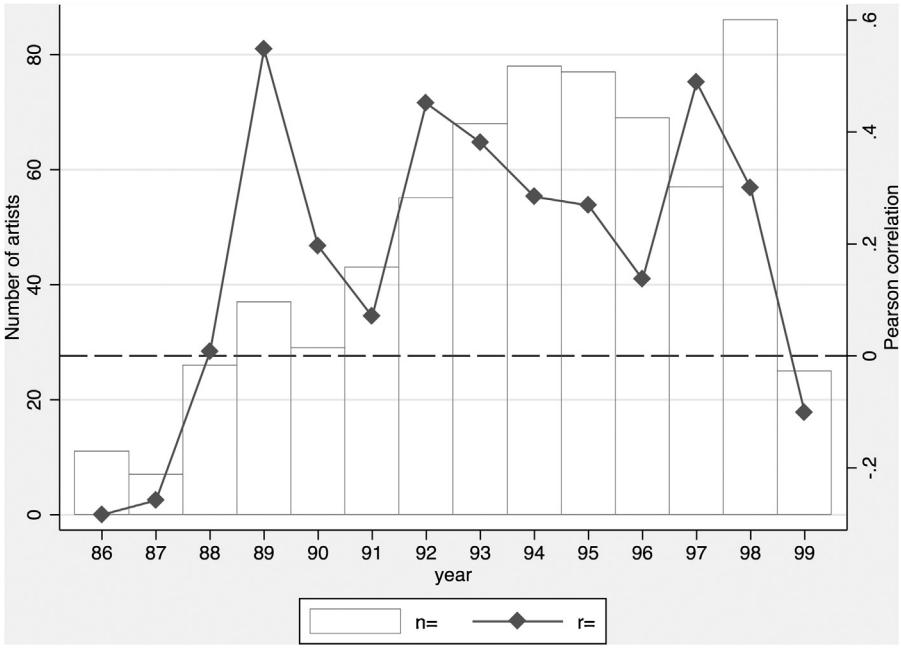

Fig. 3. Correlation between aesthetic status and sales status.

gradual in the case of the 1992 peak). These peaks and valleys suggest to us that moments of alignment between artists' consensus over the best samples, and fans' consensus over the best music, were followed immediately by dissensus. Another interpretation of this result is that artists making music later in time mined a small number of hit songs in 1989, 1992, and 1997 whose samples they repeated in their own work.

4.2. The role of industry resources and novelty in shaping artistic status

We wish to evaluate the role played by two key factors, organizational (record label) resources and novelty, in each artist's artistic status. In order to do so, we organized the data into a panel format. A longitudinal regression specification within the family of fixed effects models is appropriate given our data structure (Allison, 2009). A random-effects model with robust standard errors has the advantage of controlling for individual-level dependencies over time (i.e., we assume that *LL Cool J*'s aesthetic choices in 1992 have something to do with his work in 1989) and of controlling for time-varying heterogeneity in measured attributes (in our case, market and style covariates). We used artist-year observations with robust standard errors clustered on the solo/group artist unit, because we assume that artists are nested in solo and group identities that may be conflated.[16] Lastly, we mirrored the time period reported in the correlation analysis, 1986–1999.

[16] To evaluate whether a random or fixed-effect specification was more appropriate, we conducted a Hausman test to evaluate a systematic difference in model coefficients. For each of the outcomes reported here (sales, aesthetic repetition, supra-genre), the test failed to reject the null hypothesis—that there is no systematic difference—suggesting a random-effect specification is more appropriate.

Table 3
Longitudinal regression of artistic status on style and label, 1986–1999.

	(A) Artistic status Baseline Coeff. (Rob.SE)	(B) Artistic status +Style, label Coeff. (Rob.SE)	(C) Artistic status +Innovation Coeff (Rob.SE)
Samples[†]	1.63*** (0.462)	1.56*** (0.440)	1.28*** (0.219)
Sources[†]	−0.61 (0.415)	−0.57 (0.399)	−0.56** (0.233)
Label type			
Independent (omitted as reference)	–	–	–
Major	–	0.30*** (0.099)	0.42*** (0.086)
Both	–	1.14** (0.473)	0.84** (0.331)
Music style			
Crossover (omitted as reference)	–	–	–
Hardcore	–	−0.09 (0.106)	0.02 (0.092)
Conscious	–	0.52* (0.297)	0.35* (0.186)
Multiple	–	1.44*** (0.261)	1.09*** (0.280)
Sales status	–	–	0.30*** (0.100)
Novel sampler	–	–	0.82*** (0.119)
Year	0.06*** (0.018)	0.04** (0.018)	0.11*** (0.017)
Constant	−5.29*** (1.657)	−4.41*** (1.675)	−10.48*** (1.599)
Observations	668	668	668
Number of artists	298	298	298
Wald chi^2	(3) = 126.6	(8) = 204.3	(9) = 359.9
Prob. >chi2	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
R^2	0.42	0.47	0.62

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** $p < 0.01$.
** $p < 0.05$.
* $p < 0.1$.
[†] Weighted by # singles per year.

Table 3 reports the relationship of sampling volume, supra-genre style, organizational resources, popularity, and sampling novelty to artistic status. The baseline model (A) includes control variables that capture aspects of the samples being used. From this model, we learn that artists who use more samples obtain higher status positions. This makes sense, as the use of more samples gives an artist a greater opportunity to have their aesthetic choices repeated by other artists. The next iteration of the model (B) adds supra-genre and label covariates in order to ascertain how each contributes to individuals' artistic status. We learn that an artist is more likely to have a high artistic status position if that artist records on a major label (0.30 units, unstandardized coefficient) or on both independent and major labels (1.14 units) in a given year. Artists working in multiple supra-genres are also likely (1.44 units) to see subsequent songs repeat their choice of samples.

The final model specification (C) evaluates the contribution of sales to artistic status; it importantly also includes a measure that identifies whether an artist is the first to use a sample. We add this discrete measure because our equation treats artistic status somewhat like an average of path positions across lineages, and so artists may obtain equivalent aesthetic status values using different techniques. For instance, the artist who is always in the middle of these lineages has the same score as one who is the first half of the time, and otherwise the last. In order to identify artists who are the first to use a sample, we introduced

a measure that captured this narrowly defined type of innovation we shall call "novelty."[17] In these results, we see a positive and significant relationship between sales status and artistic status. Introducing a novel sample (i.e., an innovator) predicts an artist will have higher artistic status (0.82 units). This status bonus persists despite the fact that our measure counter-acts the potential reputational penalty incurred by artists charting later in time, who have less opportunity to attract repetition. We also discover that sampling too large a number of source artists may produce a reputation penalty (−0.57 units). This suggests that selective innovation may earn rewards, but having catholic tastes for samples depresses one's artistic status. This is perhaps because diverse samples muddy the listener's sense of the artist's aesthetic alliances.

We also note that the inclusion of sales status and an independent measure of novelty attenuates—but does not eliminate—the significant relationships between aesthetic status and recording on multiple record labels, nor the relationship between status and multiple supra-genre affiliation. This finding seems noteworthy. Our measure of artistic status captures the spectrum of practices between repetition and innovation and demonstrates a positive association with working on multiple label types and in multiple styles. When we effectively isolate the role of novelty in this relationship, we find that it accounts for a great deal of the relationship. We can logically extrapolate that artists who seek to employ novel artistic content would seek to exit their existing label relationship in order to generate resources and support for music that (then or later) is categorized into a different supra-genre style. That is, it makes sense that innovation would be associated with adding (or the need to add) a label affiliation, or a style to one's repertoire. This provides suggestive evidence that novel choices are rendered visible to the field, despite the large number of participants, the decentralized industrial character of production, and on-going efforts at institutionalizing means and practices. Despite these impediments, the introduction of novel artistic content has an apparent causal relationship with artistic status, even though all of the contours of the field are not visible to participants, who rarely have anything approaching perfect information.

4.3. The role of industry resources and novelty in shaping popularity

Table 4 evaluates popularity (sales status) as the outcome of interest, with the same array of predictive covariates as the previous analysis. Unsurprisingly, the baseline model (A) reveals that the statistical significance of sample frequency and source artist frequency are not as compelling with sales status as they were in the case of artistic status. Additionally, the baseline sales status model does not explain nearly as much variance as does the artistic status model. The addition of label type and supra-genre style in model (B) suggests that *crossover* artists are more likely than artists charting songs in other supra-genres to have increased sales. Finally, model (C) reveals that while artistic status is positively related with sales status, offering novel content is not statistically significant. That novelty has a neutral or negative impact on sales is valuable evidence that not only is sales status not fully aligned with artistic status, but also that popularity is a poor proxy measure for artistic status.

[17] Artist A may have three singles, where she is the 1st of 8 in a sampling chain, 8th of 8, and 4th of 8. Compare her with Artist B, who also has three singles, but consistently occupies 4th position in chains of 8. There is no way to distinguish these artists, except by way of a separate indicator variable that marks "innovators."

Table 4
Longitudinal regression of sales status on style and label, 1986–1999.

	(A) Sales status Baseline Coeff (Rob.SE)	(B) Sales status +Style, Label Coeff (Rob.SE)	(C) Sales status +Innovation Coeff (Rob.SE)
Samples[†]	0.22*	0.22*	−0.12
(0.118)	(0.113)	(0.160)	
Sources[†]	−0.24* (0.128)	−0.25** (0.124)	−0.12 (0.142)
Label type			
Independent (omitted as reference)	–	–	–
Major	–	0.11 (0.084)	0.13 (0.083)
Both	–	0.55* (0.299)	0.50 (0.318)
Music style			
Crossover (omitted as reference)	–	–	–
Hardcore	–	−0.30*** (0.066)	−0.28*** (0.060)
Conscious	–	−0.24** (0.108)	−0.34*** (0.118)
Multiple	–	0.36 (0.254)	0.05 (0.289)
Aesthetic status	–	–	0.23** (0.105)
Novel sampler	–	–	−0.06 (0.118)
Year	−0.01 (0.014)	−0.01 (0.014)	−0.02* (0.012)
Constant	1.45 (1.276)	1.21 (1.261)	2.62** (1.120)
Observations	668	668	668
Number of artists	298	298	298
Wald chi^2	(3) = 6.08	(8) = 41.4	(9) = 41.25
Prob. >chi^2	0.11	0.0001	0.0001
R^2	0.01	0.04	0.11

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
*** $p < 0.01$.
** $p < 0.05$.
* $p < 0.1$.
† Weighted by # singles per year.

4.4. Artistic status by sample repetition vs. artistic status by critical evaluation

While the primary goal of this study is not to compare our artistic status measure with art world critics' evaluations of status, we remained curious about how our measure of artistic status would compare. To examine the overlap in status orders, we turned to two recent ranking schema endogenous to the field but exogenous to our measurement construction. We first employed rap legend Kool Moe Dee's published ranking of rappers derived from his measurement of 17 ''elements'' (Dee, 2003). Dee's role as peer evaluator reaches back to the ''rapper's report card'' he included on the inner sleeve of his platinum award-winning album, *How Ya Like Me Now* (1987, Jive Records). In the preface to his book, Dee describes at some length the limitations of external evaluators, like journalists, and argues that he has ''nothing vested in this other than the passion for clarity, and to give acknowledgement and recognition to those who usually don't get it'' (Dee, 2003, p. x). Moreover, his longevity in the field, and sensitivity to its changing musical, social and political demands allows him to ''break down emcees from the past to present with a clear understanding of the different job requirements of each era of emcees'' (Dee, 2003, p. x). Of Dee's ''50 Greatest MCs,'' 43 are captured in our dataset. Of these, 72% ($n = 31$) are found in the top quartile of our artistic status rankings, and 83.7% ($n = 36$) are found in the top half. We feel this speaks strongly to how well our measure captures artistic status.

We then compared the artists at the top of our artistic status ranking with a recent evaluation by music critics of the top 100 rap songs ever (Bernard et al., 2012). We find that, of our top twenty highest ranked artists, 55% ($n = 11$) appear in the *Rolling Stone* list. While this is a simple measure of overlap between lists (e.g., we did not conduct a rank-order correlation analysis), it does provide suggestive evidence that our measure of artistic status is capturing some—but not all—of the qualities that generate critical acclaim.

We did not collect more extensive data on critical acclaim for one practical and one substantive reason. Substantively, critics' evaluations of commercial works, at least until the field undergoes artistic legitimation, are highly likely to reflect the status order produced by sales (see Bielby et al., 2005). Commercial culture critics have great incentives to translate news of aesthetic innovations across the membrane between practitioners and fans, and this would necessarily reduce the distinction between critical evaluation and sales. But the practical consideration was more determining of our choice: collecting comprehensive data on all critical evaluations of several hundred works would have doubled the time spent on data collection: a process that had already consumed several years of time. As a consequence, we performed a preliminary analysis from an authoritative source that is frequently utilized in scholarly evaluations of popular music (Schmutz, 2005), in order to build towards a more extensive data collection project in the future.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study began with a simple question: how does artistic content influence the status of the artists that make it? Sociologists assume artistic conventions (Becker, 1982) are a core mechanism use to bound genres, schools, approaches—aesthetic modes of classification (Lena and Peterson, 2008; White and White, 1965)—but sociologists are still uncovering their connections with other status-generating attributes. It behoves us to gain a greater understanding of status built from the choice of conventions and the extent to which these status orders are decoupled from peer evaluation, critical discourse, and audience tastes (or sales). In this article, we set out to understand how patterns in the use of artistic conventions relate to one of these other status orders: that of popularity. We also briefly compared, for illustrative purposes, how the use of aesthetic conventions relates with peer esteem and critical discourse.

Theories of conventions and status in the arts provided a heuristic for how reputational rankings might result from patterns in the content of art works. These theories held that artists repeating existing artistic choices, and those innovating new ones, were making choices that are bounded by the *ars obligatoria* of the group—the grammar that describes what is possible, and what choices will be met with derision or silence. But some innovations evolve into conventions within emerging artistic circles, manned by new artists who seek to "assert their identity (that is, their difference) and get it known and recognized ('make a name for oneself') by imposing new modes of thought and expression" (Bourdieu, 1996, pp. 239–240). The celebration of these "radical innovations" by new artists, and artists at the periphery, pushes them out of status contests in the core art world and into competitions for status within emerging artistic cliques, and new status orders. Thus, the study of innovation and repetition of artistic content complements the study of artistic legitimation, a process that results in a contrast between cliques in which works and artists are credited for their peer and critical acclaim, and another in which producers are celebrated for their popularity. We chose to examine rappers' status positions as the field underwent artistic legitimation. As we argued above, aesthetically mobile fields can serve as special test cases for theories of status

within art worlds, and rap music provides an excellent case of an art world undergoing legitimation.

One of the most significant contributions of this paper was the identification of innovative artistic conventions (samples) and operationalization of these conventions into lineages of repetition. We confirmed the independence of this measure of artistic status from sales. Audience members do not consistently reward the same songs that artists imitate, a feature we witness in the correlational analysis of artistic status and popularity. We may also witness this gap in the second discovery made using our correlation analysis: a series of peaks and valleys in the correlation, with notably higher concordance in 1989, 1992, and 1997. What is likely taking place is that audience tastes are ''catching up'' with those of artists and there are moments of greater consensus over which works are most successful, each of which are followed by a series of innovations (and their repetition) by micro-communities of artists, which alienate audiences and throw the two status measures out of alignment. In studies of status in art worlds, we need to emphasize a systematic delay between the reward of ''innovator'' status (symbolized in a repetition of an innovation—a recognition of it, as such) and the reward of sales. In the future, we could test these theories by capturing innovation and repetition among much smaller groups of artists—a sub-genre analysis of the same sort we complete here but which was presently beyond our scope. Lending more credibility to this interpretation of the correlations between status orders, our regression of sales status reinforced the conclusion that it is repetition, not innovation, that fuels artist sales/popularity.

In the regression analysis, we also found that rappers who recorded on both major and independent labels within a given year were more likely to have higher aesthetic status. Recording in multiple supra-genres was also associated with higher aesthetic status. Artists working in multiple styles are working with a larger range of aesthetic conventions than artists working in only one supra-genre, and their traits (perhaps greater flexibility, curiosity, and an experimental ethos) might be reflected in these patterns. Creativity and innovation are positively associated with artistic achievement, and achievement invites repetition. However, complicating this picture, we found that artists who sample from a great(er) diversity of sources experience a kind of penalty. This suggests some kind of threshold effect, where innovative sampling attracts imitation, to a saturation point, after which artists are shunned by prospective imitators.

The burgeoning literature on the value of switching or adding styles, called ''category-spanning,'' suggests that diversification brings with it certain penalties: less attention and legitimacy and lower chances of survival or success (Hsu et al., 2009, p. 150). The organizational niche literature predicts that specialists out-compete generalists because specialization leads to efficient and reliable production—''fitness'' in the niche (Hannan and Freeman, 1977). This is expected to be true except when the niche is volatile—when expectations of production are not widely shared (Hannan and Freeman, 1989). Niche volatility has been found in multiple industries, including feature films and eBay auctions (Hsu et al., 2009). However, Hsu's (2006) research finds that category-spanning films, those that target multiple genres and attract large audiences, are less enjoyable to those audiences. Perhaps this is consistent with our finding that higher sales increases the likelihood that a rapper is charting songs in the *crossover* or *hardcore* style, yet we find no such association for artists charting songs in multiple styles within a year. Like the audience members of interest in Hsu's (2006) study of film, rap audiences demonstrate a conservative desire for products to remain within dominant conventions for the niche. But fellow artists display a slightly more progressive impulse—a greater friendliness to innovation. This gap between audience and artist tastes will be important to keep in mind in future research.

We believe we have demonstrated two means by which artists generate artistic status: the repetition of practices which come to be understood as legitimate in the field; and introducing novel artistic content that is later repeated by peers. That said, we do not mean to suggest that status-seeking is the only motivation for artists' choice of conventions. Nor do we argue that samples are the only kind of artistic content that contributes to artists' positions within status orders, or that status orders are constructed only of patterns in artistic content. Rappers use conventional elements (e.g., lyrical content, ''flow'' or vocal style) to acquire status and associate their work with a style. But there is no logic or evidence that would suggest patterns in the use of these other forms of artistic content undermine the status position rappers would acquire from patterns in samples use. In fact, prior studies that compare patterns in samples use to patterns in other artistic content find congruence in the ways these choices link artists and fans into sub-genre groups (Krims, 2000; Lena, 2004).

We join scholars whose findings complicate the long-held Bourdieusian understanding of restricted vs. large-scale fields of production (Anheier et al., 1995; Sapiro, 2010). We join those who explore how new and incumbent actors shape the structure of a field (Kirschbaum, 2007; Kirschbaum and Vasconcelos, 2006), and who demonstrate how critical and financial success align and mis-align (Pinheiro and Dowd, 2009; Uzzi and Spiro, 2005). Beyond investigations of art worlds, however, analyzing the connections between cultural content contributes in a fresh way to a growing body of work that investigates meaning structures with relational methods (Mohr, 1998; Pachucki and Breiger, 2010). This work also speaks to how broad patterns of social inequality among actors can be linked with small decisions about cultural content and normative practices that evolve through networks (Padgett and Powell, 2012; Small, 2009).

It is our hope that our approach might be extended by others to involve a more sensitive analysis of the precise sequence by which artists make innovative choices (or repeat those of others) and sell albums. The discovery of new data on patterns of the use of cultural conventions and their operationalization into chains of innovation and repetition opens a new world of possibilities for sociologists of culture and inequality, for we can model in new ways the micro-processes from which status orders are built. More and better information will help artists to craft more rational career strategies and organizations analyzing strategic initiatives to do so more effectively. In conclusion, by articulating the dual character of innovation and the functional form of stylistic emergence in art worlds, we offer a model that can be evaluated in a range of professions in order to determine the response of intra-professional and extra-professional audiences to diversity and change.

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Appendix A. Measuring artistic status by tracing sample usage (extended description)

The aesthetic repetition measure indexes the degree to which a rapper's choice of samples were used by later artists. Significant evidence exists that sample choice is an important aesthetic decision and that evaluations of these decisions position artists within a status order. Samples are a key locus of craft work in rap; a convention that is formally comparable to musical notes in other genres (Krims, 2000; Lena, 2004; Potter, 1995; Schloss, 2004). More importantly for present purposes, there is no dispute among artists, critics, and fans that samples are a key focus of innovation and repetition in rap (George, 1993). This importance is revealed in the academic analysis of sampling patterns (Barlett, 1994; Krims, 2000; Lena, 2006; Potter, 1995; Schloss, 2004) and in the focus on samples within fan communities. A small industry has emerged to satiate the desire for easy-to-use samples (e.g., the *Ultimate Breaks and Beats* album series), to identify rare records to use in sampling (e.g., *Wax Poetics* magazine), and to document the use of samples in rap songs (e.g., the website Sample F.A.Q.s). That rap artists view specific sampling choices as solutions to major, unsolved, technical and aesthetic problems is the focal concern of several important works in the field (Krims, 2000; Rose, 1994) and it led one author to produce a set of ''rules'' for crafting ''artistic'' samples (Schloss, 2004). Patterns in the choice of samples helps artists and fans position themselves among various sub-genres within rap (Lena, 2004, p. 298).

To build the measure, we examine artists' choice of samples in each of their charting singles between 1979 and 1999. We treat all rappers who sample the same ''source'' artist (typically, R&B, funk, or soul artists) as elements in a chronological sampling path of length n. We describe two attributes concerning a given path (length, timespan) and one attribute of each artist (position within a path), and discuss how we use these attributes to evaluate a rapper's degree of repetition. A brief illustrative example of the 1970s funk group *7th Wonder* will be useful (Fig. A1).

The variable ''path length'' captures the number of successive uses of the same source artist by multiple rappers. In the following example, we see that artists *Sugarhill Gang* (1980), *LL Cool J* (1987), and *Queen Latifah* (1990) constitute a path length of three. This lineage begins when *Sugarhill Gang* sampled the funk classic ''Daisy Lady'' by *7th Wonder*, continues with *LL Cool J* and ends with *Queen Latifah*.[18] The path position reflects the number of rappers within a path, and assigns those in earlier positions a greater value. Here, *Sugarhill Gang* is the first to use the sample, and has the highest value as the innovator, while *Queen Latifah* (1) is the most recent and lowest value. The range spans 1980–1990, so the path has a timespan of 10 years.

The case of *7th Wonder* is relatively unambiguous to code, as each sampling rapper can be clearly ordered in temporal succession (1980, 1987, 1990). Other sampling paths are not as clear-cut, and so we created the following rules to systematically code boundary cases:

(a) *A valid path must contain at least two distinct artists and span at least two years.* Some instances of sampling include only one artist because only one rapper sampled a given source. (E.g., if hypothetical *Artist X* samples source *Q* in 1993, but no other artist subsequently samples *Q*, then *Artist X* is assigned a path length of zero.) If multiple artists sample in the

[18] We take care to emphasize that, while *7th Wonder* is a group that serves to originate the repetition chain of subsequent sampling artists, we do not calculate a repetition score for *7th Wonder*. Our sole concern in this paper is with evaluating aesthetic repetition by contemporary rappers as they sample from earlier musicians. *7th Wonder* is not a rap group, and they are not engaging in sampling, but rather in the simple act of recording a performance.

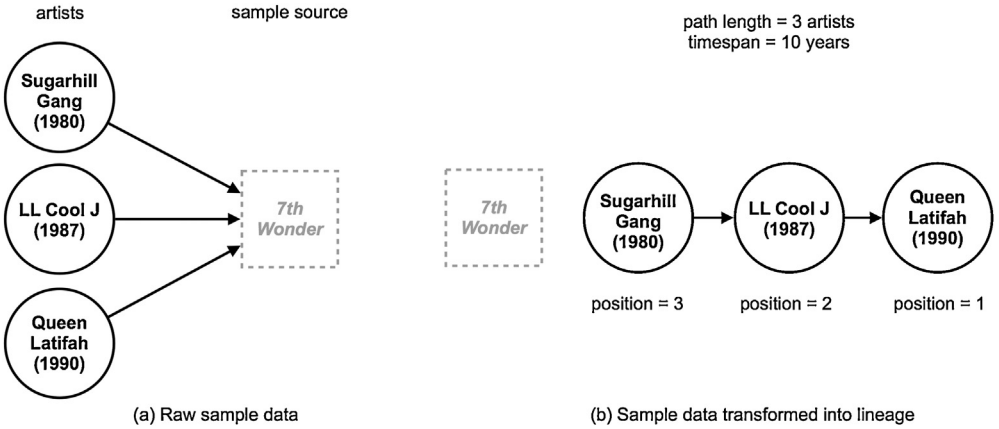

Fig. A1. Construction of a sampling lineage.

same year, but no artists in other years repeat their choices, we do not consider the path valid (E.g., if artists *X* and *Y* both sampled source *Q* in separate 1995 charting singles, but were the only ones to sample *Q*, both artists *X* and *Y* are accorded a path length of zero.)

(b) Multiple artists sampling the same source in different singles constitute a single path position, and earn the same path position value. If multiple artists sample the same source in a given year on different charting singles, those artists each contribute one path position, and give both the same value. (E.g., if LL Cool J and Artist X had sampled 7th Wonder in 1987, the path length would increase to "4"; Sugarhill Gang would then occupy position "4", both Artist X and LL Cool J would have position "3", position "2" would be empty, and Queen Latifah would be in position "1".)

(c) *Collaborating artists are given the same path position value.* When artists collaborating on a song engage in sampling, each sample contributes a single path position, and both artists are accorded the same path position value. (E.g., if hypothetical *Artist X* had collaborated with *Queen Latifah* to sample *7th Wonder* on her 1990 track "Ladies First," the path length would remain at 3, and both *Artist X* and *Queen Latifah* would be accorded position 1.)

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