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#### **Title**

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#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6kp6d661>

#### **Journal**

Creativity Research Journal, 16(2-3)

#### **ISSN**

1040-0419

#### **Author**

Simonton, Dean Keith

#### **Publication Date**

2004

Peer reviewed

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## Film Awards as Indicators of Cinematic Creativity and Achievement: A Quantitative Comparison of the Oscars and Six Alternatives

Dean Keith Simonton

University of California, Davis

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*ABSTRACT:* Although film awards are often taken as indicating the creative achievements that underlie outstanding motion pictures, critics have questioned whether such honors represent a consensus regarding cinematic contributions. Nevertheless, a strong agreement was demonstrated by investigating 1,132 films released between 1975 and 2002 that had received at least 1 award or award nomination from 7 distinct sources (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hollywood Foreign Press Association, British Academy of Film and Television Arts, New York Film Critics Circle, National Board of Review, National Society of Film Critics, and Los Angeles Film Critics Association). The results indicated that (a) almost all award categories exhibited a conspicuous consensus, the Oscars providing the best single indicator of that agreement; (b) Oscar awards provided meaningful information about cinematic creativity and achievement beyond that provided by Oscar nominations alone; (c) awards bestowed by the 7 organizations corresponded with more specialized awards granted by guilds and societies, with the Oscars usually providing the best correspondence; and (d) awards correlated positively with later movie guide ratings, the correlations being especially large in the categories of picture, direction, screenplay, and acting. The findings were discussed in terms of whether the awards can be considered to be indicative of cinematic creativity.

Creativity is often perceived as an individualistic phenomenon, as epitomized in the popular image of the “lone genius.” For example, poets seldom collaborate with other poets in the composition of their poems. Yet it is evident that certain forms of creativity require a

group effort. Scientific creativity, for instance, usually emerges from research collaborations, especially laboratory work groups (Andrews, 1979; Dunbar, 1995). The collaborative nature of creativity is even more apparent in filmmaking (Simonton, in press). The typical feature film is the product of the separate contributions of directors, screenwriters, actors, cinematographers, film editors, composers, art directors, costume designers, and a host of specialists in makeup, special effects, and sound. What makes these cinematic collaborations especially intriguing is that the individual contributions are not completely submerged or blended in the final product. On the contrary, it is possible to evaluate each of the separate contributions independently of each other as well as independently of the film’s overall success (Simonton, 2002). For example, a picture that features outstanding music may not necessarily have equally exceptional cinematography. As a collaborative effort, filmmaking can be compared to certain team sports in which one player may attain a “personal best” performance whereas another player falls into a slump.

The relative independence of the separate contributions is nowhere more dramatically seen than in the Oscars conferred each year by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Although Oscars are awarded in more than a dozen major categories, it is rare for any picture to receive more than a handful. In the 2003 Academy Awards ceremony, as an example,

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Correspondence and requests for reprints should be sent to Dean Keith Simonton, University of California, Department of Psychology, One Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616–8686. E-mail: dksimonton@ucdavis.edu

Oscars were conferred on *The Pianist*, *The Hours*, *Adaptation*, *Hable con ella*, *Road to Perdition*, *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, *Frida*, and *8 Mile*, as well as *Chicago*, the year's best picture with five additional Oscars. Because the various Oscars are awarded in relative independence of each other, it is possible to use the awards to gauge the separate contributions of each collaborator to the final creative product (Simonton, 1980; Smith & Smith, 1986). For instance, Simonton (2002) used Oscar awards and nominations to demonstrate the exceptional impact of direction and the screenplay on a motion picture's success. In a different fashion, Zickar and Slaughter (1999) used the Academy's best acting awards to generate a control variable when examining the career trajectory of major directors.

Measures based on Oscar awards and nominations seem to have a respectable amount of prima facie authority. After all, the Academy Awards are based on the judgments of hundreds of experts in the various domains of cinematic creativity and achievement. Even so, it also must be acknowledged that these awards have attracted a considerable amount of criticism. According to many "unofficial histories," the Oscars are often subject to "behind the scenes" political maneuverings, advertising campaigns, and other arbitrary events (e.g., Holden, 1993; Wiley & Bona, 1993). These contaminating factors have led some critics to offer alternative opinions regarding who should have received the honors. An example is Peary's (1993) *Alternate Oscars: One Critic's Defiant Choices for Best Picture, Actor, and Actress from 1927 to the Present*. More systematic alternatives are the awards conferred by various critic organizations, such as the National Society of Film Critics and the New York Film Critics Circle. In fact, the New York Film Critics Circle awards were begun in 1935 precisely as an antidote to the Academy Awards, which the New York City critics thought were excessively swayed by Hollywood local tastes and studio politics. Nor are the critics the only ones offering competing awards. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association launched its own award series that eventually came to be broadcast as the Golden Globes ceremonies, and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts offered its own set of BAFTA awards. Finally, competing honors are also bestowed by the National Board of Review, the organization that publishes the magazine *Films in Review*.

What is the validity of these criticisms and opposing assessments? Are the Oscars nearly worthless as indicators of cinematic creativity and achievement? Do they merely represent the provincial and politically contaminated opinions of a largely uninformed Academy membership? Surprisingly, no empirical study published to date has systematically investigated this issue. Instead, most investigations have focused on the predictive value of the Oscars with respect to box-office success or some similar criterion (e.g., Dodds & Holbrook, 1988). Even these studies have not compared the predictive power of alternative award series. The only exception is a single inquiry that evaluated alternative best picture awards with respect to a movie's Nielsen ratings when broadcast on television (Taylor, 1974).

It was therefore the goal of the current investigation to remedy that deficiency. In particular, the aim was to answer the following four questions.

First, how do the Academy Awards compare with the major alternatives, such as the Golden Globes, BAFTAs, and various critic awards? Past research suggests that alternative assessments of cultural achievement tend to converge on a coherent consensus even when discrepancies exist (Simonton, 1991, 1998). The same may hold for the diverse evaluations of cinematic achievements. Despite differences of opinion, the agreements should outweigh the disagreements. Furthermore, it is even possible that the Oscars are more representative of the implicit consensus than are the alternative film honors. Then again, the Academy Awards may be less indicative of that overall consensus.

Second, what is the relative merit of an Oscar award versus an Oscar nomination? It is easy to argue that the official nomination and voting procedures are not designed to yield an optimal outcome. On the one hand, the process of making nominations in most categories is often restricted to the members of the corresponding branch of the Academy. For example, only directors can nominate the candidates for Best Achievement in Directing. It makes perfectly good sense to have the nominations confined to the membership with the greatest expertise. On the other hand, the ballots for the final awards for almost all categories are distributed to the general membership, regardless of the branch to which the member belongs. Hence, the final result is contingent on votes that are appreciably less informed than is the case for the initial nominations. Therefore, it

is conceivable that Oscar nominations are more indicative of true cinematic accomplishment in a particular category than are the Oscar awards themselves. The awards might even worsen the correspondence between the honors and genuine merit, like sprinkling extra salt in an otherwise perfect dish.

Third, how do the various awards bestowed by the Academy compare with more narrowly defined honors presented by relevant guild or professional organizations? For example, domain-specific awards are given by the Directors Guild of America, the Writers Guild of America, the Screen Actors Guild, the American Society of Cinematographers, the Art Directors Guild, the Costume Designers Guild, the Grammy Awards, and the American Cinema Editors. Do the corresponding Oscar awards agree or disagree with these honors? And do the Oscars exhibit greater or lesser agreement in comparison with the comparable honors bestowed by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, the National Board of Review, the National Society of Film Critics, or any of the other critic organizations?

Fourth, what is the comparative predictive value of the diverse award series? More specifically, which awards have the greatest utility in predicting the ratings that films receive in movie guides? Past research has shown that movie guides display a strong consensus on the relative merit of motion pictures (Boor, 1990, 1992; Simonton, 2002, in press). Some films consistently receive “more stars” relative to others, some films even earning the status of “turkeys” or “bombs.” Moreover, previous inquiries have also demonstrated that these ratings are partly a function of the awards that they received, especially Oscars (Simonton, 2002, in press; Zickar & Slaughter, 1999). What is now required is to determine which awards from which organizations display the strongest correspondence with movie guide ratings.

In addressing these four questions, I scrutinized the fullest possible range of awards, including those in the technical rather than creative categories (e.g., best sound as well as best screenplay).

### Method

The raw data for the sampling procedure and variable measurements came primarily from electronic

sources, such as the Internet Movie Database at <http://us.imdb.com/Sections/Awards/> and various official sites, such as those for the Academy Awards ([http://www.oscars.org/awards\\_db/index.html](http://www.oscars.org/awards_db/index.html)) and the Golden Globes (<http://www.hfpa.com/awardsframe.htm>). This information was cross-checked using the *Corel All-Movie Guide 2 CD-ROM* (1996) and published reference books. These cross-checks revealed that there were no disagreements in the assignments of the awards across alternative sources.

### Sample

The main sample consisted of all movies released between 1975 and 2002 that received nominations or awards in the standard award categories (viz., picture, screenplay, direction, male and female leads, male and female supporting actors, cinematography, art direction, costume design, makeup, score, song, film editing, visual effects, sound effects editing, and sound). Furthermore, the award or nomination had to come from at least one of the following seven professional societies: (a) the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (a professional honorary organization with a membership now exceeding 6,000 individuals who have received special recognition for their own contributions to filmmaking); (b) the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (a similar organization with a current membership of more than 4,000 individuals actively involved in either film or television production); (c) the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (a society currently consisting of 80 movie journalists representing almost 50 nations); (d) the New York Film Critics Circle (consisting of strictly print-only film critics who write for such New York City-based publications as *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Rolling Stone*); (e) the National Board of Review (an organization made up of teachers, actors, writers, and workers in film production); (f) the National Society of Film Critics (currently constituted by 48 leading critics from major U.S. publications and media outlets); and (g) the Los Angeles Film Critics Association (whose membership currently includes more than 50 critics in the Los Angeles area who review movies for newspapers, magazines, television, and online media). These seven organizations were picked for three reasons. First, they all have been in existence for at least a quarter century. Second, they

have consistently granted annual awards in most, if not all, of the major categories. Third, they all focus on widely distributed, English-language motion pictures that are most likely to be included in movie–video guides (unlike movies honored at film festivals, such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin, or Sundance).

The sample began with movies released in 1975 because that was when the Los Angeles Film Critics Association started its award series. The sample was further restricted to render the films more comparable. Specifically deleted from the sample were all animated films, documentaries, and non-English-language films. For the most part, such films are not evaluated as extensively or in the same manner as other films. For instance, documentaries cannot win screenplay awards, nor can animations win cinematography awards. In any case, these deletions restricted the sample to 1,132 English-language, feature-length, narrative films deemed in some way significant by seven professional organizations. Of course, sometimes the actual sample size is less than 1,132 due to missing values on one or more measures defined in the following section.

### Measures

To the extent possible, measures were defined for all seven organizations that evaluated each film's achievements according to the main award categories on which the sample was based (except that sound effects editing was omitted because it is only awarded by the Academy). The following scheme was used to calculate the score a movie received for each measure: 2 = recipient of an award in that category, 1 = received a nomination for an award in that category, and 0 = received neither an award nor a nomination. It should be pointed out that occasionally a film obtained more than one nomination in the same category. This can occur in the four acting awards and the best song award categories. To avoid confounding awards and nominations, I counted such nominations only once rather than double counting them. Otherwise, two nominations would be equivalent to a single win. Besides constructing sets of award measures for each of the seven organizations, I constructed a composite measure for each of the award categories but with the Academy Awards excluded. The composite was defined as the average of the scores received for a given category (cf. Simonton, in press).

Similar individual award measures were constructed for the available categories based on the honors offered by the following more specialized award programs, namely, the Directors Guild of America (direction), the Writers Guild of America (screenplay), the Screen Actors Guild (male and female lead and supporting acting), the American Society of Cinematographers (cinematography), the Grammy Awards (score and song), the Art Directors Guild (art direction), the Costume Designers Guild (costume design), and the American Cinema Editors (film editing). In each case, 2 = an award recipient, 1 = a nomination recipient, and 0 = neither an award nor a nomination recipient.

Solely for the Academy Awards, two additional sets of measures were defined. The first ignored the nominations and thus measured merely whether or not the film received the Oscar in a particular category. The second set of measures counted exclusively nominations. In other words, no additional point was provided for a picture's receiving an award in the particular category. This alternative set differed from the earlier measures in one other manner as well. Because only nominations were being counted, a picture that received more than one nomination in a given category would receive a corresponding score. That is, the measures represented straightforward counts of the number of nominations received in the category. Again, this applied only to the best acting and song nominations.

To provide a check for the three types of Academy Award measures—awards and nominations, awards only, and nominations only—I averaged the measures for the remaining six organizations to produce a new set of composite measures of non-Oscar awards for each category of cinematic creativity or achievement.

Finally, the criterion of movie guide ratings was a composite measure based on five different movie or video guides (viz., Bleiler, 2001; Craddock, 2002; Maltin, 2002; Martin & Porter, 2002; Walker, 2001). In these guides professional movie critics provided some rating system, most often using "stars." The ratings were transformed into a quantitative measure using the following procedure. First, when necessary, each rating was converted into a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*turkey* or *bomb*) to 5 (*masterpiece* or *classic*). If a movie was not rated in a particular guide, then it was assigned a missing value for the corresponding score. The five assessments were then averaged across all nonmissing values, yielding a combined

measure that also ranged from 1 to 5 ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) with an internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha) of .82.

It should be pointed out that the various organizational measures and the movie guide ratings represent relatively independent assessments of cinematic achievement. Although there is some overlap in membership between some organizations, this overlap represents only a minuscule proportion of the total membership in any given organization. For instance, there is virtually no overlap between those who belong to the various critics associations and those who belong to the industry organizations.

### Results

The focus of the data analyses was on effect sizes rather than significance tests. There were two main reasons for this emphasis. First, the size of the sample was so large that most coefficients reported here were highly significant, most exceeding the .001 level and almost all exceeding the .05 level. Indeed, the usual reason why a statistic was not statistically significant was because missing values sometimes reduced the sample size (i.e., some award ceremonies did not have all categories in place starting in 1975). Second, the 1,132 films in this investigation cannot represent a random sample of the larger population of motion pictures. On the contrary, these films were selected precisely because they displayed sufficient creativity or

other attainment that they were deemed worthy of a nomination for an award from at least one of seven major organizations. In other words, the movies constituted a “significant sample” in which the descriptive statistics (effect sizes) have inherent value independent of any generalization to some larger population (Simonton, 1999; see also Cohen, 1994). In any event, effect sizes reported throughout the present article were gauged by descriptive statistics, namely, sample reliability coefficients and, most commonly, sample correlation coefficients.

The first question to be addressed is how the Academy Awards compare with the corresponding awards offered by the other six organizations. Table 1 provides an answer in terms of a reliability analysis. The first column shows the internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach’s alphas) for the award categories for which there were at least three awards available. It is apparent that most of these reliabilities were quite respectable, with the exception of cinematography and film score. Clearly, a strong consensus exists regarding the relative merit of most cinematic accomplishments. The next series of seven columns indicates what happened when a given award was deleted from the composite. For example, when the Oscar measure was deleted from the best picture composite, then the reliability dropped from .76 to .67. Two points should be concluded from these results. First, the decrements to the reliability were usually largest for the Oscar items. The only exceptions were the award categories of cinematography and score. Second, on only two occasions did the dele-

**Table 1.** Coefficient Alphas for Seven-Item Composite and Alphas When Single Measures Were Deleted

Award Category	Composite $\alpha$	$\alpha$						
		O	G	B	N	R	S	L
Picture	.76	.67	.71	.71	.73	.74	.76	.75
Direction	.78	.71	.72	.77	.77	.77	.77	.76
Screenplay	.73	.66	.67	.71	.70	—	.72	.70
Male Lead	.76	.67	.73	.73	.73	.76	.75	.72
Female Lead	.77	.69	.75	.75	.74	.75	.76	.74
Male Supporting Actor	.74	.66	.66	.73	.70	.73	.72	.72
Female Supporting Actor	.74	.65	.68	.73	.72	.74	.71	.69
Cinematography	.66	.58	—	.57	.64	—	.67	.57
Score	.59	.47	.41	.49	—	—	—	.63
Song	.86	.72	.75	.91	—	—	—	—

*Note.* O = Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscars); G = Hollywood Foreign Press Association (Golden Globes); B = British Academy of Film and Television Arts; N = New York Film Critics Circle; R = National Board of Review; S = National Society of Film Critics; L = Los Angeles Film Critics Association. Dashes indicate that an award was not offered by that organization for that particular category of creativity or achievement.

tion of an item actually increase the reliability of the composite. This happened when the Los Angeles Film Critics awards were omitted from the score measure and when the BAFTA awards were omitted from the song measure. Hence, these two instances betrayed assessments that go against the implicit consensus witnessed in the remaining awards.

The second issue concerned the relative merit of an Oscar award versus an Oscar nomination. Table 2 provides the answer. Here three distinct Oscar measures—awards and nomination, awards only, and nominations only—were correlated with a composite created by averaging the scores on the remaining six award measures. Without exception, the Oscar measure that counts both awards and nominations exhibited a higher correlation than the measures that considered either awards or nominations separately. Just as significant, although the correlations for the awards-only measures tended to be a bit lower than the correlations for the nominations-only measures, they remained about the same magnitude, and the awards-only measures displayed consistently high correlations with the corresponding 6-item composites. It must be manifest that the Oscars were more likely to recognize true merit, so that receiving such an honor was more indicative of merit than was receiving just a nomination.<sup>1</sup>

The third question was how the awards bestowed by the seven general organizations compared with the more narrowly defined honors presented by guild or professional organizations. This issue was addressed via the statistics shown in Table 3. Here the awards offered by the seven organizations were directly correlated with comparable awards offered by the Directors Guild of America, the Writers Guild of America, the Screen Actors Guild, the American Association of Cinematographers, the Art Directors Guild, the Costume Designers Guild, and the Grammys. It should be obvious that the Oscars performed very well by this

<sup>1</sup>Although the emphasis throughout this investigation has been on effect sizes as indicated by the sample descriptive statistics (i.e., correlations), the conclusions in this paragraph were supported by running a hierarchical regression analysis in which the measure with the Oscar scores omitted were regressed first on the Oscar nomination measure and second on the Oscar winner measure. Without exception, the latter added a statistically significant increment to the explained variance, with standardized regression coefficients for the second measure all exceeding .50 and the probability values all being less than .001.

**Table 2.** Correlations of Total (Academy Awards and Academy Award Nominations; A + N), Academy Awards Only (A), and Nominations Only (N) With Composite Measures Based on the Remaining Six Award Series

Award Category	A + N	A	N
Picture	.71	.48	.68
Direction	.68	.44	.66
Screenplay	.60	.51	.51
Male Lead	.72	.54	.15
Female Lead	.71	.55	.66
Male Supporting Actor	.65	.46	.61
Female Supporting Actor	.63	.49	.57
Cinematography	.48	.45	.41
Art Direction	.53	.40	.49
Costume Design	.44	.36	.39
Makeup	.44	.43	.37
Score	.44	.37	.38
Song	.70	.58	.62
Film Editing	.56	.41	.52
Visual Effects	.52	.45	.48
Sound	.47	.42	.40

Note. All Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were significant at the  $p < .001$  level or lower.

standard. The Academy Awards displayed the highest correlations for direction, all four acting categories (except for a tie with the Golden Globes), screenplay, cinematography, and art direction. Even in the case of costume design, score, and song, the correlations for the Oscars were very close to those that were the largest. In contrast, the various critic societies tended to do very poorly across all categories for which they offer awards. Worse of all was the National Board of Review, almost half of whose awards exhibited very little correspondence with the more specialized awards.

The fourth and last issue concerned the predictive validity of the honors bestowed by the seven award series. Table 4 provides the statistical results necessary for addressing this matter. Once more the Oscars demonstrated their superiority. The correlation with movie guide ratings was highest for the Academy Awards received for picture, direction, screenplay, male supporting actor, female supporting actor, film editing, and art direction, albeit the superiority was not always substantial. The only evaluations on which the Academy appeared unusually weak were the awards for makeup and visual effects. This probably merely reflects the fact that these categories contribute very little to the cinematic success of most films (Simonton, in press). In stark contrast, the predictive validity of the critics'

**Table 3.** Correlations Between Specific Awards and Corresponding Awards in Seven Organizations

Specific Award	O	G	B	N	R	S	L
Direction (DGA)	<b>.68</b>	<b>.57</b>	<b>.39</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>.22</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>.31</b>
Screenplay (WGA)	<b>.71</b>	<b>.50</b>	<b>.40</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.20</b>	<b>.25</b>
Male Lead (SAG)	<b>.82</b>	<b>.53</b>	<b>.44</b>	<b>.40</b>	<b>.30</b>	<b>.27</b>	<b>.40</b>
Female Lead (SAG)	<b>.87</b>	<b>.58</b>	<b>.57</b>	.10	<b>.41</b>	.04	<b>.33</b>
Male Supporting Actor (SAG)	<b>.73</b>	<b>.52</b>	<b>.18</b>	<b>.11</b>	.09	<b>.14</b>	<b>.20</b>
Female Supporting Actor (SAG)	<b>.62</b>	<b>.62</b>	<b>.41</b>	<b>.22</b>	.09	<b>.27</b>	<b>.20</b>
Cinematography (ASC)	<b>.74</b>	—	<b>.41</b>	<b>.11</b>	—	.06	<b>.24</b>
Art Direction (ADG)	<b>.58</b>	—	<b>.47</b>	—	<b>.16</b>	—	<b>.31</b>
Costume Design (CDG)	<b>.18</b>	—	<b>.19</b>	—	—	—	—
Score (Grammy)	<b>.31</b>	<b>.32</b>	<b>.34</b>	—	—	—	—
Song (Grammy)	<b>.46</b>	<b>.48</b>	—	—	—	—	—

*Note.* All Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients significant at the  $p < .05$  level or lower are in boldface. O = Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscars); G = Hollywood Foreign Press Association (Golden Globes); B = British Academy of Film and Television Arts; N = New York Film Critics Circle; R = National Board of Review; S = National Society of Film Critics; L = Los Angeles Film Critics Association; DGA = Directors Guild of America; WGA = Writers Guild of America; SAG = Screen Actors Guild; ASC = American Society of Cinematographers; ADG = Art Directors Guild; and CDG = Costume Designers Guild. Dashes indicate that an award was not offered by that organization for that particular category of creativity or achievement.

**Table 4.** Correlations Between Movie Guide Ratings and Award Measures From Seven Organizations

Award Category	O	G	B	N	R	S	L
Picture	<b>.43</b>	<b>.41</b>	<b>.40</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>.22</b>	<b>.23</b>	<b>.26</b>
Direction	<b>.44</b>	<b>.39</b>	<b>.37</b>	<b>.24</b>	<b>.20</b>	<b>.24</b>	<b>.22</b>
Screenplay	<b>.49</b>	<b>.40</b>	<b>.41</b>	<b>.20</b>	.18	<b>.18</b>	<b>.23</b>
Male Lead	<b>.29</b>	<b>.24</b>	<b>.31</b>	<b>.17</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>.17</b>
Female Lead	<b>.22</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.10</b>
Male Supporting Actor	<b>.30</b>	<b>.22</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>.13</b>	<b>.12</b>	<b>.13</b>
Female Supporting Actor	<b>.24</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>.18</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>.17</b>
Cinematography	<b>.24</b>	—	<b>.26</b>	<b>.14</b>	—	<b>.11</b>	<b>.17</b>
Art Direction	<b>.21</b>	—	<b>.20</b>	—	.03	—	<b>.08</b>
Costume Design	<b>.12</b>	—	<b>.15</b>	—	—	—	—
Makeup	.03	—	<b>.19</b>	—	—	—	—
Score	<b>.18</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>.26</b>	—	—	—	—
Song	<b>-.10</b>	<b>-.21</b>	—	—	—	—	—
Film Editing	<b>.36</b>	—	<b>.35</b>	—	—	—	—
Sound	<b>.20</b>	—	<b>.26</b>	—	—	—	—
Visual Effects	.04	—	<b>.09</b>	—	—	—	—

*Note.* All Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients significant at the  $p < .05$  level or lower are in bold face. O = Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscars); G = Hollywood Foreign Press Association (Golden Globes); B = British Academy of Film and Television Arts; N = New York Film Critics Circle; R = National Board of Review; S = National Society of Film Critics; L = Los Angeles Film Critics Association. Dashes indicate that an award was not offered by that organization for that particular category of creativity or achievement.

assessments was uniformly inferior, insofar as the critics offered their assessments at all.

### Discussion

An assumption was implicit in the current investigation: Awards or honors can be used as indicators of cre-

ativity or achievement. This assumption dates back to Francis Galton (1869) and represents one of several methods of providing an operational definition of creativity (Hocevar & Bachelor, 1989; Simonton, 2003). Such special recognition is frequently used as both a sampling criterion and as a quantitative measure (see, e.g., Feist, 1997; Rothenberg, 1983; Simonton, 1992). Therefore, as researchers, it behooves us to ask what



the results reported in this study tell us about the assessment of creativity in the several categories of cinematic contributions.

A good place to begin is the award category of best picture. This can be considered a kind of summary measure of the total impact of a film as a creative product. Here the Oscar award for Best Motion Picture of the Year displayed a clear advantage over all rival assessments. This was evident in the alpha reliability decrements shown in Table 1 and the correlations with movie guide ratings shown in Table 4. Perhaps the only downside of this particular Oscar is that a measure that includes only nominations did almost as well as the measure that considered the awards as well, as shown in Table 2. This small differential suggests that picking the single best picture of the year out of the five movies nominated is by no means a simple task. It is analogous to the problem faced by the judges in gymnastic events who often must make extremely fine distinctions among the top contenders for the gold medals. Even so, the fact that the awards-alone measure still exhibited a respectable correlation with the best picture composite derived from the remaining six organizations showed that the Academy voters do better than a cast of the dice.

According to auteur theory in film criticism, the director plays the single most prominent role in cinematic creativity (Blandford, Grant, & Hillier, 2001). Truly creative directors leave their personal stamp on virtually every movie they make. Examples of classic auteurs include Woody Allen, Ingmar Bergman, Luis Buñuel, Federico Fellini, Alfred Hitchcock, and François Truffaut. In line with this conception was the strong correlation between the Oscars in this category and that of best picture, namely, .81 ( $p < .001$ ). As a consequence, the findings for direction closely matched those for picture. In both instances, the Oscars provided the best of the seven indicators, and the measure that included both awards and nominations is only slightly superior to that which counts nominations only. Moreover, the two measures correlated about the same degree with movie guide ratings, although the picture awards have correlations that tended to be a little larger. Of course, unique to the assessment of direction was its positive correlation with the award offered by the Directors Guild of America, with the Oscar indicator again showing the strongest correspondence.

As noted earlier, screenwriting joins direction in constituting the two most critical predictors of a movie's success (Simonton, 2002; see also Simonton, in press). In this respect, screenwriters enjoy much more prominence than librettists do in opera, another ambitious dramatic form, but one in which music plays a more prominent role (Simonton, 2000). In this case, the Oscars were tied with the Golden Globes in the degree that they capture the general consensus. Unlike what happened in the case of picture and direction, the award-only Oscar measure performed as well as the nomination-only measure, and the measure that combined both did better than either. The correspondence with the awards of the Writers Guild of America was even slightly better than the parallel comparison for direction. Lastly, but perhaps most remarkably, awards in this category correlated with later movie guide ratings to about the same degree as the picture and direction awards. Ultimately, a great film must tell a great story. This provides a link between filmmaking creativity and the creativity displayed in literature, especially in drama. Needless to say, many notable motion pictures are in fact adapted from successful novels and plays.

The four acting categories have a more ambiguous relation with creative achievement. Some may argue that successful acting constitutes more a virtuoso skill than a form of creative expression. Even so, it is clear that assessment of outstanding performances followed pretty much the same pattern as seen in the preceding three measures—a perhaps not surprising result given how intimately acting must be linked with the screenplay, direction, and the final creative product. The consensus across the seven indicators of the four categories remained just as high, with the Oscars usually on top, a placement endorsed by the correlations with the awards granted by the Screen Actors Guild. The utility of the awards separate from the nominations was again demonstrated, the contrast being especially conspicuous in the category of best actor. On the other hand, the correlations with movie guide ratings revealed the lesser status of these contributions relative to direction and screenplay. However important good acting may be, it cannot survive inadequate direction or a poor screenplay.

Of interest, although almost every organization offers awards in the categories of picture, directing, screenplay, and acting, most of the other categories display more spotty representation, particularly among the critics' organizations. This parallels the fact that the

Academy Awards themselves began with Oscars in just four categories, picture, direction, and male and female acting (the latter two then were later split into lead and supporting roles). Consequently, it is a little more difficult to make systematic statements about the corresponding measures. Even so, three observations are worth putting forward on the basis of the results reported in Tables 1 to 4. First, the cinematography measures seemed to have a status only a little bit below that of acting, a finding that reflects the highly visual nature of filmmaking creativity. Second, other measures concerned with the visual appearance of the film—art direction, costume design, and makeup—appear less adequate than those for cinematography. Third, musical composition, both score and song, had a much more ambiguous association with cinematic creativity, whether in terms of reliability or validity. Particularly striking is the finding that the Oscar and Golden Globe awards for best song both have negative validity coefficients. This result replicated what was found in two earlier studies in which it was shown that this negative effect even survives control for genre, such as whether or not the film was a musical (Simonton, 2002, in press). In contrast to opera, film music (and especially songs) has a more peripheral, even antagonistic involvement in the creative product.

These complexities notwithstanding, one should not lose sight of the main results of this investigation. The movie awards exhibit a substantial consensus, with the Oscars often representing the best of the lot. The Oscars usually feature the greatest congruence with more specialized awards, such as those given by the Directors Guild of America, the Writers Guild of America, the American Society of Cinematographers, and the Art Directors Guild. The Oscars can also boast the most predictive validity as gauged by subsequent movie guide ratings. The validity of the Oscars is further substantiated by the fact that the awards themselves have meaning over and above just the nominations. Each year millions of viewers throughout the world watch the televised ceremony on “Oscar Night,” awaiting the results hidden in the secret envelop. Although the gala event is often criticized for being more glitter than gold, there can be no doubt that the statuettes distributed that evening really mean something, at least in the categories that really count. Those who take an Oscar home can have a strong likelihood of having exhibited superlative cinematic creativity or achievement.

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